



16 DAYS OF
ACTIVISM AGAINST
GENDER-BASED
VIOLENCE



Organization for Security and
Cooperation in Europe
Office in Bosnia and Herzegovina



Protecting Women, Strengthening Laws and Institutional Response: The Role of the Parliament of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Combating Domestic and Gender-Based Violence





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Organization for Security and
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Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Mission would like to thank the four committees and the Committee for Gender Equality of the House of Representatives, the Committee for Security of the House of Representatives, the Committee for Gender Equality of the House of Peoples and the Committee for Human Rights and Liberties of the House of Peoples, parliamentarians and parliamentary administration for their continuous and dedicated efforts to combat domestic violence and violence against women in FBiH.

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ANY

48%

19%



INTIMATE PARTNER PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE

36%

10%



SEXUAL HARASSMENT

28%

10%



INTIMATE PARTNER OR NON-PARTNER PHYSICAL AND/OR SEXUAL VIOLENCE

15%

4%



STALKING

5%

1%



Since the age of 15



12 months prior to the survey

According to the latest OSCE survey¹, nearly **half of women in Bosnia and Herzegovina have experienced abuse since the age of 15**, with most cases going unreported. Gender-based violence, including psychological, physical, and sexual violence, is pervasive, with sexual harassment affecting nearly one in three women. Alarmingly, femicide cases have increased in recent years, with most victims killed by current or former partners, and women who report domestic violence face an even greater risk of being attacked or killed.

1 OSCE-led Survey on Violence Against Women: Bosnia and Herzegovina - Results Report, 2019. available at https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/3/5/423470_1.pdf



The OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina recognises that gender-based violence is an impediment to the security and safety of all citizens in Bosnia and Herzegovina. For this reason, the Mission invests substantial resources into monitoring and strengthening responses to gender-based violence - a widespread and underreported phenomenon in BiH. Together with national partners the Mission works on enhancing the institutional response to gender-based violence in BiH to ensure women in BiH are protected and perpetrators held accountable.

The Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) issued its first evaluation report² on BiH in 2022, assessing the country's progress in implementing the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention)³. The report **identified several challenges**, including inconsistent enforcement of laws due to BiH's complex political structure, limited resources for support services, as well as insufficiencies in the collection of data regarding violence against women. The report **recommended** improvements in the training of law enforcement and judiciary personnel, expanded shelter access, and greater funding for women's organizations. It underlined a greater need for nationwide co-ordination to ensure all victims receive equitable protection and support.

2 GREVIO publishes its report on Bosnia and Herzegovina - Istanbul Convention Action against violence against women and domestic violence ([coe.int](https://www.coe.int))

3 Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence available at [CETS 210 - Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence](https://www.coe.int/t/treaties/Convention-on-preventing-and-combating-violence-against-women-and-domestic-violence/)

In 2024 the OSCE Mission in BiH supported four committees of both houses of the Parliament of Federation of BiH⁴ in holding three thematic sessions on domestic violence. This collaboration was the result of a need for increased and strategic approach towards the gender-based violence issue that needed urgent respond and long-standing cooperation between the Mission and the key stakeholders and decision makers. The aim of this collaboration was to create a favourable environment among the decisionmakers to adopt enhanced legislation on combating domestic violence and violence against women, to accelerate the implementation of the GREVIO recommendations, improve the existing practice as well as to strengthen the parliamentary oversight of the relevant policy implementation. The sessions were attended by the relevant institutions, committees, parliamentarians, coordination bodies for prevention of domestic violence as well as civil society organizations from ten cantons from FBiH.

Parliamentary oversight of law implementation is a key function in a democratic system ensuring accountability, transparency, and alignment to legislative intent. Through this mechanism, parliamentarians monitor the activities of the executive branch to verify that laws are being implemented effectively, legally, and equitably. It helps prevent misuse of power, addresses potential gaps or issues in enforcement, and holds government agencies accountable for the execution of policies as intended by the legislation. **Effective oversight contributes to trust in government by ensuring that laws serve the public good and reflect the priorities and rights of citizens.**

4 Committee for Gender Equality, the Committee for Security of the House of Representatives, the Committee for Gender Equality and the Committee for Human Rights and Liberties of the House of Peoples.



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The first thematic session⁵

The first thematic session in the Parliament of the FBiH was organized in **April 2024** and gathered members of parliament, ministers, representatives of the judiciary and law enforcement agencies, cantonal co-ordination bodies for prevention of domestic violence, representatives of safe houses as well as representatives from other civil society organizations (CSOs) working on combating gender-based violence.

The discussion included a presentation of **the key findings of the GREVIO report and main recommendations**, as well as a presentation of a proposed **FBiH Strategy for prevention and fight against Domestic Violence** and information on the key legislative developments in FBiH.

⁵ [Institutional Response to Domestic Violence: Joint Session Highlights Need for Systemic Change](#)
| OSCE



Recommendations adopted by the both houses of the Parliament FBiH

1. The Gender Centre of the Federation of BiH is tasked with preparing and submitting to the FBiH Parliament an overview of the Council of Europe Committee of the Party and GREVIO recommendations and plans for their implementation in FBiH.
2. **FBiH Government shall urgently prepare and submit the FBiH Parliament revised legal framework for protection against domestic violence and violence against women** harmonized with international conventions.
3. *The Gender Centre of the Federation of BiH shall establish a biannual coordination between domestic and international institutions and organizations focusing on the activities for the implementation of the Strategy of Prevention of Domestic Violence 2024 - 2027 and GREVIO recommendations.*
4. *Four committees of the FBiH Parliament will organize two joint thematic sessions, focusing on the justice sector response to domestic violence and comprehensive support for victims, including vulnerable groups.*



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The second thematic session⁶

The second thematic session held in **September 2024** focused on **judicial and police response to gender-based violence**, and was a unique opportunity to exchange experiences between the judiciary, prosecutor offices as well as with law enforcement professionals. The Mission presented its latest data and analysis of judicial and police response to gender-based violence and this formed the basis for the development of the committees' recommendations, in addition to the GREVIO recommendations.

This was followed by an expert panel session during which **challenges and opportunities of different sectors involved in first response to cases of domestic violence** were discussed.

⁶ [Strengthening Institutional Responses to Domestic and Gender-Based Violence | OSCE](#)



Recommendations (adoption by the FBiH Parliament expected by end of December 2024)

1. FBiH government should work to **align Legal Framework with Istanbul Convention** and GREVIO/State Party Recommendations to ensure harmonised and standardised protection from domestic violence across Federation of BiH

The HJPC should consider **undertaking a comprehensive analysis of current penal policy** and propose actions to ensure that the sentences and measures imposed for domestic violence are effective, proportionate and dissuasive and that victims receive highest level of protection and access to justice.

2. FBiH and cantonal governments should **ensure effective and standardized implementation of the Law on Protection against Domestic Violence in FBiH** and relevant parts of the FBiH Criminal Code by allocating resources for standardised trainings and oversight mechanisms to track quality and effectiveness of the education of the police and judiciary, increasing number of female officers and applying victim-centred approach in legal proceedings.

3. FBiH and cantonal governments should work **to improve multisectoral co-operation** among the police, judiciary, social services and non-governmental organizations in providing comprehensive support for victims.

The HJPC should consider **organizing a series of practitioners' roundtables to ensure improved coordination** of law enforcement, prosecutors, and judges, with the aim of producing guidelines to harmonize and improve the justice system's response to cases of domestic violence.



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The third thematic session⁷

As part of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, the Mission-supported third joint session served as a central event to advocate for **accessible support for victims and lasting accountability for perpetrators**. Organized in **December 2024** the session conveyed the key messages of the campaign under the slogan **"#NoExcuse!** and focused on underlying ways for enhancing the support system and ensuring consistent responses to domestic violence.

The session hosted a rich discussion on service sustainability, as well as response standardization in social protection of victims and work with perpetrators.

⁷ <https://www.osce.org/mission-to-bosnia-and-herzegovina/582097>



Recommendations (adoption by the FBiH Parliament expected in 2025)

1. **FBiH and cantonal governments should ensure access to protection and specialized services for all women** by ensuring public funding for women's services and multisectoral coordination for prevention and combating of domestic violence, sustainable solution of the status of SOS line and economic empowerment programmes, and raising awareness on the available services especially those coming from marginalized communities such as Roma women, women with disabilities, and rural women.
2. **FBiH and cantonal governments should ensure adequate legal framework and resources for free legal aid** by adopting relevant legislation, funding and conducting professional development for legal aid staff and by conducting monitoring to assess accessibility, quality of services, and areas for improvement.
3. **FBiH and cantonal governments should enhance capacities of the social welfare sector in response to cases of domestic violence** by conducting needs assessment of the centres and departments for social welfare to identify gaps in the number and skills of social work professionals, capacity-building programs focusing on victim-centered approach, adoption of the standardized protocols on domestic violence cases and provision of the supervision.
4. **FBiH and cantonal governments should improve capacities of the mental health centers with a focus on domestic violence and violence against women** by ensuring availability of comprehensive psychosocial support for both victims and perpetrators of domestic violence and violence against women, by conducting **training for mental health staff** and by ensuring **comprehensive support services** through more coordinated approach.
5. **Gender Equality Committees of the House of Representatives and the House of Peoples** of the Parliament of FBiH will, in 2025, organize **sessions with cantonal commissions on gender equality, coordination bodies for combating domestic violence, and other relevant institutions** to further discuss the adopted conclusions from thematic units to ensure their feasibility and effectiveness across all cantons of the Federation of BiH.

