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FACTSHEETS

The Situation of Roma in Bosnia and
Herzegovina



THE SITUATION OF ROMA IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

OVERVIEW

The Roma community, as one of the largest and most marginalized minority groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), continues to face significant discrimination and exclusion. The 2013 census results show that 12,583 persons declared being “Roma”, while another 252 persons used different names such as “Bosniac Roma”, “Gypsies”, “Muslim Roma” “White Gypsies” and others. Estimates of the size of the Romani population range from 40,000 (UNDP) to 100,000 (Council of Roma), with a state-wide registration of Roma in 2010 yielding a figure of approximately 50,000. Roma activists reported a minimum of 40,000 Roma lived in the country, a datum aligned with Council of Europe estimates, of which approximately three-fourths were in openly segregated neighborhoods with poor infrastructure.

Bosnia and Herzegovina recognizes two kinds of minorities: constituent people (Bosniaks, Croats, Serbs) in a minority position and ‘others’, i.e. minorities from non-constituent groups. The Law on the Protection of Rights of Members of National Minorities names 17 national minorities belonging to the category of ‘others’, including Roma. Members of the Romani community just as the other non-constituent groups do not enjoy the same rights as members of the three constituent people.

The findings of this Factsheet draw on the most recent reports from organizations such as OSCE, The United Nations agencies (UNDP, UNICEF), Human Rights Watch (HRW), Civil Rights Defenders and other National and international organizations focusing on discrimination and social inclusion.

DISCRIMINATION AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina remain highly marginalized and are subject to systemic discrimination in nearly all aspects of life. This marginalization stems from entrenched stereotypes and institutional neglect, which lead to exclusion from social, economic, and political life (OSCE, 2020). In the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Roma community is not recognized as a national minority but is referred as “other”, which disables the Roma to exercise their political rights but also their representation on local and national level of decision-making bodies. The International human rights organizations have highlighted the persistent challenges that Roma face in integrating into society, and various initiatives have aimed at improving their socio-economic conditions, albeit with limited success.



EMPLOYMENT

Employment opportunities for Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina are severely limited. High unemployment rates, lack of vocational training, and discrimination in the labor market are major barriers for Roma individuals seeking employment. Many Roma are confined to informal work with little job security or protections, perpetuating cycles of poverty and social exclusion. In the Strategy for social inclusion of Roma there are measures for employment of Roma, however, those measures are insufficient, uncoordinated and underfunded. This was particularly the case during Covid19 pandemic, when many businesses ceased to exist due to lack of State support to Roma entrepreneurs.

When it comes to employment, based on the Strategy for Roma inclusion 2021-2025 in Bosnia and Herzegovina the situation was as followed:

Unemployed Roma	10,490
Roma to be employed	9,650
Registered at Employment Agency	3,270
Unemployed Women	45% of unemployed are women
Roma without Qualifications	88% of registered Roma
Youth Unemployment (Aged 25-44)	Largest percentage of unemployed
Older People (65+)	8% of population

In 2022, according to when it comes to employment the situation was as followed: 4% are employed, 6% are retired or cannot work. 90% are unemployed.



HOUSING

Housing is a critical issue for Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Roma communities often live in substandard conditions, lacking adequate infrastructure and services. Many Roma families reside in informal settlements, without proper documentation or legal ownership of their homes, making them vulnerable to forced evictions.

According to the Strategy for Roma inclusion 2021-2025 and based on the information provided by Local self-governance unit on the Federation level, the situation is as following:

Housing and Infrastructure Needs	Number of Units/Families	Units of Local Self-Governance
Need for Legalization of Housing Units	1,539 families	24
Need for New Housing Units	883 families	32
Need for Reconstruction of Existing Housing Units	1,300 families	32
Need for Infrastructure Repairs (roads, sewage, etc.)	Infrastructure repairs	28



EDUCATION

Education remains one of the most significant areas of discrimination for Roma children. Access to quality education is limited due to a combination of institutional neglect, societal prejudice, and poverty. Based on the findings of Romani Early Years Network from 2022, the education level of Roma families are as follows: 6% have upper education, 10% have lower secondary education, 28% have primary education and 56% have not been to school or if has gone, did not complete.

According to the United States Department of State's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2023 on BiH, Roma are often disadvantaged at preschool ages, with obstacles in the school registration process, including a disproportionately high number of Roma children profiled as "special needs," leading to very low enrollment numbers in regular schools. Accordingly, Roma children and children from poorer or more vulnerable backgrounds were less likely to gain access to educational and developmental services. Only 1.5 percent of Roma children and 2 percent of the country's poorest children had access to preschool. Only 69 percent of Roma children attended elementary school and 23 percent high school. Those rates were even lower for Roma girls, of whom 67 percent attended elementary school and 18 percent high school.

Based on the Strategy of Roma inclusion the situation is as following:

Roma children enrolled in preschool education (2020)	4% of children
Roma children enrolled in primary and secondary education	35% of children



HEALTH

Poverty, poor living circumstances, and restricted access to healthcare services are the main causes of the notable health disparities that Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina experience. A significant number of Roma households lack health insurance, and even those who do, they frequently encounter prejudice when trying to obtain medical care.

According to National Strategy of Roma Inclusion and Romani Early Years Network from 2022, the situation is as following:

Roma without health insurance	30%
Total number of Roma without health insurance	5,200 people
Children under 15 without health insurance	34.7% of 5,200 (approx. 1,804 children)
High disability rate among children (age up to 14)	34.7%
children do not have all the required vaccines for their age	47%

UN TREATIES AND COUNTRY SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

In 2021, the [UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights \(CESCR\)](#) issued recommendations to [Bosnia and Herzegovina \(BiH\)](#) addressing major concerns regarding discrimination, poverty, healthcare, and education. CESCR expressed concern over widespread discrimination and hate speech against Roma and minority groups, as well as their lack of representation in governance. The Committee **recommended proactive anti-discrimination measures**, such as awareness campaigns, strict **investigation of hate crimes**, and the **adoption of an action plan to improve Roma access to employment, housing, and healthcare**. CESCR urged BiH to establish a national poverty line, assess fiscal policies for poverty reduction, and adopt **targeted anti-poverty measures**, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic's socioeconomic impacts. The fragmented healthcare system creates significant regional disparities, leaving about 15% of the population, especially Roma and informal workers, without health insurance. CESCR recommended **healthcare reform to improve access and quality, expand insurance coverage, and address shortages of medical professionals and equipment** in public institutions. CESCR advised BiH to increase efforts toward inclusive education, ensure access for asylum-seeking children, and mitigate educational disruptions caused by COVID-19, especially for marginalized students.

The 2019 report by the [Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women \(CEDAW\)](#) identified multiple areas where Bosnia and Herzegovina should take action to address challenges facing Roma women. CEDAW **urged BiH to implement temporary special measures to improve Roma women's political representation**, encouraging **public awareness of these measures** and expanding their application across political, educational, employment, and healthcare sectors. The Committee highlighted the high rates of trafficking among Roma women and girls, **recommending targeted initiatives to improve educational and economic opportunities for Roma communities** to reduce vulnerability. They also advised **increasing shelter capacity, funding for victim support, and ensuring witness protection**. Due to significant underrepresentation, CEDAW recommended adopting amendments to the electoral law to support Roma women in politics, providing capacity-building for skills like campaigning and leadership, and promoting awareness of the importance of Roma women's political participation. The Committee noted barriers that Roma girls face in accessing quality education. Recommendations included **ensuring inclusive education, removing gender stereotypes from curricula, and making educational resources accessible for Roma girls to increase school enrollment and completion rates**. The Committee also urged action to **address the limited access to healthcare**, particularly maternal care, faced by Roma women, alongside recommendations for gender-sensitive and protective services for Roma women experiencing violence or discrimination. CEDAW raised concerns about the high rate of child marriages among Roma, recommending efforts to raise awareness of the harmful impacts of child marriage on girls' health, education, and development.

CONCLUSION

Bosnia and Herzegovina committed to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development on 15th of June September 2015. Despite some progress in recent years, Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina still struggle with access to basic rights such as education, healthcare, employment, and housing. Multiple UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 1 (No Poverty), 4 (Quality Education), 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) are the goals that require special focus in advancing the wellbeing of the Roma in the next period. The government of Bosnia and Herzegovina has made some efforts to address the situation of Roma through the adoption of national strategies and action plans, particularly in the areas of housing, education, health and employment. However, the implementation of these plans remains inconsistent and underfunded.

SEE RECOMMENDATIONS 



RECOMMENDATIONS



Ensure the effective implementation of Universal Periodic Review Recommendations and other Treaty bodies recommendations targeting Roma communities, especially the one related to improving Roma women's access to education, healthcare, and political representation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, by 2026.



The Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina should put more efforts in the Coordination and Monitoring of governmental bodies in charge of Roma inclusion such as The Committee of Ministers, Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees and Roma Committee. This is essential in order to meet the SDG but as well the goals set in the National Roma Strategy and obligations from Poznan Declaration.



In the area of health, it is needed to improve health insurance coverage among Roma in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Roma mediators can play the vital role in providing essential health information and promote healthy lifestyles. Additionally, collaboration with relevant institutions should focus on increasing reports of violence against women and children, ensuring victims receive appropriate services. These measures will foster better health outcomes and greater social protection for the Roma population.



To improve the education of Roma children, the local self-governance units should collaborate with educational institutions and civil society organizations (CSOs) to develop and implement action plans. The Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees should support these efforts by offering technical and financial assistance. Educational authorities must accelerate the adoption of action plans to reduce dropout rates and increase preschool inclusion, replicating successful practices from municipalities like Banja Luka and Novo Sarajevo.



To improve Roma housing in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Government and institutions in charge should to develop a sustainable social housing model, prioritize the legalization of existing homes, and map Roma settlements for targeted improvements. Local self-governance units should continuously increase the number of legalized properties to ensure investment sustainability. Additionally, create new housing projects for Roma families in inadequate conditions where legalization is not possible.



To enhance Roma employment in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Ministry of Labor and Employment, local self-governance units, and the Public Employment Services should collaborate to track Roma qualifications and provide requalification and vocational training programs. The Ministry of Public Administration should prioritize Roma employment in the public sector. Additionally, JLS should create a specific employment model for hard-to-employ individuals, while the Ministry of Finance allocates funds to support these initiatives and ensures Roma inclusion in public works programs with systematic monitoring.