TURN OFF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

"16 days of activism against gender-based violence" campaign in Bosnia and Herzegovina
November 25 – December 10 2022
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CAMPAIGN OVERVIEW

The global campaign "16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence" is marked every year from November 25th (International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women) to December 10th (International Human Rights Day). It is observed by institutions and civil society organizations around the world and it is part of the broader UNiTE campaign led by the United Nations Secretary-General, which calls on governments, media, women’s rights organizations, youth, civil society, and the entire UN to fight violence against women and girls.

As in previous years, UN Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina marked this campaign with various activities. The focus of the "16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence" campaign in 2022 is sexual violence and harassment against women in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

According to the World Health Organization, sexual violence is any sexual act, attempted sexual act, unwanted sexual comment or advance directed against a person and their sexuality, which can be committed by another person regardless of their relationship with the victim or the situation they are in.

According to the Istanbul Convention, sexual harassment is defined as any unwanted verbal, nonverbal or physical behavior of a sexual nature that is intended to violate a person’s dignity, especially when it creates a terrifying, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

According to available data from previous research in Bosnia and Herzegovina, every second woman has experienced some form of violence in her lifetime, including sexual violence and sexual harassment. However, many cases go unreported due to a lack of trust in protection system institutions, shame, or the fact that women do not recognize themselves as victims of violence.

To increase the awareness of BiH citizens about different forms of sexual violence and harassment, such as stalking, harassment in public spaces, and marital rape, UN Women BiH implemented a campaign under the motto "Turn off Sexual Violence" with messages #nomeansno and #recognizeandact. The goals of the campaign were to change harmful attitudes and gender stereotypes that lead to high tolerance for sexual violence and promote attitudes that condemn such behavior. Furthermore, the campaign aimed to support current advocacy activities aimed at accelerating changes in legal frameworks that regulate the prosecution of cases of sexual violence through the local platform called Action Coalition Against Gender-Based Violence in BiH.

The campaign was implemented with the support of Sweden and in collaboration with numerous partners, institutions, government representatives, civil society organizations, the international community, youth, celebrities, and influencers.
WORK OF THE ACTION COALITION AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The Action Coalition Against Gender-Based Violence (hereinafter referred to as the Action Coalition) is part of the UN Women global campaign "Generation Equality," which affirms the relevance of the commitments made in Beijing 28 years ago to create equal opportunities for all people regardless of age, race, religion, residence, gender, and sexual orientation.

The Action Coalition in Bosnia and Herzegovina was launched in December 2021 with the main goal of engaging leading academics, practitioners, activists, young girls and boys, as well as relevant institutions to come together to address the problem of sexual violence and sexual harassment.

In order to intensify the discussion on the legislative framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina that regulates criminal acts of sexual violence and to expand the membership of the Action Coalition, UN Women BiH organized two thematic discussions as part of this year's "16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence" campaign, one in Sarajevo on November 4, 2022, and the other in Banja Luka on November 18, 2022.

Domestic experts in the field of law, members of the academic community, representatives of entity institutions, including the ministries of interior and justice, representatives of gender mechanisms and civil society organizations, as well as service providers to survivors, participated in the discussions.

Participants showed great interest and willingness to be included in the work of the Action Coalition, exchange information on developments in this area, and work together to influence changes and concrete progress in improving criminal laws with a focus on acts of sexual violence.
The most important conclusions from the meeting in Sarajevo are:

- It is necessary to harmonize proposed amendments to the Criminal Code of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina with existing laws at the state and federation level;

- Define the type and severity of sanctions for gender-based violence offenses, taking into account that the purpose of punishment is social condemnation of the crime committed in order to influence the perpetrators not to repeat the criminal act and to encourage their resocialization;

- Pay attention to the proper positioning of the proposed amendments in the appropriate chapter of the Criminal Code of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The most important conclusions from the meeting in Banja Luka are:

- It is necessary to harmonize the Criminal Code of Republika Srpska with the Istanbul Convention in provisions related to sexual harassment and rape;

- Ensure access to support services for victims of sexual violence, both emergency response and long-term support;

- Ensure continuous education for prosecutors and judges for adequate implementation of the law.

The work of the Action Coalition continues in 2023, with planned thematic discussions aimed at networking relevant stakeholders and current initiatives that are expected to contribute to the building of a comprehensive system of accessible and equally accessible protection for victims of sexual violence.

The main conclusions and recommendations defined by the members have been translated into an advocacy document, which was presented to the participants of the panel discussion at the beginning of the campaign. The conclusions and recommendations will be used in further advocacy efforts by the Action Coalition, UN Women, and other stakeholders in order to accelerate changes to entity criminal laws, as well as in further efforts to create a sustainable protection system for victims of sexual violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
"16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence" campaign started on November 24th in Sarajevo with a panel discussion on "Protection from sexual violence in legislative frameworks and practice: Gaps and possibilities." Members of the Action Coalition, representatives from the ministries of justice, judges, prosecutors, secretaries of entity gender equality commissions, parliamentarians, representatives from civil society organizations, and representatives from international organizations attended the discussion.

The event began with introductory speeches by the Swedish Ambassador to BiH, H.E. Johanna Strömquist; the Director of the Gender Equality Agency of BiH, Samra Filipović-Hadžiabdić; former UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, Dubravka Šimonović; and the representative of UN Women BiH, David Saunders.
"The Action Coalition against Gender-Based Violence in BiH represents additional synergy for the implementation of the Istanbul Convention and GREVIO recommendations for BiH in the field of preventing gender-based and sexual violence. Competent institutions must urgently react to suppress this problem, which can only be solved through a comprehensive approach. It is necessary to harmonize legislation with the Istanbul Convention, provide necessary support for victims, education for professionals, as well as at all levels of education, and preventive action on recognizing and rejecting sexual violence and harassment."

Samra Filipović – Hadžiabdić, Director of the Gender Equality Agency of BiH, Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees of BiH

"States have a duty to prevent violence against women and girls, regardless of who the perpetrators are. Sweden is pleased to work with partners to ensure the existence of adequate legal frameworks for preventing and combating gender-based violence, including sexual violence, as well as ensuring adequate resources for their implementation."

NJ.E. Johanna Strömquist, Swedish Ambassador to BiH

"It is crucial to align laws with the highest international standards of the Istanbul Convention. We are here to support the improvement of laws and their implementation with representatives of authorities, civil society, and international organizations. Only together can we improve laws and ensure their implementation according to the highest standards."

David Saunders, UN Women representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina

"BiH is the first country in the region to establish a Committee for the Implementation of the Istanbul Convention and femicide, which is the most extreme form of violence against women. In addition to strengthening prevention efforts, it is necessary to collect data on all forms of violence against women and girls, including sexual harassment, rape, and femicide, so that data on the gender of the perpetrator and victim includes the relationship between the victim and perpetrator. It is also necessary to analyze femicide cases to identify problems in laws or their implementation and prevent similar cases."

Dubravka Šimonović, former UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls
Participants had the opportunity to hear messages from members of the Action Coalition through a short video, and attendees were provided with an overview of the main conclusions and recommendations for improving and implementing entity criminal laws, with a special focus on sexual violence, which served as an introduction to the panel discussion.

The central part of the event was a panel discussion with Nikolina Grbić Pavlović (Police Training Administration, Ministry of the Interior of Republika Srpska), Diana Šehić (Association "Rights for All"), and Miomirka Mila Melank (Representative in the House of Representatives of FBiH (2018 – 2022) and current representative in the Assembly of Canton Sarajevo), moderated by journalist Kristina Ljevak.

Attendees had the opportunity to sign the Declaration of the Action Coalition Against Gender-Based Violence, created as part of the Generation Equality campaign. By signing the Declaration, support is given and commitment is shown to preventing sexual violence against women in BiH. The Declaration was signed by Aurelie Valtat, Head of Section for European Integration, Political and Economic Affairs at the EU Delegation to BiH, on behalf of the European Union, and Lisa Curman, Deputy Head of Development Cooperation at the Embassy of Sweden in BiH.

The Declaration is also available for signing online.

“We must unite in the fight against all forms of violence against women. The right to a life free from violence is one of the most important human rights, and it is the state’s obligation to establish timely and effective protection mechanisms that will show victims of violence that they are not alone, while at the same time ensuring that perpetrators are promptly and severely punished. Of course, this requires harmonizing legislation with international human rights and violence protection standards and aligning it with relevant domestic legislation to ensure effective protection and legal security in BiH.”

Diana Šehić, director of the "Rights for All" Association

Lisa Curman, Deputy Head of Development Cooperation at the Embassy of Sweden in BiH.

Aurelie Valtat, Head of Section for European Integration, Political and Economic Affairs at the EU Delegation to BiH.
INFO CORNERS ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE

The campaign continued in Banja Luka (26-27 November), Bihać (29-30 November), Mostar (2-3 December), Tuzla (5-6 December) and Sarajevo (7 December), where informative booths on sexual violence were set up at selected locations. Citizens had the opportunity to find out about different forms of sexual violence and harassment, how to recognize violence, and what to do in risky situations by talking to experts at these locations.

These activities were carried out with a long-standing partner, UNHCR, whose partner organizations, Your Rights BiH and BHWI, facilitated the participation of experts who talked to visitors at the corners.
In addition to conversations, visitors of the info booths were given the opportunity to take an online quiz and test their knowledge on different forms of sexual violence and harassment, such as marital rape, unwanted touching, hugging or kissing, sexually suggestive comments and insulting jokes, etc.

"It’s very easy for people who speak publicly about it and report it to be stigmatized, and the community is not sympathetic and sensitive towards violence and reporting."
— Ognjen, Banja Luka

"A woman is an equal member of this society, and it’s terrible that someone has to protect you from your surroundings."
— Fadila, Bihać

Based on the experiences from the info booths during these nine days, it can be concluded that citizens are not greatly encouraged to talk about sexual violence and harassment. They showed more readiness to take the online quiz, which actually enabled them to learn and start questioning their own attitudes.

**Quiz on Sexual Violence and Harassment**

An online quiz on sexual violence and harassment was created with the aim of collecting data on the knowledge of BiH citizens on sexual violence, its different forms, consent, and the relevant legal framework. The questions are formulated in an interesting way to encourage respondents to look up the answers and thus educate themselves on this topic. The quiz and brochure with answers are available on the website [www.iskljucimoseksualnonasilje.ba](http://www.iskljucimoseksualnonasilje.ba). The brochure with the correct answers is available for download after completing the quiz.
Almost 2,000 people took the quiz, and the results are available [here](#). Some of the main conclusions arising from the analysis of the quiz results are:

- 77.4% of respondents consider sexual violence to be a private matter.
- 92.8% of respondents recognize the definition of marital rape.
- 80.1% of respondents did not recognize the difference between sexual violence and sexual harassment.

The panel discussion was attended by over 70 participants, including high school and college students, and representatives from schools and organizations working with youth. The results of the quiz on sexual violence and harassment were presented, and the
importance of recognizing, preventing, and sanctioning these crimes, which are widespread but often unrecognized and unpunished in BiH society, was discussed.

Panelists included Ilda Humić, an influencer who supported the campaign; Gorica Ivić from the "United Women" Foundation Banja Luka, who spoke about sexual harassment in public spaces; Jasminka Bulić from the "Women of Una" Association Bihać, who shared her experiences as an expert who was present in the info corner; and Masha Durkalić, communications associate at UN Women BiH, who presented the quiz results. Their presentations, moderated by Naida Kundurović, formed the basis for an engaging discussion in which young people shared their opinions on sexual violence and high tolerance for various forms of violence, especially in online environments.

Among other things, it was emphasized how important it is for young people to learn to recognize different forms of sexual violence and harassment in a timely manner, and how society as a whole needs to become aware that the high incidence of violence can be reduced if an adequate legal framework and protection system are in place.

Eva Smedberg, head of the Development Cooperation Department of the Swedish Embassy in BiH, and Amna Muharemović, program specialist with UN Women BiH, also addressed the attendees.
"Talking about sexual violence is difficult for many of us. It can be stigmatizing and uncomfortable, and something we don’t want to talk about in public. But only when this topic is part of the public agenda, visible in the media, and present in schools - can we do something about it. It is encouraging that this year's '16 Days of Activism' campaign was present in public spaces in various cities in BiH, as it gave people the opportunity to engage with this difficult topic."

Eva Smedberg, head of the Development Cooperation Department of the Swedish Embassy in BiH

"As a part of this year's campaign, we talked to decision-makers about how to improve existing laws on sexual violence and improve their implementation. In five BiH cities, we met with citizens and introduced them, with the support of our partners, to protection mechanisms, existing legal frameworks, and services available to women who have survived violence. Women and girls deserve a life free of any form of violence, especially sexual violence. We hope we have managed to send a message to women, especially those who have experienced violence, that we hear them, we believe them, support systems exist, and we are working to expand and strengthen them."

Amna Muharemović, program specialist at UN Women BiH

CAMPAIGN ON SOCIAL MEDIA

The campaign was implemented on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. It also featured photo statements from representatives of gender mechanisms, international organizations, and non-governmental institutions.
This year, influencers also joined the campaign and provided support through posts and video reels, sharing their understanding of the issue of sexual violence. Among them were Mirza Mustafagić, Ana Bavrka, Ilda Humić and Robert Dacesin. Ilda and Ana emphasized the message "No means no," while Mirza’s reel addressed various inappropriate comments directed towards women. Robert emphasized different experiences of women and men while traveling, with a special focus on women’s safety.

Illustrator Nataša Konjević was also involved in the campaign, creating an illustration on the theme of sexual violence and harassment. In addition, designer Haris Jusović and illustrator Ivana Janković, who runs the ID channel Instagram profile, joined the campaign by creating memes and illustrations that also conveyed the campaign’s messages.
During the campaign, the media provided significant support by reporting on UN Women BiH activities and hosting representatives of UN Women BiH for interviews on television and radio stations.
TURN OFF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

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