



Obezbijedila Evropska unija



United in Faith to End Violence Against Children and Gender-based Violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)

Background

According to the WV BiH's [gender-focused research](#), conducted with girls and boys - members of 8 BiH Youth associations in May 2022, 57% of boys and girls do not know the difference between sex and gender, 65% feel that members of the opposite sex have some advantage over the members of their sex while 61% of them consider that girls and boys are subjected to child rights violations in different ways. At the same time, the WV BiH latest [research on GBV perceptions and experience](#) gained through working with faith-based organisations and religious actors to protect refugees and migrant children show high levels of trust of B&H citizens in the "religious institutions" (77%), illustrates the power of Churches and religious communities to influence the

attitudes of believers. Supported by the European Union in BiH and partnership with the Interreligious Council of BiH (IRC), WV BHF has initiated an innovative project as a feasible, meaningful, and impactful way to contribute to addressing Child Rights (CR), prevention of Violence against Children (VAC) and Gender-based Violence (GBV) and promotion of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI), through joint action and combined resources and respective organisational mandates, expertise, and operational footprint in B&H. This action acknowledges the untapped potential of faith actors, and especially the potential of women in faith communities in raising awareness on and prevention of VAC and GBV, together with their capacity and responsibility to be more involved in the state efforts aimed at tackling harmful social practices.

Our Approach

WVBHF brings in its expertise in country-wide community-based programming for the long-term well-being of most vulnerable children, gender equity and social inclusion perspective, as well as local to national level network of partners and advocacy coalitions contributing to the creation of enabling environment for systematic improvement of child rights (CR) and gender equality in B&H, in which empowerment and direct participation of children and youth, as well as women groups as advocates of change, play a pivotal role. [Interreligious Council in BiH](#) is an official representing body of Churches and Religious Communities in B&H and as such a platform for interfaith dialogue, peacebuilding, and reconciliation. In addition, IRC conducts outreach work through its network of community committees for inter-religious cooperation in 15 municipalities and the Youth Network. IRC, as a well-positioned and trusted player within the local communities, Churches, and religious communities represents an accessible, influential, and relevant channel for reaching and meaningfully influencing the wider community.

Methodology

The methodology used is based on the World Vision Channels of Hope for Gender (CoHG) model which has been adapted by IRC representatives from the Jewish community, the Islamic community, the Serbian Orthodox Church, and the Catholic Church. It is based



on the shared Guiding Principles and incorporates the valuable findings obtained through [study/research](#) conducted on Violence Against Children and gender-based Violence in targeted communities.

[Channels of Hope CoH for Child Participation](#) used in WV BiH for many years already, has proven its effectiveness in decreasing violence against children, as a programme methodology that motivates and builds capacity in faith communities to address harmful traditional practices toward children, to support and advocate for children's rights, to become better child protectors, and to ultimately strengthen the local child protection system.



Key achievements

- To ensure evidence based interventions, a [study/research](#) was conducted among 1,636 participants from 53 local communities in B&H to examine perceptions, attitudes, and practices related to violence against children and gender-based violence.
- Children and youth (CAY) from 16 CAY groups from across B&H, capacitated with knowledge on gender, sex, and gender-based violence.
- Members of Chapters for Interreligious Community (CIRC) in 15 cities mobilised for participation.
- Adapted CoHG used for the education of religious officials and believers (members of CIRC) through 11 online workshops. The participants' knowledge and understanding of prevalent gender biases, gender equality, and the need to prevent gender-based violence in their communities increased.
- High-level United in Faith conference organized with 32 CIRC members from 15 local communities, including representatives of the European Union, the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees (MHRR), and the Agency for Gender Equality B&H. United and strong messaging and call for preventing VAC and GBV sent by key stakeholders.
- The [Network of Women Believers](#) (WBN) formalised and joined in Strategic Planning was carried out which supported the formalization of the Women Believers Network and further engagement
- Capacitated and networked CAY groups ready to spearhead small scale initiatives tailored to their communities' needs and priorities for action.

For the first time in BiH, through the United in Faith project, IRC and representatives of churches and religious communities are working on the topic of gender-based violence. In the first year of the project implementation, through the formalization of the WBN, organised series of topical online trainings, and the holding of a high-level conference on the subject, the aforementioned actors connected in joint planned action and paved the path for concerted and focused efforts towards addressing gender-based violence in respective communities.

Next steps

- With 16 small projects, CAY continues to mobilize children and young people and engage them in the prevention and suppression of VAC, GESI, GBV, and advocate their engagement in meaningful dialogue with relevant stakeholders.
- CIRC members will prepare small projects that will directly address the prevention of VAC and GBV in local communities.
- WBN will convene and coordinate faith-based actors and Children and Youth representatives to share findings and jointly define advocacy action.
- WBN together with faith-based actors and Children and Youth implement joint advocacy initiatives and/or Information, education and communication campaigns on Violence Against Children and GBV
- WBN will organize round tables with the participation of IRC in B&H's board and Children and Youth representatives on VAC and GBV issues
- Engagement of faith actors with civil society and national, multi-sectoral child protection coordination mechanisms for policies development/ change to be fostered.
- WBN to engage with B&H Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees and cooperate around defined joint policy action with Inter-religious Council in B&H and Children and Youth (on the role and position of churches and religious communities in National Child Rights Interface Platform).

Expected results

The project is stepping into its second year of implementation in which local to the national level of actions will continue and utilise the capacities and resources of WBN, faith-based actors, and CAY groups to advocate for targeted improvements in the fields of CR, VAC, GESI and GBV in their communities while convening and spearheading national level of dialogue on these critical topics. Through a series of joint initiatives, campaigns, and events, multi-sectoral coordination and local-to-state level referral and reporting mechanisms relevant to the elimination of VAC and GBV will be strengthened. It is expected to **contribute to the improvement of existing policies and practices on VAC and GBV through which, greater CSOs' engagement and overall state-level dialogue and action over these shared fields of interest will be stepped up.**

United in Faith project in numbers

The total number of final project participants reached in the reporting period is **725 (251 Female and 115 Male).**

From this number, CAY is **359 (211 Female and 148 Male)** and **adults 366 (251 Female and 115 Male).**

