

Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Context

Impact of the economic crisis

Despite several years of economic growth and stability, the economy in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) slowed considerably in 2009 due to the global economic recession. The per capita GNP is US\$3,300, which is the lowest in the CEECIS region. The foreign aid that flowed to the country in the wake of the war is now ceasing, causing concern about the long-term stability of the economy. Exports continue to decline, and remittances and reserves have decreased 14 per cent and 12.9 per cent, respectively.

Increased poverty and unemployment have resulted from the economic downturn. Poverty is a major concern in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with almost one in five people living below the poverty line. Geographical differences are notable; with poverty rates in rural areas almost double those in urban areas. Households with three or more children are 43 per cent more likely to be in poverty than smaller families. Only about half of poor people who are eligible for social services receive them, and nutrition remains a serious issue. Unemployment in the nation is 24.1 per cent and rising. Furthermore, young people aged 15 to 24 account for 47.5 per cent of the total population.

Lingering war effects

The Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA) brought an end to war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1995, but work to improve state institutions and government bodies is still necessary. Ongoing challenges include: imbuing principles of democracy and the rule of law into governance; coping with fluctuating regional economies, including rising food and fuel prices; improving social welfare; and moving toward sustainable development. Positive results in the area of policy and economic reform have led to signing the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the European Union, and continued progress is expected.



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However, the complex organizational structure of the country may slow down the reform processes.

Educational reforms

Bosnia and Herzegovina has multiple education governance units, including 13 separate Ministries of Educations (the Sector for Education within the state level), the Bosnia and Herzegovina Ministry of Civil Affairs, and the Department for Education of Brcko District. The role of state institutions in the field of education is to establish criteria, monitor the process of implementation of strategies and provide recommendations regarding future activities. Entity and cantonal institutions are responsible for the implementation of laws and decisions made at the state, entity and cantonal level. Very dissimilar legislation and the lack of harmonization of laws affect the system's efficiency.

Even though the Common Core curriculum was adopted several years ago, curricula for a national group of subjects remain specifically designed for a particular group of students, which affects the quality of education. The Conference of Ministers of Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina was established with the aim of improving coordination within the educational system institutions.

Quick facts about education in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Total population	3.9 million
GDP per capita	\$7,240
Net pre-primary school enrolment, 2007	6.4%
Net enrolment in primary school (grades 1–4), 2007	98.4%
Net enrolment in secondary school (9–12), 2007	79%
Tertiary education (ISCED 5 and 6) Gross enrolment ratio (2009)	37*
Number of refugees and internally displaced persons	120,774**
Youth unemployment rate as percentage of unemployment rate	47.5%
TIMSS 2007 score: mathematics, science (8th grade only)	456, 466

Source: UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008; MICS Bosnia and Herzegovina 2006; TIMSS 2007; UIS Data Centre*; UNHCR Country Profile 2010**



In the past several years, policy and legislation to improve education have emerged; unfortunately, they have not always been in harmony. As a result, changes in legislation have not always been accompanied by satisfactory implementation at the community and school levels, and vice versa.

Recent governmental supports for education include:

- Producing the Strategic Direction of Education Development 2008–2015 document
- The Framework Law on Preschool Education
- The Law on Agency for Preschool, Elementary School and High School Education
- The emergence of a cost-effective community-based model designed to support integrated early childhood services opened in four municipalities
- In cooperation with UNICEF, the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina began to address discrimination and division in the education system by promoting intercultural dialogue, peace education programmes, life skills and key competencies approaches in education

Access to education

Access to education in Bosnia and Herzegovina varies widely by region. In rural areas, the access and quality of education is lower than in urban areas. While preschool is almost unattended, primary school attendance rates are on par with the other countries in the region.

Early childhood education

Pre-primary school enrolment rates are a major concern. With only an estimated 6.4 per cent of 3- to 5-year-olds enrolled, Bosnia and Herzegovina has the lowest preschool participation rate in the CEE/CIS region. As few as 10 per cent of students entering grade one have attended some sort of pre-primary education. This makes for low school readiness, limited access to early childhood vaccines and learning assessments, and delayed services for students with special needs.

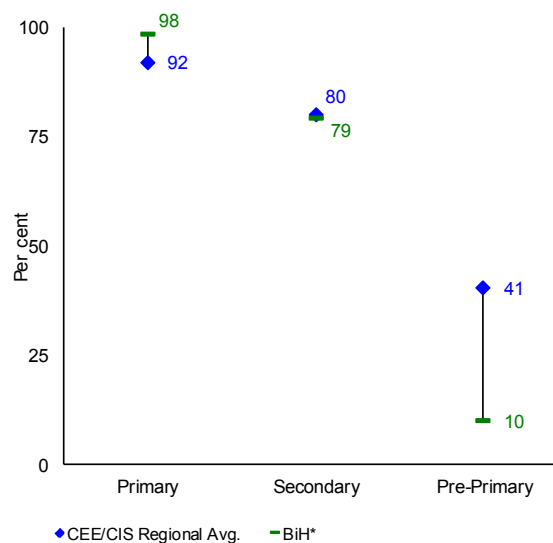
The Framework Law on Preschool Education (the Law) was adopted in 2007, making one year of preschool education compulsory in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In cooperation with educational ministries, UNICEF started two preschool projects:

one aims to improve implementation of the Law and increase attendance rates in preschool education, and the second project is focused on Roma preschool education. At the same time, standards are being developed for preschool institutions, teachers and managers, as well as preschool programmes.

Basic education

Bosnia and Herzegovina has a national net enrolment rate in primary school of 98.4 per cent. This is above both the regional and subregional averages (see Figure 1). The problem of non-attendance is mainly related to children from vulnerable families. In terms of the availability of primary education, there are differences at the regional and local level due to the lack of financial resources in some municipalities and cantons that are not able to implement the legal provisions pertaining to compulsory and free primary education. Bosnia and Herzegovina's secondary enrolment rate of 79 per cent is below both subregional and regional averages, and is the third lowest in the CEE/CIS region after Romania and Turkey. Secondary school completion rates for females are lower than for males. Reasons for this include the socio-economic conditions of families, tradition and patriarchal legacy. The majority of secondary school students attend secondary vocational education.

Figure 1. Net enrolment rates in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the CEE/CIS region



Students with disabilities

Although the past few years yielded some progress with respect to education reform, Bosnia and Herzegovina has just begun to explore issues in relation to inclusive education. By law, regular schools are required to include children with special needs and provide them with individual education programming when they experience difficulties. In reality, students with disabilities who do attend school (estimated at 0.4–0.8 per cent of all students) often find minimal accommodations or supports to help them succeed. Teachers lack

the training to effectively reach young people with disabilities, further limiting their access to quality learning. A lingering societal stigma towards people with disabilities results in many students with disabilities not attending school at all or going to special institutions.

Educational challenges facing adolescents and youth

Multiple challenges face the estimated 23 per cent of people in Bosnia and Herzegovina who are between the ages of 14 and 29. High youth unemployment (ranging between 45 per cent and 60 per cent) and overwhelming dissatisfaction with the educational system (80 per cent) has resulted in large numbers of youth expressing a desire to leave the country (77 per cent). The core problem of youth unemployment is a result of the mismatch between labour supply and labour demand. The education system does not adequately prepare youth with the requisite skills for the world of work. Even when young women and men do choose an appropriate career field, they often find they do not have the requisite 'soft skills' to succeed: communication skills, entrepreneurial spirit, teamwork and positive attitudes toward work in general. These findings reflect the changing social paradigm, where a formerly communist country is making the transition to a modern knowledge-based market economy. There is a growing number of out-of-school and out-of-work youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In 2010, implementation started of a programme that aims to address the high youth unemployment and irregular migration. UNICEF works closely with the government on this programme, coordinating education activities in order to increase capacities of the education system and local communities and improve youth employability.

Over 250 youth organizations exist in Bosnia and Herzegovina that support young people, but according to the data from the Federal Institution of Statistics, high numbers of youth still participate in crime, sex work and pandering. Child trafficking is also an increasing concern throughout the country. A lack of interaction between youth of different backgrounds and religions results in ignorance about, and intolerance, of those who are different.

More than 1 million landmines and other unexploded ordnance are still spread throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. In 2007, UNICEF secured funding to post warning signs in suspected areas. The result is that many areas are off limits and young people are not free to roam and enjoy the outdoors.

Equity in education

The constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina (article 2, paragraph 4) states that all persons shall be free from discrimination based on gender, race, colour, language, religion, politics and other opinions, nationality or origin. Nevertheless, educational equity continues to be a major challenge. Layers of inequality – ranging from decision-making at ministries to the access and quality of education available to different populations in schools

– are a concern. Since local ministries set their own course for education, it is difficult to establish and enforce standards at the national level. Textbooks, for instance, often reinforce stereotypes or discriminate against various groups. Furthermore, as a result of how education is governed, majority ethnic groups in a district often develop education at the expense of minority groups, who receive lower quality education.

The deep issues that divide populations in Bosnia and Herzegovina's schools are culture and ethnic status, geographical location and socio-economic disparities. Current education structures solidify existing ethnic divisions. Mono-ethnic schools and 'two-schools under one roof' segregate and often physically divide children based on their ethnicity or nationality. This can have long-term impacts on social cohesion and peace.

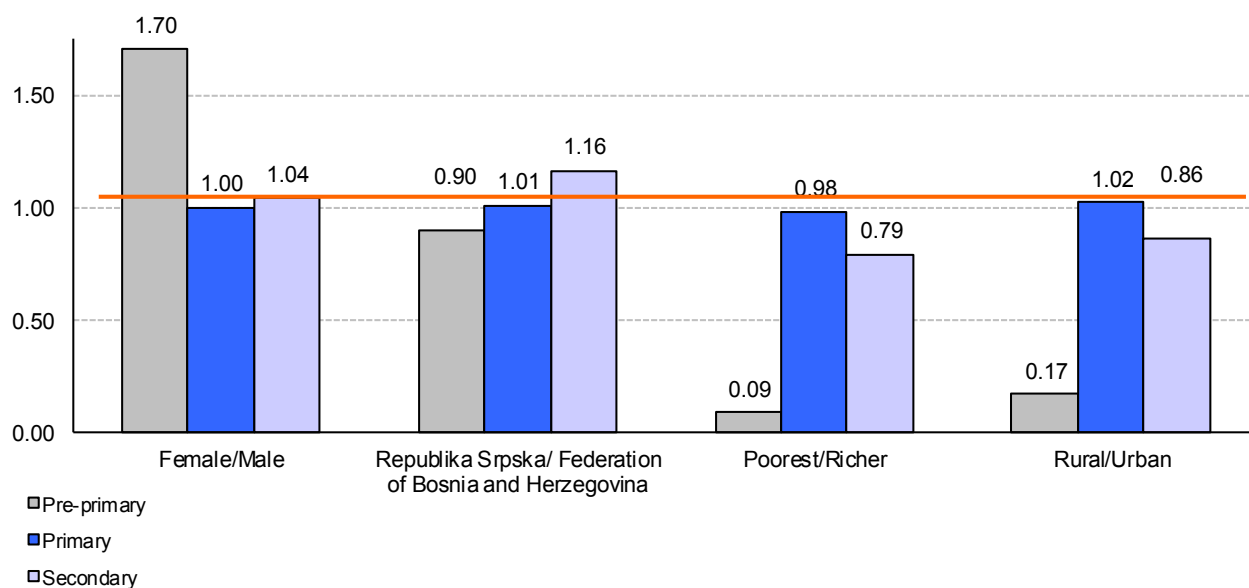
A rural/urban disparity is clear in both pre-primary and secondary school access. While the preschool enrolment rate is the lowest in the region, it is lower still in rural areas. Only 2.4 per cent of children aged 3 to 5 in rural areas attend preschool, compared to 14.3 per cent of the same age group living in urban areas. The educational disparity grows along with the child: only 73.5 per cent of rural children attend secondary school, versus 86 per cent of children in urban areas. These rural/urban disparities are even greater when broken down by region and ethnicity.

A socio-economic disparity is also apparent in early childhood education and secondary school access. Richer children have better access to both preschool and secondary school. In pre-primary education, less than 2 per cent of children in the lowest income bracket attend preschool, versus 14 per cent in the highest income bracket. This indicates that children who are most in need of early support have the least access to it. Similarly, 8 poor children attend secondary school for every 10 rich children (see Figure 2). In addition, wealthier districts often provide much higher quality education than poorer districts.

Roma education

Between 50,000 and 60,000 Roma live in Bosnia and Herzegovina, making it the nation's largest minority group and most vulnerable population. Roma children are marginalized, underrepresented at all levels of schooling and have high levels of illiteracy. While half of Roma children are enrolled in primary school, only 15 per cent attend regularly. Primary school completion rates for Roma are around 32 per cent. In secondary school, only 2 per cent of Roma children enrol and only 9 per cent of those graduate. Less than 1 per cent of Roma obtain any amount of tertiary education. Seventy-six per cent of Roma aged 15 to 24 are illiterate. Anti-discrimination laws are now established, but they are too new to assess their impact.

Figure 2. Disparities in educational enrolment by gender, region, income and locality, 2005



There are slow signs of improvement in Bosnia and Herzegovina, such as at Djemaludin Causavic Elementary, a model school in Sarajevo that welcomes and encourages Roma children to attend. The school aims to practice, promote and provide for all students without prejudice. In 2004, an Action Plan on the Educational Needs of Roma and Members of Other National Minorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina was adopted. In 2008, Bosnia and Herzegovina became the 11th nation to sign the Decade of Roma Inclusion.

Educational quality

Educational quality is another major challenge facing Bosnia and Herzegovina. Again, the labyrinthine policy environment makes it difficult to set, maintain and enforce quality standards, and makes it difficult to collect information about the quality of schools. There is virtually no data available on in-school processes, outputs or outcomes in Bosnia and Herzegovina. MICS 2006 was one attempt at systematic data collection.

Proxy indicators point to relatively poor education quality. Children are generally ill-prepared for school when they arrive, partly because of low early childhood enrolment rates, but also because of a dearth of learning materials in the home; only 70 per cent of children have three or more children's books in their home. With the government spending almost 80 per cent of its education budget on sustaining the highly complex administrative system, little is left to spend on learning materials to make up for children's late start with formal learning. Schools are often short of or have poor quality and outdated textbooks. Drop-out rates are high in primary school. Eighty per cent of companies surveyed reported that the education system does not prepare youth for the labour market. With poor quality schooling that is irrelevant to the labour market, drop-out rates can only be expected to increase and school enrolment rates to decline.

Secondary analysis of TIMSS 2007 (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) found that Bosnia and Herzegovina was below the international average in terms of the percentage of students stating they 'liked to be at school'. Reasons for this perception of schools can be found in the outdated curricula and methods of knowledge transfer. Other reasons include poor conditions in schools; inadequate buildings; poor hygiene conditions; and lack of technical equipment such as computers. The third set of reasons for this reluctance to attend school concerns poor safety conditions, whether in school or on the way to school. The lack of safety is most often due to peer violence, and sometimes to verbal and even physical abuse by teachers.

Education priorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina

UNICEF, in partnership with local organizations and the Ministry of Education and Science, has prioritized the following actions:

- Support improvements in the quality of and equitable access to preschool education programmes (including standards, preschool programmes for the most marginalized children such as Roma, and alternative models for preschool education).
- Support improvements in the quality and inclusiveness of primary education, based on the Child-Friendly School (CFS)/Quality Basic Education principles and approach. This includes supporting the development of standards for learning achievements and learning outcomes, peace education programmes and school-based programmes on CFS.
- Support education policymakers, practitioners and communities to advance intercultural education in Bosnia and Herzegovina (including teacher training on intercultural education, development of modules, school-based activities and non-formal education activities with children from different communities).

- Support the education system to improve youth employability. This includes expanding life-skills education programmes, improving primary and secondary curricula for career development elements, training teachers on life skills and key competencies, and involving youth in the activities of the local communities.
- Support school-based child safety and injury prevention, including education on landmines, small arms and violence prevention through training of teachers and participatory action activities with children.

Education in post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina

In post-conflict settings, there is an urgent need for education to respond to the psychosocial needs of students, to support the country's reconciliation through peace education and to build a foundation of civic awareness and values that encourage democracy. However, without specific attention to these important roles, education can act as fodder for future conflict by reinforcing existing societal schisms after the end of war.

Researcher Adila Pasalic-Kreso observes: "Problems arise especially when returnees start returning to their small towns and municipalities that were ethnically cleansed during the war. In these communities, education policies primarily reflect the domination of the majority group over minorities. Minority children are allowed access only to education organized to serve the needs of the majority students. Some of the majority community are hostile toward returnees and lock the doors of the schools. This type of behaviour towards minorities demonstrates an unwillingness to accept life in a multiethnic community."

Attempts have been made at engendering democratic values in schools; however, the divided nature of the school system prevents consistent systemic change. "Although at the beginning of every school year solemn promises are made to solve all problems by the next school year, no real changes are made that prevent exclusion and separatist activity. It seems that we contemplate our education and school systems without theory, without studying the experiences of others, and in general without either an academic or professional approach to this important and sensitive field."

Source: Adila Pasalic-Kreso. (2002). Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Minority inclusion and majority rules the system of education in Bosnia and Herzegovina as a paradigm of political violence on education. Sarajevo.