Civil Society in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Seeking the Way Forward
Seeking the Way Forward: Civil Society in Bosnia and Herzegovina

To provide the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme in Bosnia and Herzegovina with a coherent framework for working with civil society actors in Bosnia and Herzegovina to better facilitate volunteerism and civic engagement, the UNV Field Unit for Bosnia and Herzegovina conducted a review and assessment of the civil society reports and needs assessments for Bosnia and Herzegovina released since 2008.

This review document is organized into 5 main sections:

- The basic characteristics of and challenges facing civil society and civil society actors in Bosnia and Herzegovina
- The role and status of volunteers within civil society in Bosnia and Herzegovina
- The collected recommendations put forth by recent civil society reports and needs assessments for Bosnia and Herzegovina since 2008
- Reflections, recommendations and conclusions on the United Nations
- Volunteers programme’s role in strengthening civil society and volunteerism in Bosnia and Herzegovina

From the perspective of UNV, civil society is seen both as 'an overall public arena from a family unit to the state' containing a range of organizational structures, with differing forms and levels of self organization, independence, privacy and self-governance, and a space where citizens and citizen groups are able to work to realize individual and common interests. Importantly, it is a space within which civil society actors can mediate between government or public authorities, the private sector and citizens to ensure social inclusion, equality, human rights and participatory democracy.

Many have perceived that the ability of civil society in Bosnia and Herzegovina to play its role in building a more inclusive, prosperous and democratic country is significantly hindered by the country's multilayered governmental, political and legislative structures defined along the lines of
three 'ethnic' groups or 'constituent peoples'. The sector's situation does mirror the overall state in many respects - fragmented, institutionally and financially weak, competition for power and resources, and dependence on international support.

However, while intimately linked to low levels of social trust and capital which characterize the social fabric of BiH, the social divisions present within civil society are seen to be less pronounced than those found in the country as a whole.

Since the 1992-1995 conflict, the role of the civil society sector of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) has changed from addressing humanitarian needs and often serving as a state substitute during and straight after the war to complementing government and supporting the development of socially cohesive and democratic society today. The civil society sector contributes to cohesion and democracy through delivering vital social services and providing individuals and organizations the space to work together to develop solutions to the social, economic, political and environmental challenges facing individuals and communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Sustainable Development Goal: