

## SUCCESS STORY

### Support to victims/witnesses in war crime cases

DELEGATION OF  
THE EUROPEAN UNION  
TO BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA



*In the period 2015 to 2017, 5 existing institutional support networks were strengthened and 10 new ones established*

### EU assisted support networks provide crucial help for victims/witnesses in war crime cases

Solving war crimes from the recent past in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is a difficult process triggering stress to the victims/witnesses, but also to the experts dealing with war crimes. The legal punishment of perpetrators of all war crimes is the most important part of the healing process, as in this way the State re-establishes faith in justice and its moral credibility.

The European Union considers the protection and support of victims and witnesses in Bosnia and Herzegovina as a key priority. This was also envisioned in the 2008 BiH National War Crimes Strategy (NWCS), the primary aim of which is to resolve all outstanding war crimes cases in a timely manner. The implementation of the NWCS is also one of the core priorities addressed within the framework of the EU-BiH Structured Dialogue on Justice.

With the aim of improving access to justice and rehabilitation of the conflict affected victims/witnesses through provision of

15 institutional support networks are now operating in the country.

9 networks in FBiH, in the cantons: Zenica-Doboj, Herzegovina-Neretva, Podrinje, Tuzla, Una-Sana, Central Bosnia, Posavina, Sarajevo and Canton 10.

5 networks in RS in Banja Luka, Doboj, Bijeljina, East Sarajevo and Trebinje.

1 network was also established in Brcko District.

multidisciplinary support, the European Union funded the project "Ensuring access to Justice for witness/victims through strengthening existing and establishing new witness support networks across BH".



Svako ima pravo da posjeduje imovinu, ličnu i u zajednici sa drugim osobama. Niko ne smije samovoljno biti lišen svoje imovine. (čl. 17)

Svako ima pravo na slobodu misli, savjesti i vjeroispovjesti. (čl. 18)

Svako ima slobodu mišljenja i izražavanja. (čl. 19)

Svako ima slobodu mirnog okupljanja i udruživanja. (čl. 20)

Svako ima pravo da učestvuje u javnim poslovima svoje zemlje, neposredno ili preko izabranih predstavnica i predstavnika. (čl. 21)

Svako ima pravo na socijalno osiguranje i pravo da ostvaruje privredna, društvena i kulturna prava. (čl. 22)

Svako ima pravo na rad, slobodan izbor posla, pravične uslove rada i zaštitu od nezaposlenosti (čl. 23)

Svako ima pravo na jednaku platu za jednak rad. (čl. 24)

Svako ima pravo na odmor, razumno ograničenje radnog vremena i plaćeno odsustvo. (čl. 25)

Svako ima pravo na standard života koji osigurava zdravlje i blagostanje njega/nje i njegove/njene porodice. (čl. 26)

Svako ima pravo na obrazovanje. (čl. 27)

Svako ima pravo da učestvuje u kulturnom životu zajednice. (čl. 28)

Svako ima pravo na društveni i međunarodni poredak u kojem prava i slobode sadržane u Deklaraciji mogu biti potpuno ostvareni. (čl. 29)

*Vive žene*

Ovaj projekat finansira  
Evropska unija

**10. DECEMBAR/PROSINAC**

**MEĐUNARODNI  
DAN LJUDSKIH  
PRAVA**

*za sve*

**SVA LJUDSKA BIĆA RAĐAJU SE  
SLOBODNA I JEDNAKA U DOSTOJANSTVU I PRAVIMA**

Medica Zenica

udruženje  
Banja Luka

ACED

*The Project organised public events promoting the International Day of Support for Torture and the Human Rights Day*

The total budget of the project is over EUR 2 million, of which the EU contributed EUR 1,7 million, and is being implemented by the Citizens' Association Vive Žene from Tuzla, together with Medica Zenica, the Foundation Udružene Žene from Banja Luka, and the Agency for Cooperation, Education and Development ACED Banja Luka.

Before the start of the project, five institutional support networks for victims/witnesses were in place in the country. Within the project, in the period 2015 to 2017, these five networks were strengthened while 10 new ones were established.

A victim/witness, whose identity remains confidential, explains that the first opportunity to familiarise with her rights as a civilian victim of war

Lack of understanding of victims' feelings because of the stigma attached to their injuries leads to a discouragement of victims from testifying in court, which slows down the process of tackling war crimes cases and of successfully overcoming the legacy of war.

Institutional support networks consist of both representatives of institutions and non-governmental organisations cooperating and providing professional and quality support to victims/witnesses within the legal framework and their competences. Therefore, the project required the participation and engagement of a large number of stakeholders, including institutions, organisations, experts, victims' associations and the public.



was provided to her by a network established within the project.

*"Prior to the help I received from the Vive Žene organization in 2015, the only help I received were interviews with a psychologist before testifying at a trial that went on for five years," the witness said.*

Comprehensive assistance throughout trials is essential for victims/witnesses. In BiH, it was of the utmost importance to develop an integrated multidisciplinary approach to witnesses/victims and thus to provide them with quality psychosocial, psychological and legal assistance that is needed before, during and after trials.

The bulk of victims of war crimes are at the same time important witnesses in war crime trials. The testimony of victims, particularly of rape and sexual violence, is critical to the outcome of cases, since there is usually little or no other evidence available. However, witnesses and victims often experience testifying in court as re-traumatizing as they are in a perpetual state of fear of retaliation if they talk publicly about their experiences.

A crucial part of the project was training for professionals as well as strengthening the capacity of associations gathering or cooperating with witnesses/victims. Altogether, 328 professionals involved in the work of individual networks completed three training modules which was essential since NGOs and citizen associations represent the foundation of the support networks and ensure their long-term sustainability.



*The Project organised public events promoting the International Day of Support for Torture and the Human Rights Day*



*The Project strengthened the capacity of associations gathering or cooperating with witnesses/victims*

In order to promote the importance of establishing victims/witnesses support networks, the project implemented activities involving the general public. The International Day of Support for Torture Victims, on 26 June, and the Human Rights Day, on 10 December, were marked in co-operation with institutional support networks by a series of public events aimed at raising public awareness of the importance of victim support.

The EU is also providing about EUR 15 million of IPA funding to support the processing of war crime cases, namely the financing of salaries for judges, prosecutors and support staff working on processing war crimes in the relevant courts and prosecutors' offices throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as for covering the material expenses of the judicial institutions for processing war crimes. The overall objective of the support is to reduce the number of war

A victim/witness interviewee highlighted the importance of raising awareness about victim/witness issues. Prior to the project, most of the institutions she had approached showed no understanding for the civilian victims of war. *"I have often felt discriminated against. I've faced mocking and there was a time when I had to hide my past,"* the victim/witness explained.

In addition to psychosocial support, networks also helped with logistical needs of victims/ witnesses such as transport to the court and accommodation.

crime cases in the prosecutors' offices involving identified suspects by 50% within 5 years.

Moreover, the EU (European Commission and EU Member States through bilateral projects) is the main donors to the International Commission for Missing Persons (ICMP). Since 2004, EU funds have been used to support the ICMP activities in collecting and processing DNA samples from family members of the missing persons, re-association of mortal remains as well as outreach activities in the region. This assistance helps Bosnia and Herzegovina to deal with its painful past and contributes significantly to transitional justice mechanisms.

Photos provided by the project *"Ensuring access to Justice for witness/victims through strengthening existing and establishing new witness support networks across BH"*.

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