MONITORING AND EVALUATION SUPPORT ACTIVITY (MEASURE II)

RECONCILIATION ASSESSMENT IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA: PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE THROUGH SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL CHANGE

May 2023

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Final Report
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ABSTRACT

The American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) has been commissioned by the United States Agency for International Development Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (USAID/BiH) under the USAID/BiH Monitoring and Evaluation Support Activity (MEASURE II) to conduct a reconciliation assessment to inform the design of a new activity in this area. The assessment aimed to formulate recommendations on how best to address interethnic division caused by the 1990s war in BiH. The assessment was conducted between July and November 2022. The assessment team used a mixed-methods approach and triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data to address the assessment questions. The assessment findings indicate that sources of division in BiH are predominantly related to the 1990s war and its consequences, and exacerbated by political elites, politically controlled media, and a divided education system.

No single stakeholder group could facilitate reconciliation processes on its own, but there are individuals among the youth, academics, civil society organizations (CSOs), politicians, media, religious communities, and other stakeholder groups who can advance reconciliation. At the moment, CSOs are the most active peacebuilding actors, but their activism is insufficiently visible, and they depend on donor support. Approaches to reconciliation in BiH rely primarily on reducing interethnic prejudice and tensions through contact-based activities, while transitional justice approaches never came to life in BiH. Interventions relying on developing complex identities, inter-religious dialogue and understanding, education, and peace economy have the potential to contribute to peacebuilding in BiH. Future reconciliation interventions in BiH should be locally driven and owned, and they should be long term rather than project based. These interventions should target three levels of actors: grassroots (primarily youth), mid-level actors (e.g., experts, CSOs, media, religious leaders, businesses, diaspora), and elites (highest-level politicians, religious leaders, and mainstream media), with different objectives.

With grassroots actors, donors and implementors should design longer-term interventions and ensure adequate layering and sequencing. The objective of these activities should be to build targeted citizen resilience to imposed divisive political and historical narratives by implementing ingroup preparation activities. The activities should aim to reduce prejudice, develop critical thinking, increase intergroup perspective taking and empathy, develop complex identities, adopt constructive narratives about sources of division, engage in sustainability planning, and replicate the effects with wider groups. USAID should establish a network of mid-level actors who would work together to develop an authentic BiH approach to reconciliation. The network should initiate constructive discussions around divisive narratives at the local level, build on previous PRO-Future II activities on fostering a reconciliation civic movement, and support research to expand the evidence base about the past and develop effective interventions. The network should conduct intensive outreach activities to convey constructive narratives and research results to the public and to counterbalance negative influences of political elites. Implementors should pay more attention to results monitoring, layering, and sequencing, and to establishing coordination, collaboration, learning, and adaptation mechanisms between different project components, with other USAID activities, and with other donor activities.

CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIR	American Institutes for Research
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
CLA	Collaboration, Learning and Adapting
CSO	Civil Society Organization
FG	Focus Group
FO	Field Office
HO	Home Office
IRC	Inter-religious Council
KIs	Key Informants
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
MEASURE II	Monitoring and Evaluation Support Activity
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NSCP	National Survey of Citizen Perceptions
NYS	National Youth Survey
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PRO-Future II	Trust, Understanding and Responsibility for the Future II
SPPG	Support to Political Pluralism and Good Governance Processes
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USAID/BiH	United States Agency for International Development/Bosnia and Herzegovina

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) was commissioned by the United States Agency for International Development Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (USAID/BiH) under the USAID/BiH Monitoring and Evaluation Support Activity (MEASURE II) to conduct a reconciliation assessment to inform the design of a new Mission activity in this area. The new activity will contribute to the Country Development Cooperation Strategy through (1) Intermediate Result 1.1—Impact of inclusive citizen engagement improved and (2) Intermediate Result 2.1—Social cohesion strengthened. The purpose of the assessment was to formulate recommendations on how best to address mistrust between the main ethnic groups in BiH caused by the 1990s war and consequent grievances, exacerbated by divisive political rhetoric. The assessment investigated the underlying sources and drivers of interethnic division and identified the actors and tools with the potential to contribute to bringing divided groups closer together.

METHODOLOGY

The reconciliation assessment was conducted between July and November 2022. The assessment team used a mixed-methods approach and triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data to address the assessment questions. The team conducted a literature review, 55 key informant interviews (KIIs) with a variety of stakeholders (donors, international organizations, politicians, religious leaders, media, local civil society organizations [CSOs]), and 20 focus groups (FGs) with citizens. The team also analyzed data from the National Survey of Citizens' Perceptions in Bosnia and Herzegovina (NSCP-BiH) and the National Youth Survey (NYS-BiH).

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Key informants (KIs) interviewed for this assessment held opposing views about the country's progress in terms of improving interethnic relations and reconciliation. Most KIs believe that interethnic contacts and cooperation at the local level have increased, especially between young people, but few think the situation has improved in terms of resolving the sources of division, acknowledging war crimes toward the outgroups, or forgiving the outgroup members. Political rhetoric has worsened and become more divisive than it was five years ago.

To ensure common understanding of underlying concepts, the report identified the most important operational definitions. The term "social cohesion" is used for results encompassing improved interethnic trust, relations, connections, and collaboration, without necessarily discussing or resolving sources of division. "Facing" and "dealing with the past" stands for discussions around past grievances. The terms "peacebuilding" and "reconciliation" are used interchangeably to denote the broadest concepts and highest goals that society should strive for. Peacebuilding and reconciliation require improved social cohesion and resolution of division, and they are considered necessary, ongoing processes to preserve peace rather than achievable results. A summary of the assessment questions and corresponding findings and conclusions is presented next.

SOURCES OF DIVISION

Key informants—politicians, media representatives, religious leaders, CSO representatives, and some citizens from divided communities—all agreed that BiH society today is deeply divided on ethnic grounds, based on opposing historical and contemporary narratives. Divisive narratives are manipulated and reinforced by political elites, politically controlled media, and a divided education system. To maintain their hold on power, political elites manipulate ethnic identities and fuel fears among citizens, using the public media to convey divisive messages.

The BiH society continues to lack mechanisms for establishing and driving constructive dialogue about the past, and ordinary people avoid discussing "difficult topics," leaving clear space for divisive narratives to dominate. Nevertheless, the vast majority of KIs, including citizens, believe that division among the ordinary people are not as severe as depicted by politicians in the media and that at the local level, citizens communicate, cooperate, and help each other when necessary. But interethnic relationships are, in most cases, superficial rather than close. Most KIs, especially citizens, found it difficult to identify and articulate the sources and themes underlying ethnic division and tend to revert to topics promoted by politicians and the media.

The key, divisive ethnonationalist narratives identified by the assessment team fall broadly into the narratives about the (recent or distant) past and about current issues. Themes surrounding the 1990s war are perceived as the primary sources of division between different ethnicities in BiH: which ethnic group started the war, its (aggressive/liberation/genocidal) character, whose losses and suffering were adequately recognized, and who committed war crimes versus heroism acts. Divisive narratives from more distant history include disagreements about the Battle of Kosovo and the entire Ottoman era, as well as issues related to World War I and World War II. Even issues dating to medieval times are at times hotly disputed. Divisive issues that emerged after the war relate to the structure of BiH as a state, the election law, Bosnian (vs. "Bosniak") language, national holidays, and reciprocal accusation of extremism.

Although most participants agree that all victims, regardless of ethnicity, should be respected, commemorations and memorials are perceived as sources of division rather than events that promote reconciliation, and they tend to be heavily politicized and exploited. Commemorations of outgroup victims are resisted by many FG participants, while even joint commemorations would be likely to cause strife. Some joint commemorations did happen, typically at the local level. Similarly, in several local communities, joint monuments for all war victims were built. But these positive stories remain exceptions and are largely disregarded by politicians and the media. Even the movies covering themes related to the 1992–1995 war are avoided by many citizens. These types of movies are typically not as politicized as other types of memorials and are used by various non-governmental organizations to facilitate discussions about the past, but with limited success.

Overall, people tend to reject the facts about the past, lack the skills to approach these discussions constructively, and feel hopeless that these differences can be resolved. For some BiH citizens, avoidance of these topics may be motivated by the desire to preserve their relationships with outgroup members, given that opening up about sensitive and divisive issues could disrupt these relationships.

KEY AGENTS OF CHANGE

Although the assessment team found that no single stakeholder group in BiH has sufficient capacity, independence, and motivation to lead the reconciliation processes, individuals from different groups could have a role in advancing reconciliation. Many KIs consulted for this assessment believe that **youth** are the likeliest force to drive reconciliation, because they have no personal traumas or grievances and want a better society. For the most part, however, young people appear indifferent and unwilling to deal with these issues, although there are certainly some young reconciliation activists who have the potential to participate in, rather than drive, future reconciliation efforts.

Because **politicians** are nearly unanimously viewed by KIs and FG participants as key drivers of ethnonationalist narratives and division, there is little hope that any individual willing to show openness to reconciliation could emerge in this group, although USAID political academies achieved some traction with young politicians. Because they are under political control or pressure, **the media** are perceived as nearly as responsible as politicians in obstructing reconciliation in BiH. Social media, by enabling nearly uncontrolled dissemination of lies, threats, and hate speech, are seen as a particular danger, because they have become the main source of information for young people. Independent media survive mainly because of donor support, but their capacity and reach are limited. Difficulties in generating wider public interest in positive stories limits their coverage in mainstream media. While **religious communities** enjoy incomparable trust among BiH citizens, they are insufficiently engaged in promoting reconciliation, mainly because of their connections with political leaders and elites, although there are positive, local-level examples of religious leaders taking initiatives across ethnic lines. The **education system** is perceived as politically controlled and a source of division rather than one that promotes peace, progress, and universal values.

Civil society organizations (CSOs) are the most active stakeholders in peacebuilding, although their activism is not broadly visible to the public, most likely because of limited human and financial capacity and dependence on donor support. This holds truer for CSOs involved in reconciliation, for which government support is even less likely. Even donor projects are mainly short term, and donor support has been shrinking, while reconciliation requires long-term commitment.

The **academic community's** important capacity to contribute to reconciliation efforts remains untapped because some members are aligned with ethnonationalist political elites, whereas others, with few exceptions, are inactive due to fear and conformism. The potential for the diaspora, employers, artists and athletes, and local communities to contribute to reconciliation processes has been broadly recognized.

EFFECTIVE TOOLS AND METHODOLOGIES

The assessment team examined the main approaches applied in BiH to date and discussed existing theoretical alternatives from the standpoint of the effectiveness of reconciliation interventions. Projects focusing on **reducing interethnic prejudice and anxiety** through interaction have been widely implemented, and contact-based interventions will continue because of their suitability for the BiH environment. Although interventions of this type do not address underlying division, there is compelling evidence of their effectiveness in reducing interethnic prejudice and anxiety. The concept of **transitional justice** never came to life in the BiH society, chiefly because of a lack of political will and instrumentalization of the conflict and division. While there is no consensus on how BiH

should approach dealing with its past, the need to initiate this process has been mentioned frequently, especially by experts in the field.

In addition to exploring contact-based and transitional justice approaches, the assessment team investigated several alternative approaches to reconciliation that focused on different expected results. **Developing common, overarching identities** was deemed difficult in a society with insufficient commonality between religious or ethnic groups, with some potential to build a shared identity around universal human values and common issues. Some donor-supported projects of **inter-religious dialogue and understanding** led to increased understanding and interest in other religions among participants, but the religious communities do not appear to be sufficiently committed or prepared for this role. There is a need, especially among the youth, to learn about other religions and ethnic groups. **Education interventions** are increasingly being blocked by governments, particularly in the Republika Srpska. While experts agree that **economic progress** can contribute to peacebuilding, this link is indirect. Success in reconciliation is intertwined with advances in at least two other important societal processes: **Reducing corruption** would undermine the grip that unscrupulous political elites have on society, while **civic engagement** would bring people together across ethnic lines.

For most KIs and FG participants consulted for this assessment, youth are the primary target group for reconciliation efforts, with a focus on the divided and mono-ethnic communities, involvement of youth clubs and centers, and use of digital technologies. Some assessment participants pointed out the importance of adapting to local community context and ensuring local ownership, instead of applying a generic approach to all target communities. An adaptive approach would help overcome differing perspectives and narratives. Most KIs emphasized that reconciliation is a long-term process that requires a strategic approach, careful monitoring, learning, and adaptation. Ultimately, the peacebuilding approach that would stand a chance of succeeding in BiH would need to be specially designed for the purpose.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The assessment team proposes employment of tailor-made interventions with different objectives for the grassroots, mid-level actors (e.g., peacebuilding experts, academics, CSOs, media, businesses, diaspora, artists, and athletes) and elites (highest-level politicians and religious leaders, and mainstream media). For the grassroots actors, interventions should focus on building citizen resilience to divisive political influences through carefully planned, contact-based interventions rooted in evidence to maximize their effectiveness. The interventions should focus on youth and should be based on collaboration. To ensure the youth's resilience to divisive narratives, contact-based interventions should be one step in a carefully sequenced chain of activities, starting with ingroup preparation interventions (e.g., discussing youth's expectations, exposure to imaginary contacts); reducing interethnic prejudice and anxiety (through contact-based activities) and improving critical thinking/actively open-minded thinking (e.g., through debates); improving intercultural understanding (e.g., through visits to different places of worship, intercultural learning); fostering interethnic perspective-taking and empathy (e.g., through public speaking events, movies, and documentaries); adopting shared/complex identities based on common issues and universal human values; and adopting constructive narratives about sources of division (e.g., through constructive dialogue).

Future reconciliation interventions should focus on creating a platform of reconciliation facilitators (mid-level actors) to develop an authentic BiH approach to reconciliation. The core group of actors—experts, scholars, and CSOs with thorough understanding of and experience with reconciliation and conflict resolution theory and practices in BiH—should build the network of actors who have the knowledge, courage, and willingness to engage in peacebuilding. The network should initiate discussion around divisive narratives at the local level across the country, through participatory action research. The network should award and manage research grants, primarily to expand the evidence on the past and to design effective reconciliation interventions. The network should also build on the PRO-Future II activities aimed at facilitating a reconciliation civic movement and should facilitate joint memorials when opportunities arise.

The network should promote constructive narratives about the past and positive messages of peace and reconciliation among the public, through strong outreach activities. This would include responding to negative political messages in a constructive manner, promoting positive results of the grassroots interventions, and disseminating the network's research results.

Donors and organizations active in the education sector should support in-country student exchange programs and joint research projects at all levels of education. They should also continue to support integrated classes in divided areas, and activities that foster interaction among children from different ethnic groups. These donors and organizations should seek opportunities to introduce peace education as part of formal curricula.

In future reconciliation activities, actors should pay attention to results monitoring through complexity–aware approaches and to careful layering and sequencing of interventions. USAID's activities should continuously coordinate and collaborate with other projects in a variety of areas, be open to learning, and flexible to quickly adapt to new lessons and ever-changing environments.

INTRODUCTION

The American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) was commissioned by the United States Agency for International Development Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (USAID/BiH) under the USAID/BiH Monitoring and Evaluation Support Activity (MEASURE II) to conduct a reconciliation assessment to inform the design of a new Mission activity in this area. The new activity will contribute to the Country Development Cooperation Strategy through (1) Intermediate Result 1.1—Impact of inclusive citizen engagement improved and (2) Intermediate Result 2.1—Social cohesion strengthened.

The purpose of the assessment was to formulate recommendations on how best to address mistrust between the main ethnic groups in BiH caused by the 1990s war and consequent grievances, which are exacerbated by divisive political rhetoric. The assessment investigated the underlying sources and drivers of interethnic division and identifies the actors and tools with the potential to contribute to drawing divided groups closer together.

ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY DESIGN

ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

The assessment addressed the following research questions and sub-questions:

1. What are the biggest sources of division in BiH around which citizens cannot come to a consensus and understanding?

    a. What effects do the honoring of war victim events (e.g., films, remembrance days, statues, and other memorials) have on interethnic relations?

2. Who are the key agents of change to lead or engage in activities in order to ensure widespread reconciliation in BiH? To what extent are these specific stakeholders eager, able, and ready to address the divisions affecting BiH society?

3. Which tools and methodologies will best (1) facilitate constructive, interethnic dialogue and understanding; (2) reduce interethnic anxiety and prejudice; (3) foster empathy and resilience to divisive rhetoric; (4) establish shared identity among citizens; and (5) improve personal connection and collaboration between citizens from different groups?

    a. What are the risks of implementing such tools, methodologies, and interventions in the BiH society?

METHODOLOGY

The assessment team used a mixed-methods approach, incorporating quantitative and qualitative data, ensuring systematic and efficient data collection, and data triangulation from the following sources to address the assessment questions:

1. **Literature review.** Review of secondary documents, including literature on current theories and research on interethnic relations and mechanisms of social and behavior change;

documentation of past and present USAID activities (Fair Play, Fair Childhood Activity, Generation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Societal Transformation and Reconciliation Activity, Mobilizing Youth for Reconciliation, Restoring Civic Mission of Education), including the internal and external evaluation reports of PRO-Future I and II, and Choosing Peace Together; and other international donors' reports on reconciliation.

2. **Quantitative data analyses.** The assessment team conducted quantitative analyses of data from seven rounds of the National Survey of Citizens' Perceptions in Bosnia and Herzegovina (NSCP-BiH)[1] and the 2022 National Youth Survey (NYS).[2]

3. **Key informant interviews (KIIs).** The assessment team conducted 55 semistructured KIIs that encompassed 77 individuals, including representatives from USAID/BiH, other donors, international organizations, reconciliation experts, political parties, religious leaders, media outlets, war veterans associations, peace activists, and CSOs.

4. **Focus groups (FGs).** The assessment team organized 20 FGs that covered randomly selected citizens from ethnically homogeneous communities and participants from mixed and divided municipalities. The discussions were organized in ethnically homogeneous groups to encourage participants' openness and honesty when discussing sensitive topics. At the same time, the decision to include mixed or divided communities was based on the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954), according to which interethnic contacts, which are more likely in heterogeneous communities, can improve attitudes toward the outgroups. To support the findings, the assessment team compared participants' attitudes based on whether representatives were from homogeneous or heterogeneous communities, whether they were youth or adults, and whether they were men or women. A total of 115 BiH citizens participated in the FGs.

LIMITATIONS

- **Response bias.** Given that the assessment addressed sensitive issues, some KIs and FG participants were reluctant to answer the questions openly. The assessment team addressed this source of bias by guaranteeing anonymity and confidentiality to all KIs, encouraging them to express diverse views, and by carefully formulating the questions, thus reducing the likelihood of socially desirable responses.

  - **Data collection period.** The data collection occurred during the pre-election campaign period (August–September 2022), in which the negative and divisive political rhetoric is usually amplified. Exposure to such rhetoric could have contributed to more negative attitudes toward interethnic topics. The assessment team mitigated this issue by assessing whether the participants followed the campaign and discussing its effects on participants' interethnic feelings, attitudes, and behaviors.

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[1] A nationally representative, annual survey conducted by MEASURE II since 2015. For more information, see www.measurebih.com.
[2] A nationally representative survey of youth conducted by MEASURE II in 2022. MEASURE II is currently preparing the survey report.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Because the definitions of key concepts are crucial for understanding the content of this report, the assessment team provides the main operational definitions as used in this document. The team uses the terms "sources of division," "divisive narratives," and "ethnonationalist narratives" when referring to themes around which different ethnic groups disagree. The report uses the term "social cohesion" for results that encompass improved interethnic trust, relations, connections, and collaboration, without necessarily discussing or resolving sources of division. "Facing" and "dealing with the past" imply discussions around past grievances. The terms "peacebuilding" and "reconciliation" have been used interchangeably throughout the document, as the general terms and highest goals toward which society should aim. Peacebuilding and reconciliation require a shared vision of society and its future; facing, acknowledging, and dealing with the past; building positive interethnic relationships; a culture of respect for difference and human rights; and positive social, economic, and political change (Kelly, 2004). Peacebuilding and reconciliation are considered ongoing processes to keep the peace sustainable rather than achievable results.

Key informants (KIs) expressed opposing views about the country's progress in terms of improving interethnic relations and reconciliation. When assessing whether the situation has improved or worsened during the last five years, their opinions varied based on the definition of reconciliation. For instance, some KIs talked about reconciliation in terms of the frequency of interethnic contacts and cooperation; others referred to people's ability to discuss and overcome division. Most KIs believe that interethnic contacts and cooperation between ethnicities at the local level have increased, especially among the youth. Most of the KIs, however, do not think the situation has improved in terms of, for instance, resolving the sources of division, acknowledging war crimes, or forgiveness. KIs noted that the political rhetoric has become worse and more divisive compared to five years ago.

> *As an organization, we tend not to use the term "reconciliation" in our work because, somehow, through our work, we have realized that this word and the idea of reconciliation is incomprehensible to the people with whom we work. Young people do not understand the concept of reconciliation, especially now 30 years after the war. They do not understand the idea of reconciliation and the need for reconciliation, because they were not in conflict with anyone. We talk more about peacebuilding, transitional justice, and the processes of dealing with the past.*
> **– An NGO representative**

SOURCES OF INTERETHNIC DIVISION

ASSESSMENT QUESTION 1: What are the biggest sources of division in BiH around which BiH citizens cannot come to a consensus and understanding?

There will never be any progress as long as negative rhetoric is present in the media and in politicians' public speeches.

ETHNONATIONALIST NARRATIVES

Due to its geographic position, BiH has had a unique cultural profile since the medieval period. In a place where both Eastern and Western traditions and religions have co-existed, the identities of people in these areas have been developing in a multireligious and multicultural context. The major ethnic and religious groups existing today—Bosniaks/Muslims, Serbs/Orthodox, and

Croats/Catholics—emerged gradually during and after the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian occupation of BiH. These ethnic identities became more rigid and groups grew more divided before and during the war in the 1990s (Ratuva, 2019).

Key informants—politicians, media representatives, religious leaders, and CSO representatives—agreed that BiH society today is deeply divided on ethnic grounds, based on opposing historical and contemporary narratives. According to KIs, the divisive narratives are more prevalent and activated in ethnically divided and monoethnic communities.[3] However, an in-depth analysis of data from the 2021 NSCP-BiH and the 2022 NYS-BiH suggests that the situation is more complex, and different for youth than for the general population (Exhibit 1).

The assessment team defined four categories of communities based on the share of people belonging to ethnic groups other than the community majority: (1) up to 10 percent of minorities, (2) 10–20 percent, (3) 21–30 percent, and (4) more than 30 percent. The team compared four different variables across these categories of communities: whether the respondents have contacts with other ethnic groups, whether they feel anxious during these kinds of contacts or when anticipating contacts, whether they trust outgroup members, and whether they would be willing to be in a romantic relationship with an outgroup member. In the general population, interethnic contacts were more common, and trust and openness to interethnic relationships were higher in communities in which more than 20 percent of the population were minorities. On average, however, interethnic anxiety was higher in these communities, pointing to a low correlation between anxiety and other measures analyzed.

Results of the NYS-BiH analysis tell a slightly different story. As in the general population, the more multi-ethnic the community was, the interethnic contacts rose. There were no major differences, however, between communities in terms of trust, and openness to interethnic relationships was lower in communities with more than 10 percent minorities. Among youth, interethnic anxiety was stronger in communities with 31 percent or more minorities compared to those that were more homogeneous.[4]

Interethnic divisions in BiH are maintained and exacerbated by political elites (particularly during pre-election campaigns, as noted by most KIs, including citizens), politically controlled media, and a divided education system.[5] To maintain their positions of power, political elites manipulate ethnic identities and elicit fear in citizens, using the public media to convey divisive messages. Ruling politicians control the education system, and students are separated and learn different histories about the past based on the dominant ethnicity of the school (MEASURE II, 2020).[6] According to KIs, the power structures invested substantially in the infrastructure to shape people's opinions in line with the ethnonationalist narratives. Insights gained from the KIs and the literature review[7] suggest that religious leaders could contribute tremendously to reconciliation processes, but most of

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[3] KIs used their own, implicit definitions of mono- and multi-ethnic communities.

[4] The assessment team used the 2013 census data to categorize municipalities as mono- or multi-ethnic.

[5] NSCP-BiH 2021 data indicate that in multi-ethnic communities, populated by at least 10 percent of people belonging to other than the majority group members, inhabitants are more likely to engage in interethnic contacts, trust the outgroup members, state that all groups suffered in the war, and be open toward interethnic relationships. The assessment team used the 2013 census data to categorize municipalities as mono- or multi-ethnic.

[6] MEASURE II. (2020). Political economy assessment [internal document].

[7] NSCP-BiH 2021 data indicate that citizens trust religious institutions considerably more than any other type of institution or organization in the country, including education institutions, media, and CSOs.

them choose not to as they are connected to political elites, and their highest-level leaders discourage the individuals who otherwise might be willing to contribute.

Exhibit 1. Indicators of social cohesion, by level of community multiethnicity
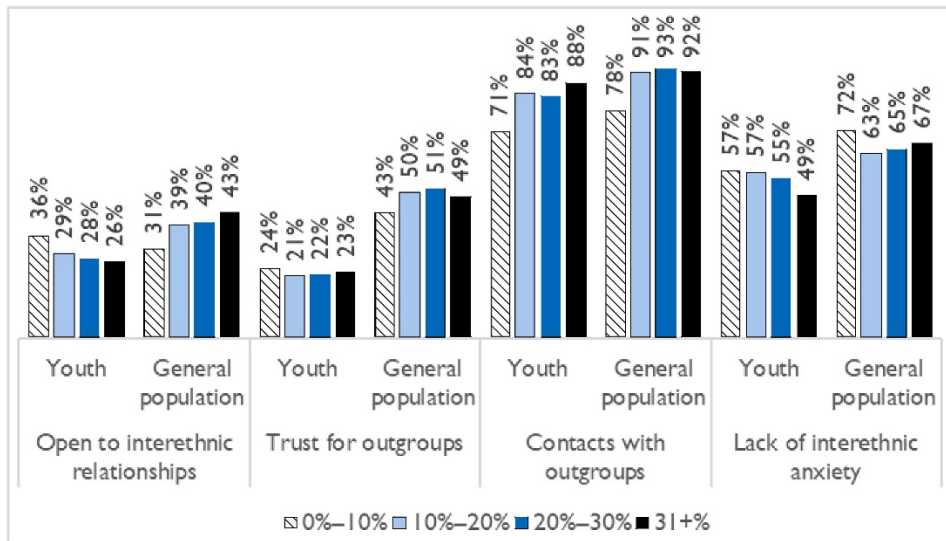
> *Always before every election, which we have every second year, there is an increase in these national tensions, which are certainly influenced by the activities carried out by political parties.*
>
> **– An NGO representative**

Due to these dynamics, BiH society lacks mechanisms for creating opportunities for people to talk and exchange opinions in general, let alone opportunities for a constructive dialogue about the past. According to KIs and FG participants, among ordinary people war-related topics are usually regarded as "difficult topics" they are unwilling to discuss. Although young people show little interest in these issues ("We were not in the war, so there is no need for us to reconcile," "We learned all we know about the war from adults," "We should turn to the future"[8]), adults avoid them due to their personal trauma; the belief that everybody has their own strong, single-minded attitude about war; and the fear they will offend someone if they discuss the past.[9] Except for several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) supported by the donor community (e.g., Center for Peacebuilding Sanski Most, Forum of Tuzla Citizens), no one facilitates constructive dialogue about these issues, and despite nearly 30 years since the end of the war and a number of reconciliation projects implemented across the country, little has been achieved in terms of facing or dealing with the past. BiH citizens are therefore exposed to divisive political narratives, with little opportunity to hear different perspectives and learn how to discuss these issues in a constructive manner.

The vast majority of KIs, however, believe that the divisions among the ordinary people are not as severe as represented by politicians in the media and that, at the local level, citizens engage in interethnic contacts, collaborate, and help each other when necessary (e.g., during the 2014 floods

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[8] When compared to the NSCP-BiH 2021 survey data reflecting the opinions of the general populations, the NYS-BiH 2021 data show that young people are considerably less likely to trust outgroup members compared to the general population.

[9] People do not consider interethnic relations their priorities: According to data from FGs and the 2021 NSCP results, citizens prioritize economic issues, corruption, and youth emigration.

and the COVID-19 pandemic). The NSCP-BiH and NYS-BiH data confirm this finding: About three-quarters of the general population and about 80 percent of youth engage in interethnic contacts. According to KIs and FG participants, however, most of these contacts are random, shallow, brief contacts rather than close, personal contacts. In addition, the NSCP-BiH and NYS data show that respondents, regardless of ethnicity, trust their own group considerably more than the outgroups.

The assessment team attempted to identify the key ethnonationalist narratives through KIIs with different stakeholders and FGs with citizens, assuming that those most prevalent and salient would emerge. During this exercise, the team learned that most KIs, especially citizens, had difficulty articulating the sources of interethnic division. Specifically, it was hard for them to remember, identify, and formulate the sources of disagreements, and they were reluctant to talk about them. When probed, KIs managed to come up with topics corresponding to those inflicted by politicians in the media, sometimes in the same words ("I love my own [people]; I respect the others," "May it never be repeated"), suggesting they internalized politicians' narratives of the past without evaluating them critically and open-mindedly.[10]

Divisive narratives, themes, and events identified through primary data collection and presented in the following section represent a sample of all ethnonationalist narratives that exist in BiH. In addition to these "general" narratives, local variations exist. The narratives identified through this research fall into two broad categories: (1) narratives about the past and (2) current issues. Narratives about the past can be further divided into those relating to the recent past, particularly the war in the 1990s, and those from the distant past, such as World War II and medieval Bosnian history.

NARRATIVES ABOUT THE PAST

We have three completely different, parallel narratives that have almost nothing in common, no points of intersection. However, in the moments when they collide, chaos ensues and there is no common line that would lead to empathy.

According to KIs, politicians use all past issues to create tensions. KIs agree that themes about the 1990s war represent the primary sources of division between different ethnicities in BiH. One of the reasons is that many people, as modeled by politicians, tend to disregard the facts and believe the imposed "truths." Whenever these conflicting narratives collide, they are expected to cause problems, tensions, and hate speech. There is no constructive dialogue about these issues, either in the education system or in the public space.

> *It is questionable whether there is any type of common narrative at all. There are three separate identities in BiH, three separate narratives; there is a completely different understanding of the events that have occurred.*
>
> **– A religious leader**

KIs, including citizens, identified several divisive themes stemming from the 1991–1995 period:

- **Initiation of the war.** Narratives about the initiation of the war first came to mind when citizens were asked about sources of division. Every group blames the outgroup(s) for starting the war. For instance, for Bosniaks, the Serbs started the war by attacking the Bosniaks. For Serbs, the Bosniaks started the war by killing a man during a Bosnian Serb wedding procession in

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[10] Actively open-minded thinking (Baron, 1985, 1994, 2000) implies optimal search for information, level of conviction proportional to the quantity and quality of thinking, and consideration of other possibilities in addition to those initially favored. An individual who thinks open-mindedly will assess evidence from all sides, even if he/she has a favored option.

Sarajevo. For most Croats, the war started in 1991, with Serbs attacking Ravno village. Most Serbs tend to blame the Americans for the war; one of the stories shared was that the war was started by Americans, Bosniaks, and Croats joining efforts against the Serbs.

▪ **Nature of the war.** FG participants rarely spoke spontaneously about the narratives related to the nature of the war. When probed, participants indicated that most Bosniaks view the war as an aggression against Bosniaks, while most Serbs regard it as a civil war. There is also a prevalent opinion among Bosniaks that the Croats and Serbs jointly attacked the Bosniaks in Herzegovina. One of the emerging themes related to the nature of the war was the genocide in Srebrenica and its denial by Serb FG participants, including the youth. An experienced reconciliation practitioner stated that, in his opinion, the war in BiH was compliant with each of these definitions at some point in time, describing this view as unpopular among all sides.

▪ **Victimization.** Narratives about victims have been among the most painful topics of all. While Bosniaks hold grudges because most war victims were from their group, Serbs and Croats believe that their victims have been insufficiently recognized and respected. Additionally, people doubt the facts about the number of victims, stating that the figures have been manipulated.

> *It's disturbing when you see the number 8,372. And we look at it as a number, not as lives, human destinies, unlived lives. I think it is important that in the future, stories be told about individuals from Srebrenica, or Ahmici, or Petrovac. A story about one person who was killed, it is more important than sharing the number 8,372.*
>
> **– A peace activist, Bosanski Petrovac**

▪ **War crimes.** Several narratives related to the war crimes appeared, for example, descriptions of the same individuals as war criminals and heroes, depending on the group (e.g., Ratko Mladic, Naser Orić); descriptions of the same events as liberation versus war crime or genocide (e.g., Srebrenica); and disagreements about and denial of the International War Tribunal and its war crime verdicts, mainly among the Serbs, due to insufficient convictions for war crimes against Serbs.[11]

> *Was it a genocide in Srebrenica; did it happen? I personally cannot say that it happened. I can say that there was certainly an enormous crime, as the one that happened in Bosnian Krajina. So, could I blame either of these three sides, point the finger and say, "This constituent people are a genocidal people"?*
>
> **– An FG (youth) participant, Drvar**
>
> *It is unrealistic that Serbs are sentenced to 1,080 years of prison in the Hague, and Muslims to 90 years. What happened? Serbs were killing themselves? That is not realistic, and that hurts these people.*
>
> **– An FG (youth) participant, Banja Luka**

According to KIs, multiple, divisive narratives from the distant past, prior to the 1990s, persist and have been instrumentalized to create ethnic tensions among people. For instance, there are different narratives and myths around the Kosovo battle, the Ottoman era, World War I, and World War II. The topic that emerged in this regard was lack of recognition of victims in Jasenovac and Bleiburg. People also disagree about themes from medieval Bosnian history. The issues include topics such as who came to the territory first, who ruled the territory, whether Bosnia has ever been independent, and so forth.

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[11] Some KIs noted that narratives celebrating war criminals as heroes should be banned from the public space.

There are no discussions about why some war crime was committed, but there is debate about the World War II history and use of that to justify the crimes from the '90s. The justification start with Muslims killed Serbs in Prijedor during World War II, and if Serbs had not done what they did in early '92, they would have ended up like in the '40s.

– An NGO representative

In FGs, participants discussed the topics they found offensive for their own and other ethnic groups. Bosniaks said they feel insulted by the genocide denial, claims that Bosniaks from Sarajevo bombarded themselves during the war (the Markale massacre), that Bosniaks are in fact Serbs who changed their religion during the Ottoman rule, and that Bosniaks are terrorists. Serbs are bothered when their group is referred to as "genocidal," criminals, killers, slaughterers, and Chetniks. Croats are offended by statements that people from their group are fascists, "Šokci," supporters of the joint criminal enterprise, that they started the war, and that they impede the reconciliation in BiH.

CONTEMPORARY NARRATIVES

Many ongoing issues causing interethnic division are consequences of the 1992–1995 war. For instance, according to KIs and FG participants, people have different preferences regarding the BiH state structure. Data from the NSCP-BiH confirm this, indicating that most Bosniaks prefer to live in a centralized state; most Serbs prefer the status quo; and Croats' opinions are divided among state centralization, strengthening of local governments, and a third-entity formation. Issues relating to the BiH election law, allowing Bosniaks to vote for Croat political leaders, cause tensions between Bosniaks and Croats.[12] Other current sources of tension cited by KIs include disagreements between Serbs and Bosniaks regarding the name of Bosniaks' native language ("Bosnian" versus "Bosniak"), national holidays (e.g., Serbs refuse to celebrate Statehood Day and Independence Day; they instead celebrate Republika Srpska Statehood Day), and issues related to extremism (groups accusing each other of extremism or fascism).

MEMORIALS

The vast majority of FG participants believe that respect should be paid to all victims regardless of their ethnicity. However, commemorations and memorials are regarded as sources of division rather than facilitators of reconciliation and social cohesion. KIs and FG participants agreed that they have not heard messages of peace in such events, which generally evoke sadness and hatred and deepen intergroup tensions. Some said there are too many commemorations across the country, and most KIs and FG participants stated that these events have been heavily politicized and used for political promotion.

Several KIs envisioned that commemorations would be more reconciliatory if the representatives of outgroups would attend them (e.g., widows, war veterans, war victims from other ethnic groups) and if they were regarded as collective mourning rather than individual. At least half of FG participants, however, said they would not attend commemorations organized for the outgroup victims, with some explaining that this would be perceived as treason of their own victims. Even though most FG participants, in principle, like the idea of a joint commemoration day for victims of all groups, they predict that such attempts would evoke heated discussions about the number of

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[12] In FGs, Croats said they feel like they have no power to make decisions in their country.

victims and perpetrators, ending in political disagreements and tensions. Some KIs believe that joint commemorations are harder to organize than they were five or ten years ago, especially in Republika Srpska, whose government ignores all crimes against the Bosniaks and the Croats. For instance, Republika Srpska public media do not cover events or stories related to Srebrenica genocide and choose to focus on other issues on memorial day.

Nevertheless, there are several positive examples of joint commemorations, mostly at the local level and typically facilitated and supported by international donors. For instance, an international project facilitated a joint commemoration in Brčko.[13] The Inter-religious Council and some war veteran associations have organized several joint commemorations in local communities (e.g., Žepa, Konjic). At the regional level, a donor project organized a joint commemoration of associations of missing persons' families in Podgorica, bringing together associations from several Balkan countries.

There are some examples of joint monuments built for all war victims, e.g., in Žepče and Bosanski Petrovac. An initiative for a joint monument has been undertaken in Mostar, but construction is pending. These positive stories, however, are exceptions rather than the norm, hard to replicate in other communities without open-minded decision makers, and mostly neglected in the public space. Several initiatives for such monuments have been discouraged by political elites and have failed as a result.

Many citizens, regardless of their ethnicity, avoid watching movies dealing with the 1990s war, as they avoid dealing with the past. Several donor projects use movies to facilitate such discussions. Movies and documentaries addressing past events do facilitate discussions about the past, prompting people—especially youth—to open up about topics they otherwise would not discuss spontaneously. According to a KI, however, the discussion is still easier around movies about conflicts in other parts of the world rather than 1990s Balkan history. Movies are not as politicized as other memorials and typically do not cause tensions or division in the public space. Recently, however, the film *Quo Vadis, Aida?* by Bosnian director Jasmila Žbanić was highly politicized and rejected by Serb politicians, who characterized the movie as an attack on all Serbs.

Some FG participants, primarily Bosniaks, said that joint commemorations would be offensive to Bosniak victims. FG participants from one local community believe that organizing three joint commemorations—one per ethnicity—would decrease the number of reminders of interethnic division, and they may be more willingly accepted by politicians than one joint event for all; however, such commemorations may concentrate the space given to divisive narratives in the public sphere.

CONCLUSION

Nearly three decades after the end of war, BiH society is deeply divided on ethnic grounds. Political leaders manipulate ethnic and religious identities to maintain their positions of power, primarily using the public media and education system to elicit fear and convey divisive messages to the general population. Even though KIs perceive that social cohesion (defined through contacts, communication, and collaboration) has improved among citizens across ethnic lines at the local level during the last

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[13] The project representatives explained that they tried to organize a joint commemoration in Sarajevo, but they were rejected by the police, who were worried the event would create tensions. The event organizers envisioned an orthodox choir singing in front of the Bosnia Bank International Center, which they thought could be perceived as a provocation.

five years, the sources of division remain unresolved, and motivation among the people to work toward an agreement is low.

Although most sources of division stem primarily from the war in the 1990s and its consequences, some go decades or even centuries back. Disagreements exist in various areas, including war initiation, its nature, (number of) victims, war crimes, state structure, and election law.

Commemorations and memorials represent sources of tensions and division, and they have been deeply politicized. Even though there is no significant opposition to joint, multi-ethnic commemorations, this is a highly sensitive issue that is hard to implement at the BiH level. There are, however, several positive examples of joint commemorations and monuments implemented and built at the local community level, typically facilitated by donor projects in areas where the atmosphere is more conducive to such events and where open-minded, courageous local actors exist.

The difficulties in articulating and remembering the sources of division among citizens suggest that their reasoning about these matters is based on heuristics rather than careful consideration of the facts and critical thinking. There are also indications that people avoid discussing "difficult themes" due to various reasons: a lack of interest; personal trauma; considering these themes a low priority; a tendency to disregard the facts; lack of skills necessary to discuss these issues in a constructive manner; and feeling of hopelessness that the disagreements can be resolved. These factors reduce their motivation to engage in discussions, leading to a dead end. People may be avoiding these topics to preserve their relationships with outgroup members. They may believe that if they start opening up about subjects on which consensus is unlikely, and that they do not know how to discuss in a constructive manner, their personal and working relationships could be negatively affected.

RECONCILIATION FACILITATORS

ASSESSMENT QUESTION 2: Who are the key agents of change to lead or engage in activities in order to ensure widespread reconciliation in BiH? To what extent are these specific stakeholders eager, able, and ready to address the divisions affecting BiH society?

All of us together can bring a lot of good!

Given that high-level BiH politicians create interethnic tensions and impose divisions, and that citizens do not consider reconciliation their priority, identifying the societal actors to lead the reconciliation processes in BiH is a complex task. The most common notion among the KIs and FG participants is that youth should lead these processes or that all societal actors should make a joint effort. The role of religious leaders has been emphasized, as they are deemed trustworthy.

In this section, we discuss the potential role of different social actors in reconciliation activities in BiH. The assessment team analyzed the potential advantages and shortcomings of different stakeholders for performing this role.

THE YOUTH

Young people are now more open to cooperation, socializing, some form of interaction, exchange of opinions and experiences. They are open to travel, learning new things, perhaps visiting cities they never imagined they would visit.
— An NGO representative

Most KIs from different categories believe that youth should be the primary agents of change. They argue that because they have not experienced the war personally, young people are more willing to deal with the past and adopt an inclusive culture of memory, focusing on the people's interests. KIs believe that young people are motivated to enter the process of reconciliation and trust building because they want to live in a better society; however, societal and parental pressures restrain youth from engaging.

> *I think that young people are the key to reconciliation. We are ready and open to include all different groups, including the new groups not under the standards of patriarchy, such as the LGBT community. Young people have great ideas and are orientated toward the future; we need local communities to support and trust us.*
> **– A peace activist**
>
> *Young people—they are not interested in ethnic divisions. They are interested in minding their business and working, not paying attention to what the political elites on the top have to say; they are simply not interested in it.*
> **– An FG participant (adult), Orašje**

Recent United Nations-funded regional research[14] established several factors relevant for youth to become agents of change:

1. **Travel experience:** Young people who had the opportunity to travel and were therefore exposed to outgroup members are more open-minded toward others and willing to engage.

2. **Self-efficacy:** Young people with a high level of self-confidence and self-esteem are more willing and have the courage to expose themselves as change agents.

3. **Sex:** Young women are more open-minded about reconciliation issues.

4. **Settlement type:** Youth from urban areas are more open-minded and have higher capacity to lead reconciliation processes.[15]

The same report, however, found that youth in BiH and in the region are conservative, leading to opposing implications about their role in peacebuilding. This finding was confirmed by data analyzed by the assessment team. Specifically, the 2021 NSCP-BiH and 2022 NYS data indicate that the level of outgroup trust among youth is considerably lower (27 percent) compared to that of the general population (45 percent). Furthermore, young FG participants did not express any interest in the topic of improving intergroup relations; they stated that it is not their priority, nor do they feel responsible for improving the situation.

Despite the lack of interest among youth, several donors and implementors noted that since the end of the war, a number of young individuals have participated in various reconciliation interventions. Some of these young activists continue their engagement as reconciliation facilitators after their projects have ended. For instance, under PRO-Future, a group of young people organized a peace

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[14] https://www.undp.org/eurasia/publications/shared-futures-youth-perceptions-peace-western-balkans

[15] Research conducted by the University of Edinburgh suggests that those who most strongly desire change, reconciliation, and commitment to people-to-people activities include the oldest, the economically vulnerable, and citizens who experienced stabler conditions before the late 1980s. In these surveys, they project the capacity for change-making onto teachers, but teachers reflected a lack of engagement or sense of agency among the public, often evident in the expectations of parents that teachers, not parents, will do the work of educating youth, and not indicative of a trust in the autonomy and professionalism of teachers.

camp after having organized a similar camp with PRO-Future support. An activist who was supported under PRO-Future was hired by the Inter-Religious Council (IRC), for which he continues his peacebuilding work. However, one of the shortcomings of such interventions, as noted by KIs and in the literature review, is that the same young people, usually those who are more open-minded, participate in all trainings and events. Those youth who are more conservative or closed-minded tend to remain disinterested and uninvolved. This implies there are young activists who understand the topic and who could be engaged in facilitating peacebuilding in the country; however, to generate large-scale change, less engaged youth would need to be targeted. According to the PRO-Future II performance evaluation report (2022c), youth associations were particularly motivated to implement reconciliation grants; implementors received more applications for youth grants than for other grant lines.

POLITICIANS

In the last five years, politicians worked to keep the status quo and do not want the reconciliation processes to improve.
– A donor

Almost all KIs and FG participants perceive politicians as the sole creators of ethnonationalist narratives and the primary source of division. Ruling politicians control the country's public and many private media and use them to convey divisive messages. Politicians manipulate people by claiming they represent their best interests, while in reality, three opposing sides collaborate: They produce conflicts and crises, only to pretend to solve them. According to FG participants, even though most people know they are being manipulated, they keep voting for the same parties and candidates due to patronage, fear, strong identification with nationalist parties, and poor alternatives. KIs also characterize the current political leaders as sources of nepotism, corruption, and crime, unable to bring about progress, without any feeling of responsibility for their words or actions.

> *Politicians cannot contribute to reconciliation since they are the main reason our youth are forcing their way out of the country!*
>
> **– An FG participant, Gornji Vakuf**

Several KIs mentioned that, from time to time, politicians willing to engage in reconciliation processes appear on the scene, but they are quickly hushed by their own parties. Some believe there is potential among the young generation of politicians. KIs believe that progress is possible only if the young generation of politicians understands and accepts the service to their electorate, contrary to serving their party leaders, as their primary obligation. However, BiH parties are not democratic,[16] and they are typically led by older (male) politicians, most of whom have benefited from the 1990s conflict. Young politicians are expected to be loyal to party leadership; if they make decisions or take actions that collide with the leaders' interests, they risk banishment from the party.

Several KIs believe the international community should pressure ruling politicians to stop creating tensions based on the past and instead turn to the future. KIs emphasized the importance of following through with sanctions when the rules are violated. As an example of good practice, several KIs mentioned amendments to BiH criminal code imposed by High Representative Valentin Inzko in order to outlaw the denial and justification of genocide, war crimes, and glorification of war

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[16] This is one of the findings from the MII Performance evaluation of the Supporting Political Pluralism and Good Governance Processes activity (2021a).

criminals. According to these KIs, this resulted in fewer instances of genocide denial in the public space compared to the previous year.

The USAID-funded Support to Political Pluralism and Good Governance Processes' (SPPG) Advanced Leadership in Politics Institutes (ALPI) program and the PRO-FUTURE II political academy produced tangible outcomes with young politicians in terms of collaboration across ethnic lines and political activism. Some of these politicians may be willing to continue working toward positive societal changes. According to the NSCP-BiH 2021 data, however, politicians are considered the least trustworthy of all societal actors.

MEDIA

Unfortunately, the media is not free anywhere in the world, including in our country. The problem with media is that even in the case of the fairest and most independent ones, it is enough that they convey what the politicians said today, and they are already making a really negative impact. – Implementing partner

According to the 2021 World Press Freedom Index, editorial policies in BiH media mirror ethnic division and hate speech (Reporters Without Borders, 2022). KIs and FG participants perceive the media as the second most substantial obstacle, after politicians, to reconciliation processes in BiH. As described above, politicians manipulate and control all public and many private media to spread their divisive messages. If the media outlets refuse to comply, political elites apply different types of pressure: labeling them as foreign mercenaries, sending inspection officers, or withholding public funds. KIs said that BiH media are insufficiently professional, without the capacity or sense of responsibility for bringing about societal changes. Citizens' confidence in the media is generally low: According to data from the 2021 NSCP-BiH, 13 percent of citizens trust public media, while 24 percent trust independent media. Based on KIIs with media representatives, there are indications that they are unaware of citizens' mistrust. Moreover, NSCP data indicate that three ethnic groups follow different media outlets, with Klix.ba being the only media outlet to which all ethnicities go for their news.

According to KIs, social media represent a particularly important obstacle to reconciliation, allowing users to lie, threaten, and spread hate speech without any sanctions. The implications are especially dangerous for youth who rely on social media for information rather than traditional media.[17] Several KIs believe that young people are learning about the 1990s war from social networks. Social media are the platforms of choice for extremists calling for war, revenge, and conflict and for presenting their extreme views to young people as something unique and special.

> *Tensions and hatred are usually spread through the media. The media publish various news inciting people to conflict with others through the comments sections.*
>
> **– An FG (youth) participant, Cazin**

Key informants mentioned that BiH citizens media literacy[18] is generally low. This is confirmed by the 2021 Media Literacy Index results, where BiH ranked 34th in media literacy among the

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[17] According to data from the 2021 NSCP and the 2022 NYS, youth follow social media considerably more than traditional media.
[18] "Media literacy" refers to the ability to critically analyze stories presented in the mass media and to determine their accuracy or credibility" (Oxford Languages).

35 European countries.[19] However, the 2021 NSCP-BiH recorded slight improvements in media literacy indicators. For instance, 44 percent of citizens said they consider the author of the message when consuming media content, compared to 35 percent in 2020. Likewise, 39 percent of citizens, compared to 32 percent in 2020, claimed they consider whether the media content is produced to gain power, profit, or influence. Most KIs and FG participants notice that most news in the media are negative, with little attention to promoting positive stories.

Several independent media outlets exist in BiH, surviving due to considerable donor support. These media have the potential to be agents of positive change. But their financial and human capacity and reach are very limited compared to the mainstream media, their messaging is not as loud or aggressive, and even the independent media prefer to publish negative stories to draw readers or viewers. Moreover, many positive reconciliation stories do not reach the journalists who could promote them. Some media CSOs (such as the Center for Investigative Journalism or Žurnal), CSOs working on awareness raising (e.g., Zašto ne), and regional media interested in the topic of reconciliation (e.g., Al-Jazeera Balkans, Balkin Investigative Reporting Network) serve—and could continue serving—as promoters of positive peace messages. Some KIs noted that local, positive stories are easily promoted in local media outlets, while it is harder to elicit interest in such stories among the more prominent, mainstream media.

RELIGIOUS ACTORS

As for inter-religious relations at the institutional level, the situation is bad. But individually, we have more and more meetings and relationships between representatives of different religious communities. – A religious leader

Most KIs agree that religious leaders have tremendous potential to contribute to reconciliation processes. Data from the 2021 NSCP-BiH indicate that BiH citizens trust religious institutions more than any other institution type.[20] Religious leaders are in regular contact with their base; people trust their judgment; and all religions promote universal values relevant to reconciliation, such as empathy and forgiveness.

Most KIs and FG participants agree that religious actors are insufficiently engaged in promoting reconciliation among citizens. The primary reason for their lack of involvement is the connection between the highest-level religious leaders and political elites. For instance, religious leaders get involved in pre-election campaigns by endorsing certain parties and candidates. A KI from an NGO shared that their local government provided regular funding to a religious institution in exchange for their support. Due to their connections with politicians, religious leaders are losing their credibility and failing to deliver on their role in society. In contrast, a KI (religious leader) believes that people overestimate the power of religious communities to foster reconciliation and exaggerate their political connections.

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[19] Open Society Institute, 2021 Media Literacy Index. Retrieved from https://osis.bg/?p=3750&lang=en
[20] Forty-six percent of NSCP-BiH respondents said they trust religious institutions, followed by 35 percent who trust education institutions, and 31 percent who trust BiH Armed Forces. Trust in other institutions and organizations—health institutions, the police, CSOs, media, the judiciary, government, and political parties—is even lower.

> *Well, I would also say that religious, so to speak, leaders have taken an important place in politics. Maybe now much more than before. In any case, this reflects negatively on the overall situation. I mean, certainly it has always been that religious leaders are current in politics, but I think it should be handled in a different way. Religion and politics should not be mixed, but they certainly have an important role. That it should be separated somehow.*
>
> **– An FG participant, Doboj**

The Inter-Religious Council (IRC) is a local organization established with the mission to "promote peace, respect, and coexistence through inter-religious dialogue and cooperation."[21] Even though IRC is engaged in the implementation of various projects and is supported by several donors (including the U.S. Embassy and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe [OSCE]), the results of these efforts are not visible. According to a KI (religious leader), IRC does not contribute to reconciliation processes; they represent a poorly implemented reconciliation platform. Higher-level leaders' directives also limit the IRC activities. Some KIs reported that some local chapters of the IRC are more active and engaged (e.g., Sanski Most and Jajce) than others in this regard.

One KI, an academic, stated that most people in BiH are extrinsically religious rather than genuinely spiritual, doubting that religious values can be used to promote reconciliation. The KI cited research indicating positive associations between religiosity and intolerance, higher social distance, and support for conspiracy theories. According to the KI, religious leaders who possess these characteristics have limited potential to influence the masses in a positive way.

Many KIs described a strong potential among religious actors at the lower levels of religious communities, stating there are many good people who want to restore the trust among BiH citizens. In some local communities, religious leaders communicate and collaborate. For instance, in Tomislavgrad, a Croat mayor and Catholic priest were present at the opening of the mosque in 2020.[22] Local media promoted a story about the friendship between two women—a Catholic nun and an Islamic religious teacher—in Livno.[23] A KI claims his organization was able to influence people in a local community through religion and that, due to their project, there is now a tradition that people visit each other for religious holidays and celebrate them together. Some FG participants remembered seeing religious leaders send best wishes to each other during religious holidays.

Several KIs said that religious education should be used to strengthen interethnic connections. For instance, a school subject in which children learn about all religions could contribute positively to their inter-religious and interethnic attitudes and social cohesion. Results from the PRO-Future II evaluation, however, indicate that such interventions may be hard to implement. During the activity implementation, all planned activities with religion education teachers were discontinued by higher-level religious leaders.

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[21] https://mrv.ba/misija-i-vizija/
[22] Tomislavgrad: Fratar Sretan Ćurčić i načelnik Ivan Vukadin na otvaranju džamije - N1 (n1info.com)
[23] LIVNO: Divno prijateljstvo časne sestre i muallime koje svima donosi dobro - HBŽ Vijesti (hbz-vijesti.com)

EDUCATION SYSTEM

We have a political system that controls education. Education is one of the main resources of political ideologies.

– A university professor

Most KIs stated that the BiH education system is a politically influenced system that supports and promotes one-sided, ethnonationalist narratives. Rather than promoting peace and progress, the education system is another source of division. According to KIs, the education system is ruled by political parties. For instance, it is well known that a school director is a political position and that it is often difficult for teachers to find a job without political connections. An NGO representative mentioned that it is common knowledge to which party each school belongs. Several KIs, university professors, confirmed that students enter tertiary education with well-formed political ideologies.

In addition to politicization, low quality of education represents one of the primary problems of the BiH education system, as indicated by BiH students' low performance on standardized assessments of student achievement, such as the Program for International Student Achievement (PISA). Donors and university professors described the BiH education system as outdated, based on memorization rather than skills development and practical application. There is little (financial) incentive to choosing teaching as a profession, so most high-performing students opt for more profitable careers. Even though education reforms have been initiated by some government units[24], they are moving slowly and unequally across the country due to the system's fragmentation (16 education ministries exist in the country). Data from the 2021 NSCP-BiH show that only 37 percent of young respondents said the education system is connected with labor market demands.

According to donors and implementors, it is becoming increasingly hard to work with the education system and to introduce improvements to the curricula or extracurricular activities. According to some KIs, this is especially the case in Republika Srpska. Facing such obstacles, donors and implementors have been approaching individual schools where there are people willing to engage, thus bypassing the formal system. Some international organizations (e.g., OSCE, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO]) have better access to educational institutions than other international actors due to their long-term engagement and connections with education stakeholders.

> *The main problem with the education system is with higher education, which is highly corrupt and lacks any quality. You cannot teach at ten colleges and be a politician and work privately.*
>
> **– An FG participant, Orašje**

Several KIs noted that there are people in the education system dedicated to providing quality teaching to their students, including teaching universal values rather than one-sided histories. A few KIs noted that the education system could contribute positively to the reconciliation processes if teachers did their jobs professionally, without political agenda.

CSOs

The non-governmental sector is the only one trying to do something in area of reconciliation. But the civil society has a limited reach because they cannot achieve anything without the support of other stakeholders. – A religious leader

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[24] 20210216 DRAFT Policy Brief Curriculum (EN) (osce.org)

According to KIs, CSOs are natural agents of social change, including for reconciliation processes. Funded primarily by international donors, CSOs are the most active sector in this area, implementing a variety of peacebuilding interventions, trainings, and events across the country. Most KIs, including young politicians, shared favorable views about the CSOs' role in reconciliation. According to FG participants, however, few citizens are aware of CSO activities in this area or in general. Data from the 2021 NSCP-BiH indicate that citizens' confidence in CSOs is generally low, at 20 percent. Only a few FG participants knew something about CSO contributions to peacebuilding, which they do not consider a priority for the BiH society.

Civil society organizations in BiH are facing issues with poor human and financial capacity and dependence on donor support, particularly those working in the reconciliation area for which government support is less likely than for other intervention types. Without a clear strategy for reconciliation in the country, their work is fragmented and uncoordinated, with little information about the results and relative effectiveness of different intervention types. Although the Peacebuilding Network[25] formally exists, the organization currently does not supervise or coordinate reconciliation activities. One of the shortcomings of CSO projects cited by most donors was that the same open-minded individuals participate in most CSO trainings and activities, overlooking those who could most benefit from such interventions. Additionally, in most cases, donors support short-term projects, and the funds for such projects have been reduced over the years, while improving interethnic relations requires a long-term engagement. Several KIs from Republika Srpska perceive that only a few CSOs focusing primarily on reconciliation exist in Republika Srpska.

Even though several CSOs are dedicated solely to building social cohesion and reconciliation in BiH (e.g., Center for Peacebuilding Sanski Most, Forum of Tuzla Citizens), a large number of organizations are forced to chase money and projects and to adapt to donor interests to survive. Several KIs—donors and CSO representatives alike—observed that the situation in BiH society would be considerably worse without CSO interventions. A KI mentioned that it is not realistic to expect CSOs to have the power to beat a system that incentivizes division.

ACADEMIA

Academia is a derivative of the ruling ideologies. Have you noticed any institutional cooperation between different universities about the complex humanistic issue? No, it does not exist. – A university professor

Most KIs agree that the academic community has enormous potential to lead the reconciliation processes. But so far, the members of the academic community have been insufficiently engaged in reconciliation, and some of them have directly supported divisive political narratives. A KI mentioned that not a single post-war reconciliation intervention was designed by academia. Scholars' inactivity is frequently the result of their political connections and agreement with dominant divisive narratives. These members of academia serve ruling politicians to strengthen their political agendas. The academics have been given access to public media, and politicians use them to give more credibility to their negative messaging.

Among the academics who disagree with ethnonationalist narratives, many are inactive due to fear of retribution and choose to keep quiet and conform. The few who have tried to make positive

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[25] The Peacebuilding Network is a CSO network established in 2010 with the mission of catalyzing, strengthening, and connecting peacebuilding initiatives in BiH and in the region.

contributions have been instantly suppressed or rejected from the public space. Very few scholars have the courage to continue working on these issues, trying to influence the society in a positive direction. One KI stated that the latter should lead the peacebuilding processes in the country.

Most KIs emphasized the importance of education in the reconciliation processes. Members of academia, who are in charge of preservice teacher training, have the power and responsibility to affect future educators. Data from the 2021 NSCP-BiH indicate that a significant share (35 percent) of citizens trust educational institutions. A KI noted that regional projects connecting relevant professors to work on reconciliation jointly may be beneficial, and they should be the ones responding to negative political rhetoric with constructive messages.

OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

In addition to stakeholders who are traditionally considered facilitators or inhibitors of peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts, the assessment team evaluated other stakeholders' potential roles in these processes, including the business sector, diaspora, artists, and athletes. Our findings, further elaborated in the remainder of this section, indicate that all these actors could be involved and could contribute to reconciliation in the country in specific ways. Additionally, local communities seem more conducive to peacebuilding than higher administrative units.

DIASPORA

You have this moment where the diaspora, who do not live here, have the right to vote. And their votes greatly affect our lives because I think the diaspora is still voting for these ethnic, nationalist political structures. – An NGO representative

Most KIs describe the role of the diaspora in reconciliation processes as unfavorable, characterizing most individuals from the diaspora as nationalists. For instance, even though there is evidence that, unlike in BiH, people living abroad socialize with the outgroup members, diaspora associations abroad are divided across ethnic lines. KIs see the diaspora as contributing negatively to the BiH political situation by voting for nationalist parties[26] and supporting them financially. Only 12 percent of NYS-BiH respondents believe the diaspora can help BiH by promoting peace and reconciliation.

> *Our diaspora still lives in the year 1992. People who escaped the war are the loudest in spreading the war rhetoric and hate speech on social media.*
>
> **– A media representative**

Several KIs said the diaspora should not be regarded as a homogeneous group, because the profiles of people who were forced to leave their homes during the war differs from those who left voluntarily in search of a better life. Many war emigrants lived through trauma and still hold negative emotions and prejudice toward outgroups. These individuals transfer negative views and prejudices to younger generations, who are losing contact with their parents' home country. Among the people who emigrated voluntarily, most are less closed-minded and willing to contribute to the betterment of society. But, in most cases, they do not know how to do so, or they have given up and feel hopeless about the situation. According to several donors, there is potential among the people who returned to the country; they are particularly interested in improving the situation for their offspring. Individuals who left BiH to study abroad may have the knowledge, skills, and willingness to

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[26] According to the MEASURE II midterm performance evaluation of the USAID SPPG activity (2021), voter turnout among the diaspora is low and cannot significantly affect election results.

contribute to reconciliation processes, including some youth who participated in reconciliation projects before they left.

Some KIs said the mere improvement in the socio-economic status of citizens could lower tensions and improve social cohesion. Most KIs believe the diaspora can contribute to the economic situation in the country through investments, which has been insufficiently utilized to date and discouraged by the unfavorable business environment. But the financial contributions of the diaspora to their in-country family members have been recognized as considerable, sometimes crucial for their existence; 58 percent of NYS-BiH respondents said their households likely would not be able to meet their basic needs without financial contributions from the diaspora.

BUSINESS COMMUNITY

When you have a positive economic environment, you know, when people feel safe, when the business sector creates new jobs, I think there's even less thought about ethnic divisions. – NGO representative

Most KIs and FG participants have negative views of the business sector, doubting that businesses are willing to engage in and contribute to reconciliation processes in the country. Additionally, most private companies are perceived as politically connected and engaged in crime and corruption. Likewise, public enterprises have been divided across corrupt ruling parties who distribute jobs and positions to their members. Government employers are obligated to adhere to the so-called "national key" quota[27] when hiring workers.

It is unlikely that many business owners would actively engage in leading reconciliation processes. Businesses and government institutions, however, indirectly contribute to reconciliation efforts by hiring people who belong to different ethnicities, making regular interethnic contacts inevitable. Even though some small, local private companies may hire employees from a single ethnic group, larger companies usually cannot afford such an approach. They are bringing people together, forcing them to collaborate and build relationships, and, at least in theory, indirectly contribute to improvements in social cohesion and reduction in interethnic prejudices. Young start-up owners travel across the country, seeking opportunities to collaborate with similar businesses, improving business-to-business collaboration across ethnic divides. Private company owners are concerned primarily with profit and therefore less likely to succumb to political influence and promote division. Additionally, many KIs consider improving the economy a key factor for reconciliation: If people had a higher standard of living, they would not be as easily manipulated by political elites.[28] Nevertheless, a KI (a reconciliation practitioner) shared an opposing view, stating that in Yugoslavia, the economy and people's standard of living were more than satisfactory, yet people engaged in conflict.

ARTISTS AND ATHLETES

The other group are artists, people who somehow know the future, have a vision of the world, understand the world at another level (…). – A reconciliation practitioners

Several KIs explained that artists and culture play a significant part in reconciliation processes. Artists disregard all interethnic division, and they collaborate often. Moreover, they are not afraid of opening up about complex topics; they use art to face and deal with the past, sending strong messages to their audience and challenging their worldviews. Several international organizations (e.g., Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Regional Youth Cooperation Office [RYCO]) use art to build relationships

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[27] According to competent laws, there is a quota for the number of Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats in government positions.
[28] PRO-Future II activity produced a paper showing a positive impact of social cohesion on creating a favorable business environment.

and improve social cohesion among youth. These interventions proved effective in building interethnic friendships among youth and in reducing prejudice (MII, PRO-Future II performance evaluation).

With respect to sports, there are examples of individuals, such as Novak Djokovic—and, recently, Lana Pudar—of whom all people are proud, regardless of their ethnicity. They represent strong role models, especially for youth, and could serve as peace promoters. Some athletes are nationalists, though, and they negatively affect these processes.

Some KIs observed that politicians intentionally do everything in their power to undermine sports and culture. They managed to bring the situation to the point at which being a member of a national sports team is not an honor but an insult. Such treatment often results in young artists and athletes emigrating to countries where their talents are appreciated.

LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Most KIs noted that local communities play an important role in reconciliation. As mentioned before, lower-level politicians, religious leaders, and the media are more likely to be engaged compared to stakeholders at the higher levels. Several KIs explained that support for reconciliation in local communities depends heavily on local mayors—specifically, their openness, courage, and independence from the party leadership.

CONCLUSION

Finding the societal actors to lead the reconciliation processes in BiH is a complex task. No single stakeholder category is politically independent and has the knowledge, courage, and willingness to lead peacebuilding processes. Individuals across various social categories, however, could contribute to these processes. Most KIs believe youth should be the future peace leaders, but most youths seem uninterested and unmotivated to take on such a role. Nevertheless, some open-minded young people chose to learn more about this topic, and some of them have the potential to participate in future reconciliation interventions as leaders.

Politicians and the media are perceived as primary obstacles to reconciliation, with some hope in younger generations of politicians and potential among the local independent and regional media. Even though some politicians are willing to engage in reconciliation processes, including them in those processes may be risky due to citizens' strong mistrust in politicians. Religious leaders have high potential to contribute to reconciliation in BiH, but to date, their role has been passive, due primarily to their political connections, even though there are positive examples of engagement at the local level. The education system is perceived as another source of ethnonationalist division and not conducive to facilitating peacebuilding. Despite the unfavorable context, there are professional, dedicated, and determined teachers willing to provide quality education to students, including about universal values. To date, the academic community in BiH has done little to facilitate the reconciliation processes, even though they have the knowledge, power, and responsibility. Academia has failed in this regard for a variety of reasons: connection with ruling parties, fear of retribution and conformism, or suppression after an attempt to act. Still, there are individuals in academia who are active in this regard.

CSOs are the most active sector in facilitating reconciliation efforts in BiH society. But most citizens are unaware of their efforts, have low confidence in CSOs, and do not consider reconciliation to be their priority. CSOs face many issues, primarily limited capacity, insufficient funding, fragmentation, and lack of coordination. Despite these shortcomings, several CSOs have been engaged in fostering reconciliation in the long term.

There are indications that some segments of the diaspora—primarily returnees and scholars—could be more engaged in peacebuilding. The contributions of the diaspora to economic growth could indirectly, positively affect people's interethnic views, attitudes, and behaviors. Businesses are underutilized reconciliation actors while their role is crucial: They contribute indirectly to improving social cohesion and reducing prejudice. Artists, particularly writers and movie and play directors, are already contributing to reconciliation by using their art to address complex issues and making their audience rethink their views. Successful athletes appreciated by all ethnic groups have the potential to serve as promoters of reconciliation.

Reconciliation interventions are embraced more at the local community level than in higher administrative units. Local governments, politicians, media, and religious leaders are more likely than their higher-level counterparts to engage in and facilitate peacebuilding processes. Local actors also have better understanding of their community needs in terms of peacebuilding.

BEST TOOLS AND METHODOLOGIES

ASSESSMENT QUESTION 3: Which tools and methodologies will best (1) facilitate constructive interethnic dialogue and understanding; (2) reduce interethnic anxiety and prejudice; (3) foster empathy and resilience to divisive rhetoric; (4) establish shared identity among citizens; and (5) improve personal connection and collaboration between citizens from different groups? What are the risks of implementing such tools, methodologies, and interventions in the BiH society?

In 25 years, there have been great initiatives. However, achieved results disappeared quickly. We failed to institutionalize them and to build institutions that would continue to promote it further. – A reconciliation expert

Several reconciliation experts believe that despite enormous investments in reconciliation, very few results are visible in the field. Various factors contributed to poor results: lack of a strategic approach to peacebuilding, lack of institutionalization or sustainability of initiatives, poor implementation, focus on outputs rather than outcomes, the short-term nature of interventions, and a lack of political will to improve the situation.

In the next section, we review several desired outcomes that contribute to reconciliation processes and discuss different theoretical frameworks, tools, and methodologies for their achievement, evidence of their effectiveness, and accompanying implementation risks. The discussion starts with examining data on the effectiveness of contact-based approaches versus those dealing with the past. In the subsequent sections, we review alternative methods and potential target groups of peacebuilding interventions in BiH.

INTERVENTIONS BASED ON CONTACT HYPOTHESIS

The contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954) was generated from the social categorization theory. According to the contact hypothesis, interaction between members of different groups under specific conditions reduces intergroup prejudice. Allport predicted four preconditions of optimum contact that need to be met for intergroup contact to reduce prejudice. These conditions are inter-related:

1. **Equal status between groups:** All group members need to have equal status (no hierarchy in the group)

2. **Common goals:** Members of different groups need to have a common goal.

3. **Intergroup cooperation:** Group members need to cooperate, rather than compete, to achieve the common goal.

4. **Institutional support:** Intergroup cooperation needs to be supported by institutions (e.g., group leaders, authority figures, norms, and customs).

There is compelling empirical support for the contact hypothesis. For instance, according to a meta-analytical study (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), the vast majority of studies (94 percent) focusing on the relationship between intergroup contact and prejudice demonstrated negative associations between these constructs. In addition to direct contact, there is evidence that indirect exposure (e.g., through mass media, online, or in imagination) leads to prejudice reduction. Evidence indicates that extended contacts yield better results than one-time interactions. Intergroup friendships and interactions meeting Allport's optimal conditions described above are particularly effective.

A meta-analytic study reviewing the mediators of contact-prejudice effects indicated that contacts reduce prejudice by increasing knowledge about outgroups, reducing anxiety, and increasing empathy and perspective-taking[29] (Pettigrew & Tropp 2008). Therein, anxiety reduction and increasing empathy represent stronger mediators of the association than knowledge improvement. More recent research demonstrates that intergroup contacts improve attitudes toward encountered outgroup members, the outgroup as a whole, and other outgroups. Moreover, contacts improve cognitive functioning beyond intergroup relations, leading to so-called cognitive liberalization (Hodson et al., 2018), which implies increased productivity, as well as enhanced problem-solving and creative skills. Different mediators explain the generalization effects, including empathy, perspective-taking, trust, morality, intergroup anxiety, and ingroup reappraisal.

Negative experiences during contact, however, can lead to adverse effects: increased prejudice, anxiety, and avoidance (Boin et al., 2021). Aberson (2015) found that negative contact is a stronger predictor of stereotypes than positive contact. McKeown and Dixon (2017) state that future studies need to examine more complex and interactive contact patterns. For instance, Birtel and Crisp (2012) investigated the effects of contacts in imagination, concluding that imagining a negative

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[29] The *APA* (American Psychological Association) *Dictionary of Psychology* defines perspective-taking as "looking at a situation from a viewpoint that is different from one's usual viewpoint. This may involve adopting the perspective of another person or that associated with a particular social role, as in role play exercises."

intergroup contact before imagining a positive contact produced more substantial effects than imagining a positive contact alone.

Data from the 2021 NSCP-BiH and the 2022 NYS indicate that most people in BiH (78 percent of the general population and 83 percent of youth) engage in interethnic contacts:. There is a positive correlation between contact and positive interethnic attitudes in the BiH context. According to FG participants, however, people rarely have close relationships with outgroups. Most of these are occasional, superficial contacts in the public space, in schools, or at work. It is unknown to what extent people perceive these contacts as positive or negative. In some divided or monoethnic communities, even these sporadic contacts have been minimal: Young people attend different or divided schools and go to separate cafés and clubs. In such areas, it is not uncommon for people to meet the outgroup members for the first time when they start working. An FG participant described how anxious she was expecting her first day at work, not knowing what to expect from "the others."

Data from both the NSCP and the NYS suggest that citizens engaging in interethnic contacts feel less anxious when meeting the outgroups (NSCP-BiH: 27 percent feel anxious; NYS: 31 percent feel anxious) than those without such contacts (32 percent and 49 percent, respectively). Additionally, both surveys show that citizens' trust toward outgroup members is higher among those who have outgroup contacts (45 percent and 27 percent, respectively) than those who do not (30 percent and 12 percent). Those exposed to contacts are more open to having individuals from the outgroups in their neighborhoods and as their intimate partners (34 percent vs. 17 percent, respectively). However, the level of interethnic trust among youth (24 percent) is lower than in the general population (42 percent), even though youth are more exposed to outgroups (86 percent vs. 78 percent). Furthermore, interethnic anxiety among youth is higher compared to the general population's results in the 2021 NSCP-BiH (34 percent vs. 28 percent), but lower compared to the 2019 and 2020 NSCP-BiH surveys (42 percent and 40 percent, respectively).

Exhibit 2. Level of interethnic anxiety, contacts, and trust among youth versus general population
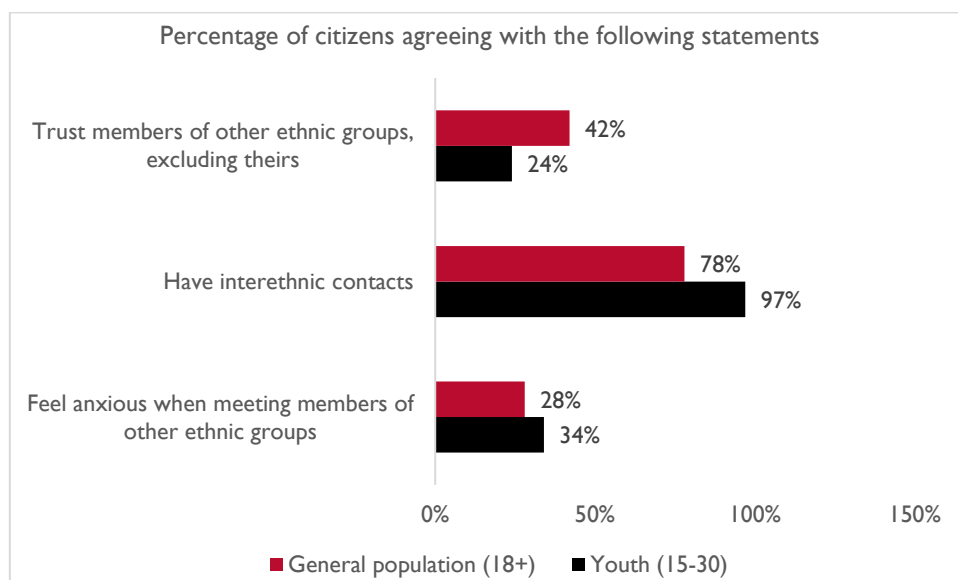
The PRO-Future II midterm performance evaluation showed that contact-based activities have the potential to produce tangible outcomes. For instance, regional peace camps[30] resulted in interethnic friendships and lasting connections, and they improved participants' perceptions about people from neighboring countries. PRO-Future II small grants bringing youth together to collaborate on certain activities (for instance, to perform a play or a concert) resulted in lasting friendships among youth who continued to communicate through social media.

In general, most KIs among donors and implementors employ and recommend contact-based activities as a preferred approach to peacebuilding in BiH, because there are parts of the country where such interactions are lacking. Even though many similar interventions were implemented across the country after the war, KIs argue that many areas (e.g., small, monoethnic, potentially rural communities in distant parts of the country) have been neglected in this regard. Furthermore, due to a lack of political will as well as failed attempts in the past, the situation in the country is not conducive to a transitional justice-focused approach, and contact-based interventions are considered less risky. Therefore, most donors and implementors have focused on contact-based interventions and plan to continue doing so in the following periods. KIs recommended different contact-based activities: student exchange programs, joint research projects for students, sports activities, cultural activities, environmental actions, and local development projects. Several KIs noted that local communities should be consulted and that implementors should frame reconciliation activities around community needs. KIs propagating contact-based approaches believe that these activities will elicit more interest if they are not framed as peacebuilding activities.

> *When I was younger, we had student exchanges between Sarajevo and East Sarajevo. I was not open-minded like this before I participated in this student exchange; I am an example of the contact hypothesis, contact leads to positive changes!*
>
> **– A CSO representative**

INTERVENTIONS BASED ON SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) posits that people strive for a positive social identity and predicts people's coping mechanisms with a negative social identity. Positive social identity leads to ingroup favoritism and contributes to personal certainty, self-esteem, and a sense of meaning. According to this theory, decategorization processes (decreasing the importance of social identity) will lead to reduced intergroup prejudice and tensions. According to the Common Ingroup Identity Model (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000), bias toward outgroups can be reduced if an overarching/common identity is made salient. Roccas and Brewer (2002) found that individuals who accept the possibility of combining multiple social identities—that is, adopting complex identities—express more tolerant attitudes toward outgroups.

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[30] Given that peace camps include different activity types, in addition to extended contacts, these outcomes cannot be attributed solely to contacts.

Data from the 2019 NSCP-BiH and the 2022 NYS indicate that BiH citizens, the general population, and youth strongly identify with their religious and ethnic groups. For each group, religious and ethnic identifications are stronger than identification with the entity of residence, state, Balkans, or Europe. Moreover, on average, religion is considered slightly more important than ethnicity. In addition to other identities, several FG participants mentioned that they identify with their local community.

Based on information obtained through FGs, it is difficult to find an overarching identity with which all ethnicities would identify. While belonging to an entity is important to Serbs but not to Bosniaks and Croats, Bosniaks' identification with the state is considerably stronger. People do not identify strongly with either the Balkans or Europe. FG participants had difficulty articulating the commonalities for all ethnicities in BiH. In most cases, they emphasized either humanity or common problems, such as a poor economic situation. Some mentioned mentality, sense of humor, solidarity, language, and food. Interventions that focus on building shared or complex identities can be risky if imposing a state or entity identity to all groups.

DEALING WITH THE PAST

I know there are many projects these days that try to focus on connectors, whether it is about the environment, or socioeconomic benefits, or whatever. And I think it is good too, because people need to have a tangible benefit from collaboration. But if that is the only thing you are doing, without addressing the legacy of the past, it is not solving anything.
– NGO representative

The concept of transitional justice envisions truth-seeking, truth-telling, retribution, restoration, and, ultimately, reconciliation. In BiH, transitional justice is connected to a host of other issues, including problems of injustice, human rights violations, and (war) crimes committed in the past. According to the relevant literature, there are at least seven models of transitional justice available: "amnesia or inaction; pardons; full amnesty; prosecution and trials (either domestic or international); lustration (disqualifying collaborators from public office); publicity (the opening of the Stasi files in Germany is the key example here); conditional amnesty or truth commissions" (Allen, 2004).

In practice, none of the above-mentioned core elements of transitional justice came to life in BiH society, due primarily to a lack of political will and political instrumentalization of the conflict and division. The transitional justice strategy, a CSO attempt to move things forward, failed in 2015 due to disagreements between the Federation of BiH and Republika Srpska organizations, with no subsequent attempts to build a new approach acceptable to all sides. As time passes, the politics of denial seems to preclude the possibility of consensus building.

As mentioned under the first assessment question, citizens are not interested in discussing difficult topics, and donors believe that the current political environment is not conducive to resolving past issues. But experts in the field find that dealing with the past is crucial for building lasting peace. According to FG participants, many people in BiH are insensitive to other groups' suffering and uninterested in learning about the outgroups' grievances. Several FG participants noted that if they started learning and caring about others' victims, and if they recognized them, they would be criticized by people in their communities, and their care for others would be misinterpreted as insufficient care for and treason toward their own people.[31] Many doubt that reliable sources of information about the war are available, which itself is another form of denial. Further, lacking the interest to seek information and to learn about the past, citizens passively consume information about the war from the mainstream, nationalist media, each covering only one side of the story, reinforcing the narratives created by political elites, their funders.

> According to John Paul Lederach's approach to conflict transformation (Lederach, 1997, according to Dietrich, 2014), all societal actors in a conflicting system interact across the social strata: grassroots, mid-level actors, and leaders or elites. Lederach emphasized that relations between different groups of actors, rather than the actors and the groups themselves, as crucial for conflict transformation. The author's approach suggests targeting different types of actors with different intervention types. For instance, grassroots interventions should include peace commissions, capacity and relationship trainings, developing new narratives, and psychosocial trauma treatment. For mid-level actors, the author envisioned capacity and relationship trainings, commissions, and work teams. For top leaders, he recommended negotiations.

> *I don't know that we can even finish talking about that topic. Maybe we're spending too much time talking about the past. If something can be resolved, everyone will stick to their side and will never deviate from it. Someone who will give in to any work, I don't see him. I think it's too much of a waste of time on the subject. That's my opinion.*
>
> **– An FG participant, Žepče**

Few donors currently support interventions based on facing or dealing with the past; most consider the transitional justice approach too risky in terms of possibly exacerbating tensions or, at best, failing to achieve any outcomes. The British Embassy in BiH, however, currently supports several similar projects. One of their projects is dedicated to working with associations of missing persons' families, focusing on organizational capacity building,[32] establishing a database of missing persons (resolved and ongoing cases), and advocating for the rights of the missing persons' families at the national level. Another project advocates for the rights of victims of war-related sexual violence. A project implemented by TRIAL International aims to secure proper medical, psychological, social, and economic assistance, financial compensation, and public apology to women victims of sexual violence. The project provides legal services to survivors, connecting them with prosecutors' offices

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[31] A classical research paper in social psychology (Schachter, 1951) investigated the consequences of people expressing different opinions from those of the dominant group in artificially established groups for research purposes. These individuals are not favored by their ingroup members. They are pressured to change their minds, or they are removed from groups.

[32] Associations of families of missing persons collaborate through a regional network. Additionally, an umbrella organization has been established in BiH to coordinate their work and foster collaboration. These associations cooperate with the national institutes, but also with one another through joint advocacy initiatives toward national institutions. A donor supports building the capacities of the associations given that their original members are getting older and organizational sustainability has been at risk. The project is encouraging the associations to include younger members to gradually take over the work.

and witness protection units, and builds the capacity of prosecutor offices and courts. This project resulted in a decision by the United Nations Committee Against Torture, declaring that the BiH has to ensure that the victims receive all these elements of reparation. Implementation of this verdict is expected at all government levels. The project achieved another success in Brcko with the adoption of a new law granting legal status to children born as a result of sexual violence.

The approach to peacebuilding adopted by USAID/PRO-Future II focuses more on trust building and improving social cohesion rather than on facing or dealing with the past. The activity's public speaking events, at which war veterans and civilian war victims talk about their war experiences, end with a shared message of peace and the importance of universal human values. These are the most prominent interventions focusing on the past. The PRO-Future II performance evaluation indicates that these interventions elicit strong emotions among audiences, primarily empathy and compassion, and people remember these stories years after participation. These activities also yielded outcomes such as peace activism and collaboration. For instance, several juvenile fighters decided to join the project as speakers after attending such an event. Two women's organizations that were separated along ethnic lines continued their collaboration after attending a joint public speaking event. On several occasions, speakers from all sides participated in joint commemorations and supported each other in advocacy actions. Several KIs warned that these events might evoke traumatic responses in participants and thus should be led by experienced moderators and accompanied by professionals experienced in dealing with trauma and trauma response. Even though these testimonies can change participants' views about individual speakers, in isolation, without follow-up or other types of exposure to the unknown facts about other groups' experiences (e.g., through media), these events are unlikely to change attitudes toward outgroups as a whole among the audiences.

Few KIs, donors, and implementors, had ideas on how BiH society should approach facing or dealing with the past, and there is no consensus in this regard. Citizens and FG participants from all sides find recognition of their victims important for improving interethnic relations. An expert explained that the lack of recognition raises frustration, anger, and animosity between three ethnic groups. Another expert noted that political apologies, often considered an initial step for confronting the past, do not produce expected results; interventions that focus on reparation—though not necessarily financial—are more effective. An expert also emphasized the importance of repentance, that is, recognizing that people have allowed themselves to become victimized and that they should overcome such self-perception. Several KIs emphasized the importance of establishing the facts for facing the past and for countering politicians' abuse of the past: Establishing and documenting lists of events and victims will reduce the space for political manipulations. A KI recalled the necessity of carefully planned communication and outreach to ensure that citizens become aware of and accept the facts. A KI (local CSO) shared a success story of a local community in which, due to the work of a CSO with donor support, facts about the 1990s war were established and citizens started accepting them. The CSO relied on street actions and taking up public space to ensure people were exposed to facts and advocated for valid, fact-based narratives about the past. The organization claims their intervention reduced denial of events in the local community.

Two local CSOs implement activities where they discuss divisive narratives with their participants. The Center for Peacebuilding (CIM) from Sanski Most targets youth through peace camps, in which representatives of all groups present their perspectives on divisive narratives, followed by discussions and critical evaluation. According to CIM, the program effectively reduced intergroup prejudice and social distance. A similar project has been implemented by Youth Initiative for Human Rights, resulting in a publication about shared narratives. Nevertheless, KIs warn that short-term

interventions are unlikely to change people's beliefs, and the effects may disappear once they return to their closed, intolerant environments. Several projects tackling issues from the past use relevant movies and documentaries, and they facilitate discussions, typically with youth. Even though such an approach brings youth closer together and reduces their prejudice, the implementors noticed that youth are less willing to share their thoughts about the issues from the 1990s war, or to being more engaged in discussions around foreign conflicts.

An expert believes that interventions focusing on the past should target positive rather than negative events. The KI noted this approach has improved participants' interethnic attitudes and reduced their prejudices, and the results were sustainable over the longer term. Such an intervention introduced young people to stories about ordinary people who had helped the outgroup members during the war. A similar intervention was described by other KIs (a CSO and a religious leader), in which youth were encouraged to research and write about people who helped or saved outgroup members during the war.

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AND UNDERSTANDING

Interventions including religious leaders are essential for youth to learn about other religions and establish inter-religious dialogue and understanding. According to FG participants, most adults know about others' religions, customs, and traditions. But youth possess less knowledge in this regard, particularly those born after the war who had never lived in a society where multi-ethnicity was regarded as a positive societal value. Data from FGs indicate that people from smaller, mono-ethnic communities generally know less about other religions and traditions than those residing in larger and mixed areas. Most youth among the FG participants said they are interested in learning more about other religions. Several young FG participants, however, noted they are afraid their elders' may interpret their interest in outgroups cultures as treason. This is in line with the PRO-Future II performance evaluation finding that adults discourage youth's involvement in peacebuilding activities.

Several KIs noted that religious leaders' commitment to and presence in joint commemorations are crucial for facilitating inter-religious dialogue and understanding, as they are the role models for constructive relationships among the people. A CSO (CIM) implemented a project in which religious leaders educated youth about peacebuilding based on sacred writing and continued building the capacity of religious leaders to participate in such projects. PRO-FUTURE II "open door" days improved interethnic understanding and elicited interest in and positive feelings toward other religions. The IRC occasionally implements projects to improve inter-religious understanding, but according to KIs, they could contribute much more. These interventions can be risky and make youth views on other religions less favorable if religious leaders participating in such projects are not adequately prepared.

EDUCATION INTERVENTIONS

Most KIs agree that the formal education system currently undermines the peacebuilding processes and that the role of education is crucial in this regard. Donors and implementors employ various approaches to engage students in reconciliation interventions. For instance, Nansen Dialogue Center implements integrated classes in divided schools. PRO-Future II designed its own peace education program, which was praised by teachers and students. Other projects engage students, for instance,

through literary competitions and contact-based activities. Several KIs emphasized the potential to work on reconciliation through religious education.

A new donor project, Holocaust & Peace – Lessons from the past for the future, implemented by Post-conflict Research Center, engaged teachers and CSO representatives from different parts of BiH to develop and publish teaching material about the holocaust and peace. The group of about a dozen people worked together for four years, but it is unclear whether anybody uses this teaching material. A KI believes that higher education institutions and professors—especially historians from Sarajevo, Banja Luka, and Mostar, but also from the region—should jointly work on establishing the facts about the past and come up with joint declarations, books, and curricula for schools and universities.

Implementors noted it is getting increasingly hard to enter schools and implement activities. Republika Srpska has been particularly stringent, discouraging most donors and implementors who started approaching schools directly and working in those with more flexible management. At the university level, a Media Literacy platform was established at the Faculty of Political Science in Sarajevo with support from UNESCO, but this has not been achieved in Republika Srpska. UNESCO, however, supported education priorities in BiH, which resulted in the adoption of unique education priorities across the whole country for the first time.

ECONOMY OF PEACE

A number of KIs and FG participants suggested that the reconciliation processes depend on economic progress; if citizens could stop worrying about their survival, they would be less likely to blame the outgroups for their unfavorable position. This is in line with terror management theory (Solomon et al., 1991), positing that fear (of death) causes stronger ingroup identification and distancing from outgroups. Moreover, according to the hypothesis of relative deprivation, group dissatisfaction and prejudice sometimes depend on the amount of money people possess, due to frustration and feeling deprived compared to outgroup members (Gurr, 1970).

> *Nothing else matters to a person except his child having food on a table. It does not matter for who, with whom, or in which entity he works; if he has a decent salary, everything else becomes banal!*
>
> **– A CSO representative**

Most reconciliation experts consider the role of businesses in reconciliation crucial, sharing different perspectives in this regard and noting that the sector has been underutilized. One reconciliation expert mentioned the "economy of peace" as an important subject within peace and conflict resolution studies. Economy of peace studies the "design of societies' political, economic, and cultural institutions and their interacting policies and actions to prevent, mitigate, or resolve any type of latent or actual violent conflict within and between societies."[33] Another reconciliation expert noted that cooperation requires two sides with a common goal; a strong economy, as well as peace, may present such joint objectives. Another KI believes that the youth leading start-ups have the potential to be the reconciliation leaders, as they are crossing all borders and boundaries and removing divisions. A KI noted that diaspora businesses could play an important role in peacebuilding if they connect across ethnic lines and come together to BiH.

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[33] https://www.usip.org/publications/peace-economics-questions-and-answers

RECONCILIATION AND OTHER SOCIETAL PROCESSES

According to several KIs, reconciliation processes are closely tied to other societal processes, such as countering corruption and facilitating activism. Reducing corruption in BiH would contribute positively to peacebuilding processes, given that corrupt politicians use their power to destabilize society. Hence, any interventions that focus on the fight against corruption and strengthening the rule of law indirectly contribute to reconciliation processes. On a different note, a KI stated that reconciliation is linked to and requires civic engagement. PRO-Future II had initiated a Platform for Peace civic movement, envisioning joint civic actions by activity beneficiaries across ethnic lines. One of the outcomes to which the activity contributed was the recent development in Mostar, when the local government changed street names that had been named after Nazi collaborators. The activity initiated several other advocacy campaigns but thus far has yielded no policy changes.

TARGET GROUPS

Most KIs believe that reconciliation activities should primarily target youth, especially with respect to contact-based approaches. The sub-groups of youth that should be targeted include those from divided or smaller, rural, monoethnic communities, particularly those who do not have the opportunity to travel. When working with schools, including whole classes, is preferred to the student selection to ensure the involvement of those less open-minded. When working with children and youth, starting at an early stage and encouraging parents and teachers to get involved is recommended. Also, young politicians should be targeted.

An implementor recommends targeting youth clubs and youth centers to reach the youth. Implementers should also consider the youth's wishes and needs and ensure their ownership over the process. A KI (CSO) explained that using digital technologies may facilitate youth's inclusion in peacebuilding interventions and proposed the development of digital youth clubs and digital memorialization.

Only a few KIs recommended that reconciliation interventions target adults and older people. Several KIs noted that women are more receptive to reconciliation activities than men. The same finding was obtained through the PRO-Future II performance evaluation[34], as well as the United Nations report[35]. However, NSCP-BiH[36] and NYS-BiH[37] data found no gender difference on any reconciliation indicators.

With respect to discussing the past, several KIs (experts) said that reconciliation experts, academics, and historians should lead these processes. Some individuals among the former members of different military formations, former camp inmates, civilians, and other victims of war are willing to talk about the past and to participate in peacebuilding activities that require dealing with the past.

According to several donors, providing structural support to CSOs that focuses on reconciliation is crucial. These organizations are unlikely to receive any government support.

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[34] https://www.measurebih.com/uimages/MII-PRO-FII-Evaluation-Report-508.pdf
[35] Shared Futures: Youth Perceptions on Peace in the Western Balkans | United Nations Development Programme (undp.org)
[36] https://www.measurebih.com/national-survey-of-citizens-perceptions
[37] https://www.measurebih.com/uimages/MII_2022_National_Youth_Survey.pdf

GENERAL NOTES

According to several KIs, monitoring, evaluation, and learning have been weak spots of contact-based reconciliation interventions thus far. Most projects focus on outputs rather than outcomes, without careful layering and sequencing, paying little attention to ways to maximize the effectiveness of contact-based activities. Coordination and collaboration between donor and implementors were also described as poor.

Several KIs emphasized the importance of adapting to local specificities, arguing that people in local communities perceive the same past events differently and believe in different narratives. Some KIs recommended assessing local views and needs and adapting approaches to the local context, rather than applying a generic approach across the country. Local ownership over the reconciliation processes is also deemed necessary. According to these KIs, most donors focus their activities on large centers, divided communities, or places where massive war operations and atrocities had taken place. Donors and implementors often neglect smaller, border communities.

> *Local communities, these micro-levels are of crucial importance for the reconciliation processes. International donors have to support them since they are the first line of defense.*
>
> **– An international donor**

According to most KIs, reconciliation should be regarded as a long-term process rather than a short-term goal. In line with the extended contact hypothesis and PRO-Future II performance evaluation findings, several KIs emphasized that longer-lasting interventions are more effective in producing desired outcomes than one-time interactions. Moving the processes in the right direction requires a strategic approach, careful sequencing, monitoring, learning, and adaptation.

A KI emphasized it is unlikely that any existing models of reconciliation would work in the BiH context. Donors should be realistic about BiH society and its sources of division; there is no simple solution to reuniting people and building lasting peace. The KI believes that finding an authentic way to initiate and foster these processes is crucial.

CONCLUSION

Post-war peacebuilding efforts in BiH have not resulted in stability. All transitional justice strategies had failed to be initiated, and it is unclear how to approach facing and dealing with the past, with a general consensus that the atmosphere in the country is not conducive to such interventions and that their implementation is risky. Hence, most donors and implementors have turned to less risky approaches.

Overall, there is compelling evidence of the effectiveness of contact-based activities in reducing interethnic prejudice and anxiety, improving perspective-taking and empathy, personal relationships, and collaboration. Most donors and implementors intend to continue focusing on improving collaboration between constituent peoples, primarily youth, in the following period. Contact-based interventions are less risky in terms of exacerbating ethnic tensions but do not resolve the underlying divisions between people. There is much less empirical evidence about approaches focusing on dealing with the past in BiH, but there is anecdotal evidence suggesting these interventions can also produce desired results and experts consider them crucial.

BiH people strongly identify with their religious and ethnic belonging and favor their own ethnic and religious groups. People do not perceive many commonalities among different ethnicities, and any attempts to build an overarching common identity should be based on universal human values rather than any geographic identity. Many, particularly youth, know little about other religions, and even when they are interested in knowing more, they are discouraged by their elders. There is room to improve inter-religious understanding in BiH, especially among the youth.

Education plays a crucial role in the reconciliation processes. In addition to those with the tradition of working with educational institutions who have relationships and connections with education stakeholders, others do not intend to enter the field since it is growing increasingly hard to get permissions to work with youth, especially in Republika Srpska.

All peacebuilding attempts need to pay attention to local specificities and to ensure local ownership over the reconciliation processes. Peacebuilding should be regarded as a long-term process rather than a shorter-term result. Approaches designed for different contexts are unlikely to work in BiH. Developing an authentic peacebuilding approach that would work in BiH will be a challenging but necessary task.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Since the end of the 1990s war, ethnonationalist parties and politicians in BiH continue to fuel interethnic tensions, thus hindering all attempts to initiate the process of dealing with the past. The mainstream media promote politically imposed, one-sided, divisive views about war events, human rights, and co-existence, not allowing the people to heal, forget, and forgive. Many religious leaders and academics, who could facilitate reconciliation processes, either collaborate with politicians or avoid engagement. In the absence of will among local actors, the international community now leads peacebuilding initiatives. Even though they generally lack coordination, most donors employ similar approaches to peacebuilding: Most of them have given up on trying to engage or high-level politicians and religious leaders, and mainstream media. Instead, they rely on CSOs to implement peacebuilding interventions, which, more often than not, focus on contact-based activities with citizens, primarily youth. Several donors noted that the situation in BiH is not conducive to initiating efforts to aid people in dealing with the past and that it may be too early to take on these efforts. Reconciliation experts, however, believe that dealing with the past is crucial to prevent future conflicts.

Among individuals who witnessed the war, personal war trauma maintained and exacerbated by negative political rhetoric still affects and shapes their interethnic attitudes. But, when necessary, people communicate and collaborate across ethnic lines, although their personal connections remain weak due to intergroup boundaries created by past grievances and a lack of shared identity. Sources of division remain taboo during citizens' interactions—topics that should be avoided to preserve "normal" relationships. Citizens identify strongly with their religion and ethnic belonging, trust their groups and group leaders more than others, and do not perceive many commonalities with outgroups. They have little opportunity to hear about outgroups' experiences or points of view, they are not trained to seek out facts or think critically, and critical thinking does not come naturally to most. Even when they feel there is more to the war stories, people lack the motivation to undertake

the painful process of questioning their attitudes; learning the facts and weighing them; and forming well-informed, objective perspectives. Their interethnic attitudes are based on emotion rather than reason, suggesting that future interventions should include a focus on emotional aspects of interethnic prejudices (e.g., through approaches that target dealing with the past, developing empathy), in addition to cognitive (e.g., learning about facts, attitude change) and behavioral components (e.g., bringing people together, improving collaboration).

BiH youths, who have not experienced the war personally but have learned about it indirectly, seem to be even less trusting than the general population toward people as a whole and other ethnic groups. These young individuals have been affected by divisive narratives their whole lives, with few positive stories about others. Many do not know much about other religions or ethnicities, and even when they are interested in knowing more, they are discouraged by their elders. Most youths are not interested in discussing the past or difficult themes, as they do not consider interethnic tensions to be their problem.

Still, most donors, implementors, and other stakeholders have high expectations of youth to address reconciliation. This assessment finds that the whole society—that is, a variety of stakeholders, including citizens—should be involved in these processes, rather than transferring all responsibilities to youth. Peacebuilding in BiH requires a strategic, tailor-made, participatory approach led by people who deeply understand these processes, have leadership and activist personalities and skills, and are genuinely inclusive of diverse worldviews. Reconciliation interventions should be implemented at the local level to ensure local ownership, but the lessons learned and constructive messages should be shared with the public across communities to amplify their effects and with higher-level stakeholders to obtain their buy-in and hold them accountable for inciting fear and division. Due to their poor knowledge about and low trust in outgroups, youth should be the primary (but not the only) target group for reconciliation interventions, particularly given the influence the adults have over youth.

The assessment findings suggest that, in BiH society, the physical proximity of outgroups can lead to a more positive outlook on outgroups among citizens, but less likely among youth. The PRO-Future II activity suggests that contact-based activities can produce tangible outcomes in terms of building personal relationships, collaboration, and activism, but usually they engage individuals who are already open-minded. The quality of contacts in these activities can be further improved, and follow-up activities can be designed to augment and strengthen the effects. Given that people in general are not motivated to engage in these processes, new activities in this area should motivate and prepare them.

The role of actors who have so far been underutilized in reconciliation processes should be re-examined. Academics, if trained properly, could design more effective peacebuilding interventions. Businesses could intentionally create more opportunities for quality personal contacts across ethnic divides. New generations of politicians may better understand the importance of reconciliation processes. Artists and influencers could be more engaged in the promotion of constructive narratives around peacebuilding issues, as well as universal human values and positive messages of peace, and they could serve as role models to youth and citizens in general.

In conclusion, the BiH reconciliation approach needs to be carefully designed and implemented to accommodate the country's history and its demographic and sociopolitical complexity. An ideal approach would target all stakeholder levels, be inclusive of citizens' needs, and help them deal with the past while looking toward the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The assessment team proposes adapting Lederach's (1997) conflict transformation approach to the BiH context. Specifically, the team proposes directing future reconciliation interventions on three different levels of actors: grassroots/citizens, mid-level actors, and leaders/elites. The assessment team hereby defines elites as the highest-level politicians and religious leaders, and mainstream media. Mid-level actors include any actors with access to both grassroots and elites. USAID should consider employing specific approaches and focusing on different results depending on the actor type. It should be noted that, in the BiH context, three levels of actors exist at the local level as well as at state and entity levels, and some actors play significant roles at different levels.

GRASSROOTS/CITIZENS

Grassroots are defined as communities and individuals who do not exercise vertical, communicative roles. Relationship building at this level should focus on the conditions and needs of ordinary people and communities in their daily lives.

OBJECTIVE: BUILDING TARGETED CITIZEN RESILIENCE TO DIVISIVE POLITICAL INFLUENCES

1. **Consider designing and implementing effective, contact-based interventions**. These interventions should be carefully planned based on evidence (e.g., preconditions for effective contacts) to maximize their effectiveness. Interventions should include longer and repeated contacts rather than one-time activities. Consider focusing on collaboration rather than competition through, for instance, student exchange programs, joint research projects, cultural activities, environmental actions, local development actions, leadership trainings, and activities appealing to youth. Youth should be the primary (but not the only) target group of contact-based activities. Building relationships across ethnic lines should be one of the targets of these interventions.

2. **Consider employing the following chain of steps/sequencing principles in building youth's resilience to divisive narratives. Adapt the sequencing to group/community specificities.**

   a. <u>Objective</u>: Increase willingness to participate in reconciliation activities.
   <u>Activities</u>: In-group preparation activities (e.g., discussing youth's expectations, exposure to virtual or imaginary contacts, including youth in activity design, discussing identities).

   b. <u>Objective</u>: Reduce interethnic prejudice and anxiety and build critical thinking/actively open-minded thinking skills.
   <u>Activities</u>: Contact-based activities focusing on collaboration, fun activities, the arts; interventions focusing on building critical thinking skills, and actively open-minded thinking (e.g., through debates with participants taking others' side of an argument; training workshops on actively open-minded thinking).

   c. <u>Objective</u>: Improve intercultural understanding.
   <u>Activities</u>: Visits to different places of worship, intercultural learning.

   d. <u>Objective</u>: Foster intergroup perspective-taking and empathy.
   <u>Activities</u>: Public speaking events by war veterans, screening relevant movies and documentaries.

e. Objective: Reveal common and complex identities.
    Activities: Activities based on identifying common problems and opportunities, and universal human values and solidarity; finding multiple, common identities.

f. Objective: Adopting constructive narratives about sources of division.
    Activities: Dialogue sessions on sources of division from different perspectives; joint work on building a constructive/shared narratives acceptable to all sides; reframing divisive narratives.

g. Objective: Broadening the effects to wider groups of youth/sustainability planning/peace activism.
    Activities: Creation of an alumni network, peer-to-peer activities, strengthening youth leadership skills.

MID-LEVEL ACTORS/RECONCILIATION FACILITATORS

OBJECTIVE: ESTABLISHING A PLATFORM TO DEVELOP AN AUTHENTIC BiH APPROACH TO RECONCILIATION

1. **Consider establishing a formal network or a foundation of mid-level actors/reconciliation facilitators.** Mid-level actors are important for peacebuilding as they have access to both grassroots and elites and they maximize communication and relationship building across divisions. Representatives of academia, experts, and CSOs[38] who deeply understand the reconciliation and conflict resolution theory, and who have been active peacebuilding researchers and practitioners over the past 30 years, should be the core group of actors leading the reconciliation processes. The initial group should build relationships and establish a network to include other actors willing to engage: young, open-minded politicians;[39] mayors; lower-level religious leaders; active, local chapters of the IRC; media;[40] school directors and teachers; businesses; social enterprises; professional organizations; diaspora; municipal staff representatives; and youth activists. The network should build on the connections established through PRO-Future/PRO-Future II activities, as well as other USAID activities (e.g., political programs; activities supporting CSOs, media, and education; and economic development activities). USAID should consider designating an international peacebuilding and conflict resolution practitioner with experience in BiH and/or other contexts to coordinate the network.

2. **Initiate constructive discussions around points of common agreement and divisive narratives at the local level and across the country—**e.g., through participatory action research— to reconstruct and reframe these narratives. The approach should be piloted in a limited number of communities and then expanded based on the lessons learned. For communities with larger minority groups, consider discussing these narratives within communities to allow for minority perspectives to be heard and understood. In more homogeneous communities, consider contrasting the prevailing community narratives with those

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[38] Given the lack of trust in CSOs and that citizens do not consider peacebuilding their priority, USAID should consider connecting its peacebuilding interventions with activities that address citizens' priorities.
[39] Research conducted at the University of Edinburgh indicates that to engage politicians, it may be beneficial to demonstrate how reconciliation work can improve their integration into constituencies. For instance, CSOs working on behalf of vulnerable and marginalized communities are eager to show politicians that they will be more valued if they engage more deliberately with elements of communities that have identified needs that a lack of reconciliation obstructs in practical terms. For more information about this research, please see Izvestaj Sarajevo 2021.pdf (ceir.co.rs).
[40] Please refer to the 2021 NSCP-BiH, page 47, for information about media outlets with the highest reach.

of neighboring communities. It could be beneficial to start by employing an in-community approach and moving to cross-community work once people have heard of, faced, and thought about other narratives. Points of common agreement could serve as springboards to discussion before moving on to more difficult themes. Facilitated discussions might tie local public discourse from divisive narratives to needs-based agendas for change.

3. **Build on the PRO-Future II activities to foster a reconciliation civic movement.** The network should promote peace as the highest societal value. Among other civic actions, the network should advocate for politicians to be involved in and committed to peacebuilding rather than creating tensions.

4. **Consider awarding research grants to research institutions and organizations and individual researchers**, primarily to expand the evidence base about the past and to develop effective reconciliation interventions. Grants could be awarded for projects aiming at looking for local peace capacities and sources of historical connections; establishing and promoting the facts about the past; collecting and documenting individual war stories; verifying the effectiveness of reconciliation interventions; implementing effective reconciliation interventions; and offering trainings (e.g., training academics in participatory action research, training media and CSO representatives about their role in reconciliation, media literacy trainings/nationwide campaigns).

5. **Facilitate and support joint memorials and memorialization initiatives in localities where open-minded actors are willing to engage.**

LEADERS/ELITES

OBJECTIVE: PROMOTE CONSTRUCTIVE NARRATIVES ABOUT THE PAST AND CURRENT DIVISIONS AND POSITIVE MESSAGES OF PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

1. **Consider designing strong outreach activities to convey constructive narratives and research results to the wider public.** Given that divisive narratives conveyed by the elites currently dominate mainstream media, the mid-level actors should ensure better promotion of constructive themes, stories, and narratives to the public. The mid-level actors' network should conduct outreach activities to raise citizen awareness about facts about the past, outgroup experiences of the war, and positive reconciliation stories, and to model constructive dialogue about difficult themes. Attention should be paid to adapting the outreach activities to different target groups (e.g., reaching adults through television and youth through social networks and other digital tools). Consider including artists, athletes,[41] and other influencers in promotional activities, particularly those targeting youth.

2. **Consider engaging mid-level actors to create and promote positive, constructive messages based on evidence as a response to negative political messages conveyed by the elites**, to counterbalance the negative messages in the public space. Consider presenting the research findings to elites privately before broad dissemination. In the longer term, seek ways and opportunities to include the elites in peacebuilding activities.

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[41] Artists and athletes could promote constructive narratives around sources of division as well as universal human values and positive messages of peace, and they should be examples of open-minded individuals without prejudices. Plays and movies could be used to facilitate perspective-taking and empathy (as already done by some donors, including PRO-Future II and RYCO).

MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND LEARNING RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Pay attention to results monitoring, layering, and sequencing.** Employ complexity-aware monitoring approaches,[42] such as outcome mapping, most significant change, or outcome harvesting. Train all involved parties (e.g., network members, grantees) to use these approaches. When applicable, consider employing experimental or quasi-experimental research to verify the effectiveness of interventions.

2. **Consider establishing coordination and linking mechanisms between different activity components to ensure they reinforce each other.** For instance, mid-level actors could conduct research to investigate the effectiveness of interventions at the grassroots level and use the research results for discussions with higher-level leaders.

3. **Consider establishing a mechanism for information exchange, coordination and collaboration with other USAID activities.** Coordinate and seek ways to collaborate with other USAID activities in various areas, to include, for instance, political, anti-corruption, media, judiciary, diaspora, and local development programs. The collaboration mechanisms could include joint work planning and exploring ways in which other activities can indirectly support reconciliation objectives.

4. **Consider embedding learning and adaptation mechanisms in the activity design.** These mechanisms may include regular (e.g., quarterly) pause-and-reflect sessions, investigating the lessons learned, and ensuring sufficient flexibility to quickly adapt to new knowledge and a volatile environment.

5. **Exchange information and coordinate with relevant international actors** (e.g., Office of High Representative, European Union, British Embassy, OSCE, UNESCO, Sweden).

RECOMMENDATION FOR DONORS AND ORGANIZATIONS ACTIVE IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR

1. **Consider supporting in-country teachers/professors, student exchange programs, and joint research projects at all levels of education.** University students are particularly important target groups as they are likely to be future mid-level actors to continue leading the reconciliation processes. Continue to support integrated classes in divided areas and other contact-based activities that bring together children from mono-ethnic communities. When implementing peace education activities, engage whole classes rather than selected students. To the extent possible, actively engage teachers and parents.

2. **Seek opportunities to introduce peace education as part of civic or religious education.** For instance, the PRO-Future II peace education program could be evaluated, adapted, and replicated in broader areas.

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[42] For more information, please see the following links:
https://usaidlearninglab.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/dn_-_complexity-aware_monitoring_final2021_1.pdf and
https://usaidmomentum.org/app/uploads/2020/12/CAM-Guide-Final-2020_12_16_508.pdf.

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ANNEXES

ANNEX I. ASSESSMENT SCOPE OF WORK

INTRODUCTION

As the USAID current reconciliation activity Trust, Understanding, and Responsibility for the Future II (PRO-Future II) ends in 2023, USAID commissioned the Monitoring and Evaluation Support Activity (MEASURE II) to conduct a reconciliation assessment to inform the design of a new Mission activity in this area. The new activity will contribute to the Country Development Cooperation Strategy through (1) Intermediate Result 1.1—Impact of inclusive citizen engagement improved (2) and Intermediate Result 2.1—Social cohesion strengthened.

The purpose of the assessment is to formulate recommendations on how to best address mistrust between the main ethnic groups in BiH caused by the 1990s war and consequent grievances, exacerbated by divisive political rhetoric. The assessment will investigate the underlying sources and drivers of interethnic division and identify the actors and tools with the potential to contribute to bringing divided groups closer together.

COUNTRY CONTEXT

While political, economic, and social stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) has improved since the war ended in 1995, BiH society remains divided and unable to develop a common national vision. Divisive politics have a national and regional dimension that extends to war commemorations, court decisions on war crimes, elections and regional events in Serbia and Croatia, even Russia and Turkey. Ahead of general and local elections, political rhetoric is becoming increasingly divisive. Due to the institutionalization of ethnic identity as the only possible political identity, citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina are now even a more divided society than they were immediately after the war. Even though the territorial boundaries are not visible, the multiple divisions across political, economic, and now also increasingly social lines, are strong. Without a shift in narrative and approaches to peacebuilding, the war will continue to shape the citizens' lives for many more years to come.

The current USAID reconciliation program PRO-Future II engages citizens and stakeholders at all levels of government to institutionalize commitments to reconciliation within the framework of the Platform for Peace. This follow-on to the first PRO-Future project continues to encourage attitudinal and behavioral changes in key leaders and citizens in 76 PRO-Future cities/municipalities for reconciliation and sustainable peace. Core PRO-Future II interventions include working with ministries to adopt the Platform for Peace at the national level and supporting war victims to advocate for equal rights. Also, the activity trains new, young politicians to develop their debate and peacebuilding skills and knowledge while engaging the business community to help politicians understand how reconciliation also creates a more desirable business environment. Additionally, the project arranges visits of multi-ethnic religious leaders to war memorials and other places of suffering (together), facilitating community interreligious dialogue, and exposing youth to the history and tradition of multiple places of worship other than their own.

ASSESSMENT PURPOSE, QUESTIONS, DESIGN, AND LIMITATIONS

This assessment will encompass a review of past and current USAID and other donor support for reconciliation and peacebuilding programs in BiH. It will provide clear recommendations for innovative, focused interventions to replace fear with peaceful co-existence, build confidence and trust, and develop empathy. Activities that foster reconciliation by maximizing social and behavioral change among citizens are of primary interest in this assessment.

The assessment will address the following research questions:

1. What are the biggest sources of division in BiH around which BiH citizens cannot come to a consensus and understanding?

2. Who are the key agents of change to lead or engage in peaceful co-existence activities in order to ensure widespread reconciliation in BiH? To what extent are these specific stakeholders eager, able, and ready to address the divisions affecting BiH society?

3. Which tools and methodologies will best facilitate open interethnic dialogue and understanding, interethnic empathy, resilience to divisive rhetoric, and establishing shared identity among the citizens of BiH?

    a. What effects do the honoring of war victim events (e.g., films, remembrance days, statues, and other memorials) have on interethnic relations?

    b. What are the risks of implementing such tools, methodologies, and interventions in the BiH society?

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The assessment team will employ a mixed-method approach and triangulate data to formulate valid and credible assessment findings, conclusions, and recommendations. In doing so, the team will employ the following data sources:

1. **Literature Review**, to include the literature on current theories and research on interethnic relations and mechanisms of social and behavior change; documentation of past and current USAID activities and other donor peacebuilding and reconciliation interventions.

2. **Secondary data** will include MEASURE II National Survey of Citizens' Perceptions (NSCP) and National Youth Survey (NYS) data.

3. **Key informant interviews (KIIs)**, primarily with donors, reconciliation experts, religious leaders, politicians, and media representatives.

4. **Focus groups (FGs)** with citizens with different ethnic affiliations.

Exhibit A-1 presents the assessment matrix outlining the assessment methodology design. Each assessment question will be informed by the literature review, secondary data analysis, KIIs and FGs. The assessment team will conduct the literature review, analyze the secondary data, and collect primary data obtained through KIIs. The team will design, attend, and analyze the FGs with citizens, but the recruitment and facilitation will be outsourced.

The assessment team will combine and compare data from all sources to formulate the assessment findings. The team will further explore areas of divergence, if any, to ensure that the assessment findings, conclusions, and recommendations are high-quality, valid, credible, and reliable.

EXHIBIT A-1. ASSESSMENT MATRIX

ASSESSMENT QUESTION (AQ)	DATA SOURCES/DATA COLLECTION METHODS	RESEARCH DESIGN
Q1. What are the biggest sources of division in BiH around which BiH citizens cannot come to a consensus and understanding?	Secondary documentation/literature review Secondary survey data/descriptive statistics Key informant interviews/transcript coding Focus groups/transcript coding	Mixed methods
Q2. Who are the key agents of change to lead or engage in peaceful coexistence activities in order to ensure widespread reconciliation in BiH? To what extent are these specific stakeholders eager, able, and ready to address the divisions affecting BiH society?	Secondary documentation/literature review Secondary survey data/descriptive statistics Key informant interviews/transcript coding Focus groups/transcript coding	Mixed methods
Q3. Which tools and methodologies will best facilitate open interethnic dialogue and understanding, interethnic empathy, resilience to divisive rhetoric, and building shared identity among the citizens of BiH? a. What effects do the honoring of war victim events (e.g., films, remembrance days, statues, and other memorials) have on interethnic relations? b. What are the risks of implementing such interventions in the BiH society?	Secondary documentation/literature review Secondary survey data/descriptive statistics Key informant interviews/transcript coding Focus groups/transcript coding	Mixed methods

ASSESSMENT LIMITATIONS

- **Low response rate.** Given that data collection will be organized during the holiday season, it is likely that some collocutors will be unavailable. This could lead to a biased sample and distorted findings. The assessment team proposes to address this issue by extending the data collection until mid-September.

- **Response bias:** Given that the assessment addresses sensitive issues, some key informants may feel reluctant to respond to the questions honestly. The evaluation team will address this source of bias by guaranteeing anonymity and confidentiality to all key informants and by encouraging them to express diverse views. Additionally, FGs with citizens will be homogeneous by ethnicity and facilitated by a moderator belonging to the same ethnicity as the group. Finally, the assessment team will formulate the KII and FG questions carefully to reduce the likelihood of socially desirable responses.

ASSESSMENT IMPLEMENTATION

DELIVERABLES AND SCHEDULE

All deliverables will be submitted to USAID electronically and in English. The deliverables will include:

1. **Detailed assessment work plan and data collection instrument(s)**
   The assessment work plan will include: (1) a detailed assessment design matrix (including the key

questions, methods, and data sources used to address each question and the data analysis plan for each question); (2) draft data collection instruments (interview guides and focus group discussion guides) (3) the list of potential interviewees (without personal information); (4) known limitations to the assessment design; (5) the anticipated schedule and logistical arrangements; and (6) a list of the members of the assessment team, delineated by roles and responsibilities.

2. **Briefing on preliminary findings for the Mission**
   A briefing on preliminary findings to USAID/BiH including a summary of initial recommendations to USAID/BiH.

3. **Draft assessment report**
   The draft assessment report will be based on a thorough rigorous analysis and consistent with USAID requirements and standards.

4. **Final assessment report**
   Once USAID has provided feedback on the initial draft to the assessment team, the team will address comments and submit a revised final report within ten business days. The final report will be up to 25 pages long, excluding annexes.

The overview of the tentative assessment timeline is provided in Exhibit 2.

EXHIBIT A-2. TENTATIVE ASSESSMENT TIMELINE

TENTATIVE DATES	TASKS AND DELIVERABLES
July 22, 2022	Draft Work Plan (with data collection instruments)
July 25-July 29, 2022	Literature review, logistical preparation, scheduling KIIs and FGs
August 1–September 16, 2022	Testing data collection instruments Literature review Data collection through KIIs and FGs KII and FG transcription and coding Preparing the briefing on preliminary findings
Week of September 19, 2022	Briefing USAID/BiH on the preliminary findings and recommendations
September 20–October 14, 2022	Finalizing transcription of KII and FG meeting notes Finalizing data analysis Report drafting Internal quality control procedures
October 15, 2022	Submit the draft report to USAID/BiH
Up to 10 days upon receiving USAID comments	Submit the final assessment report to USAID/BiH

TEAM COMPOSITION

The assessment team is expected to include five key members. All tasks will be coordinated by the Project Manager and Technical Expert. The tentative key staff and their qualifications are shown in Exhibit 3.

EXHIBIT A-3. KEY TEAM MEMBERS AND THEIR QUALIFICATIONS

POSITION	KEY QUALIFICATIONS
MEASURE II Staff Member: Project Manager and Technical Expert/Assessment Lead	Project management skills; expertise in social science research methodologies and USAID research and reporting requirements, experience in research on peacebuilding and reconciliation.
Local Consultant/Transitional Justice Expert, assessment team member	Subject-matter expert with expertise in transitional justice and the role of religion in reconciliation processes. Expertise in social science research methodology.
Local Consultant/Expert for Social Identities and Inter-Ethnic Relations, assessment team member	Subject-matter expert, experienced researcher on the topics such as social identities, inter-ethnic relations, nationalism, religious and ethnic prejudice. Expertise in social science research methodology.
Local Consultant/Expert for Inter-Ethnic Relations and Social and Behavior Change, assessment team member	Subject-matter expert, with strong theoretical knowledge about social and behavioral change and experience in research on inter-ethnic relations. Expertise in social science research methodology.
Local Consultant/Technical Research Expert	Expertise in social science research and USAID research and reporting requirements.
International Consultant/Reconciliation Expert	Subject-matter expert, expertise in peacebuilding and reconciliation research.
MEASURE II Research Analysts	Data collection coordination experience; qualitative data collection experience including note-taking; quantitative and qualitative data analysis skills; and report writing.

Support for the assessment team will include:

- Home Office (HO) and Field Office (FO) support in reviewing the assessment deliverables;

- HO Collaboration, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) experts who will contribute to application of CLA principles throughout the assessment process;

- Transcribers experienced in transcribing audio recordings from KIIs and FGs;

- Office Manager who will provide logistical support to contracting, payments, and field work.

The team composition and level of effort will be finalized in the assessment work plan.

ANNEX II. LIST OF KEY STAKEHOLDERS INTERVIEWED, PER CATEGORY

- USAID, 1 interview

- USAID Implementing Partners, 6 interviews

- International and donor organizations, 10 interviews

- Reconciliation experts, 7 interviews

- Politicians, 5 interviews

- Media, 4 interviews

- Representatives of religious communities, 4 interviews

- Civil society organizations, 16 interviews

- Peace activists, 2 interviews

ANNEX III. LIST OF MUNICIPALITIES REACHED THROUGH FOCUS GROUPS WITH CITIZENS

- Sarajevo, 2 discussions

- Cazin, 2 discussions

- Banjaluka, 2 discussions

- Nevesinje, 2 discussions

- Mostar West, 2 discussions

- Orašje, 2 discussions

- Gornji Vakuf, 2 discussions

- Prijedor, 2 discussions

- Brčko, 1 discussion

- Žepče, 1 discussion

- Glamoč, 1 discussion

- Doboj, 1 discussion

ANNEX IV: DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

INFORMED CONSENT AGREEMENTS

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

Purpose: Thank you for taking the time to meet with us today. My name is [NAME]. I am a researcher from MEASURE II, USAID/BiH's Monitoring and Evaluation Support Activity. Our team is in Bosnia and Herzegovina to conduct a study about reconciliation in BiH. You have been asked to participate today so that we can learn about your views on the interethnic relations and ways to achieve reconciliation and lasting peace. We would like your honest impressions, opinions and thoughts about various issues related to the past and current sources of division in BiH around which BiH citizens cannot come to a consensus and understanding. We are independent consultants.

Procedures: If you agree to participate, we ask you to discuss your experience and opinion of sources of divisions and possibilities of reaching consensus among citizens on these issues in BiH. The interview will take about one hour of your time. Although USAID may decide to publish the assessment findings, all of your answers will be kept confidential. Nothing you tell us will be attributed to any individual person. Rather, the report will include only a composite of all of the answers received by all of the individuals we interview. Although we may use quotes, none of the individuals interviewed will be named in the report.

Risks/Benefits: There are no significant risks to your participation in this study. You will not receive any direct benefit or compensation for participating in this study. Although this study will not benefit you personally, we hope that our results will help improve will help improve social cohesion in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Voluntary Participation: Participation in this interview is completely voluntary. You do not have to agree to be in this study. You are free to end the interview at any time or to decline to answer any

question which you do not wish to answer. If you decline to participate in the interview, no one will be informed of this.

Do you have any questions at this time? [Interviewer should answer any questions]

Permission to Proceed: I understand the purpose of the interview as outlined above and understand that I can withdraw from the interview at any time and for any reason. I agree to participate in the interview (Assessment team records).

☐ Yes　　☐ No

Permission to Record:

☐ Yes　　☐ No

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Purpose: Thank you for taking the time to meet with us today. My name is [NAME]. I am a researcher from MEASURE II, USAID/BiH's Monitoring and Evaluation Support Activity. Our team is in Bosnia and Herzegovina to conduct a study about reconciliation in BiH. You have been asked to participate today so that we can about your views on the interethnic relations and ways to achieve reconciliation and lasting peace. We would like your honest impressions, opinions and thoughts about various issues related to the past and current sources of division in BiH around which BiH citizens cannot come to a consensus and understanding. We are independent consultants.

Procedures: If you agree to participate, we ask you to discuss your experience and opinion of sources of divisions and possibilities of reaching consensus among citizens on these issues in BiH. The focus group will take 90-120 minutes. Although USAID may decide to publish the assessment findings, all of your answers will be kept confidential. Nothing you tell us will be attributed to any individual person. Rather, the report will include only a composite of all of the answers received by all of the individuals we interview. Although we may use quotes, none of the individuals who participated in the discussion will be named in the report.

Ground Rules: While the ground rules will vary depending on the FGD, they will generally include:

- Everyone is encouraged to share their ideas, and the FGD is stronger if everyone participates.
- There are no wrong answers, and everyone's perspective is equally valued.
- The ideas shared during the FGD should not be shared outside the FGD with non-participants in order to respect participants' privacy.
- Disagreements about ideas can be valuable and productive, but personal attacks will not be tolerated.

After establishing these ground rules, the moderator should ask if there are any questions or concerns participants have, and these issues should be addressed as a group before moving on.

Risks/Benefits: There are no significant risks to your participation in this study. You will not receive any direct benefit or compensation for participating in this study. Although this study will not benefit you personally, we hope that our results will help improve will help improve social cohesion in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Voluntary Participation: Participation in this interview is completely voluntary. You do not have to agree to be in this study. You are free to leave the FGD at any time or to decline to answer any question which you do not wish to answer. If you decline to participate, no one will be informed of this. Do you have any questions at this time? [Interviewer should answer any questions]

Permission to Proceed: I understand the purpose of the interview as outlined above and understand that I can withdraw from the interview at any time and for any reason. I agree to participate in the interview (Assessment team records).

☐ Yes   ☐ No

Permission to Record:

☐ Yes   ☐ No

SOURCES OF INTERETHNIC TENSIONS

- **How would you describe interethnic relations in BiH? Would you say that they are better or worse compared to 5 years ago?**
    a. How do the neighboring countries affect interethnic relations?
    b. What about other foreign countries?
    c. In your opinion, how do the memorial days and events commemorating war victims affect reconciliation processes? Are there any ways to use these events to convey positive messages?
- **What are the narratives/themes/events around which different ethnic groups in BiH cannot get along?**
    a. In your opinion, is achieving a better understanding of outgroups' positions on these issues sufficient for reconciliation? Or is reaching an agreement on these issues necessary for reconciliation to succeed? Please elaborate.

AGENTS OF CHANGE

- **Are there any actors fostering positive changes in interethnic relations in BiH?**
- **Who are the local actors who can bring about positive change in terms of interethnic relations?** *Probe: Who are the actors who people look up to? Whose opinions do they appreciate? Who can be a good role model for tolerance and openness toward others? Probe: politicians, media, religious leaders, education stakeholders, citizen groups, foreign actors, others.*
- **Which of these actors are currently willing to engage and encourage more positive interethnic attitudes and relations? How so?** For those unwilling, could they be convinced to get involved and work on facilitating the reconciliation processes? If yes, who can convince them and how?

BEST APPROACHES

- **What would our society look like had we achieved the highest level of reconciliation? How would people behave? What would be different in their behavior?** *Probe: more interethnic friendships - contacts, visits, socializing; more joint business and local development projects, joint activism for issues of common interest, people helping each other …*
- **What can people from your profession do to foster such changes? Are they usually willing to engage in such actions?**
- **In your opinion, to what extent is each of the following important for improving personal connections and collaboration between different ethnic groups in BiH? In your opinion, what are the best tools and methodologies to achieve these results?** *Present the respondents with the list.*
    o Increasing knowledge of political developments prior to and during the war in BiH, as well as atrocities committed during the war in all parts of the country
    o Improving interethnic dialogue and understanding
    o Reducing negative emotions (e.g., anxiety, fear) and eliciting positive emotions (e.g., empathy, compassion) toward the outgroups
    o Reducing interethnic prejudice
    o Building resilience to divisive political rhetoric

- o Building a shared identity
- o Bringing people together to work on issues of common interest
- **What are the risks of implementing peacebuilding and reconciliation interventions in the BiH society? Which intervention types are particularly risky? How so?**
- **In your opinion, what can BiH citizens do to improve interethnic relations in order ensure reconciliation and lasting peace in BiH? How can international community best support citizens' efforts?**

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR DONORS / IMPLEMENTORS

SOURCES OF INTERETHNIC TENSIONS

- **How would you describe interethnic relations in BiH? Would you say they are better or worse compared to 5 years ago? Why do you think so**?
  - o How do the neighboring countries affect interethnic relations? What about other foreign countries?
  - o In your opinion, how do the memorial days and events commemorating war victims affect reconciliation processes? Are there any ways to use these events to convey positive messages?
- **What are the narratives/themes/events around which different ethnic groups in BiH cannot get along?**
  - o In your opinion, is achieving a better understanding of outgroups' positions on these issues sufficient for reconciliation? Or is reaching an agreement on these issues necessary for reconciliation to succeed? Please elaborate.

AGENTS OF CHANGE

- **Who are the actors currently engaged in improving interethnic relations in BiH society? Who are other local actors in BiH society who can bring about positive change in terms of interethnic relations? Are these actors currently willing to do anything to encourage more positive interethnic attitudes and relations?**

APPROACHES

- **Which interventions has your organization designed/implemented to foster reconciliation in BiH?**
  - o Which tools and methodologies have you used to achieve your project results?
  - o What worked well, what did not work, and why?
  - o What would you do differently if you had the opportunity to do it over again?
  - o What type of interventions do you plan to implement in the next 5 years?
- **To what extent is each of the following important for improving personal connections and collaboration between different ethnic groups in BiH? In your opinion, what are the best tools and methodologies to achieve these results?**
  - o increasing knowledge of political developments prior to and during the war in BiH, as well as atrocities committed during the war in all parts of the country
  - o facilitate interethnic dialogue and understanding
  - o reduce negative and elicit positive emotions toward the outgroups
  - o reduce interethnic prejudices
  - o build a shared identity
  - o build resilience for divisive political rhetoric

- **What are the risks of implementing such peacebuilding and reconciliation interventions in the BiH society? Which intervention types are particularly risky? How so?**
- **In your opinion, what can BiH citizens do to improve interethnic relations in order ensure reconciliation and lasting peace in BiH? How can international community best support citizens' efforts?**

FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

SOURCES OF INTERETHNIC TENSIONS

1. **Introduction: How would you describe the situation in BiH society in general? What are the main problems our country is facing?**
2. **Would you say the members of different religious and ethnic groups in BiH are rather unified or divided? Why do you think so?**
3. **How would you describe the situation in your local community? Are citizens unified or divided? Why do you think so?**
4. **When you think about people belonging to different ethnic groups in our country, what are the main issues on which they disagree?** *Probe if needed, e.g., civil war versus aggression; genocide versus other explanations; international tribunal being unfair, two schools under one roof…*
5. **Who are the actors exacerbating the divisions and disagreements among the citizens from different religious/ethnic groups in BiH?** *Probe: politicians, media, religious leaders, education stakeholders, citizen groups, neighboring/foreign countries, others.* How do they exacerbate disagreements in your community? How do citizens react to their actions/messages?

AGENTS OF CHANGE

6. **Who are the actors to which people in your community trust?** *Probe: politicians, media, religious leaders, education stakeholders, citizen groups, foreigners, others.* Who are the actors to whom people look up? Whose opinions do they appreciate?
   Are there any individuals or groups to which most citizens in your community trust, regardless of their religious or ethnic belonging?
   a. If yes, who are these individuals/groups?
   b. Why do you think people from all groups trust these individuals/groups?

APPROACHES

7. **How often do people in your community encounter people belonging to other ethnicities?**
   a. Probe: On what occasions do they encounter them? What is the nature of these contacts: are they just talking on the street, having coffees, visiting each other?
   b. In your experience, are these contacts mostly positive, negative, or neutral?
   c. Are there any examples of collaboration, joint action, or people helping each other? Could you provide any examples?
   d. Do people usually talk about the war and relations between different religions or ethnic groups? Why, why not? Is it easy or hard for the people to talk about these topics without offending the other person?

8. **When you think about people in your community, what would you say they think about other ethnic groups?** *Probe.* In general, would you describe their attitudes as positive or negative? Why? Are their attitudes equally positive/negative toward group A and group B (*specify the outgroups*), or are there any differences?

9. **Which negative statements have you heard about your ethnic group? How do you feel when you hear such statements?**

10. **What about other groups? Which negative statements have you heard about them? Would you say that people in your community think about how other groups feel about such statements?** Do they ever think how other groups felt during the war?

11. **In your opinion, to what extent are people in your community familiar with other groups' cultures, customs, and religions? Would you say they are interested in knowing more?**

12. **In your opinion, to what extent are people in your community familiar with other groups' casualties and suffering during the war? Would you say they are interested in knowing more?**

13. **Oftentimes we can hear our politicians mentioning the possibility of another war, country separation, cessation, a third entity, abolishing the entities, majorization etc.** What do you think about these messages? *Probe.* How do most people in your community understand such messages? How do they feel when they hear such messages? How do they react? Do these messages affect their behavior in any way, for instance their voting decisions or decisions to leave the country?
    a. Do you follow the pre-election campaign? Have you noticed such messages during the campaign? How have they affected you personally?

14. **The constituent peoples in BiH have different religions, ethnicity, customs and traditions. What is it that they all have in common?** *Probe: common customs and traditions, they speak the same or similar language, most of them facing the same economic issues…*

15. **For some groups of citizens, living in BiH is an important part of their identity. Others value their entity belonging more. To what extent are these important to you? Why? Is there something you find more important than both state and entity? How much is the Balkans or European identity important to you?**

16. Different ethnic groups mark different memorial days to commemorate the war victims. Can you remember any such examples? **How do you feel about such dates marked by your group? How do you feel when you hear that the other group marked such a date? Do you ever hear any messages of peace on such occasions, or do they foster further divisions? Would you support introducing a memorial day dedicated to all war victims, regardless of their ethnicity or religion?**

17. **If you were invited to a peacebuilding event, e.g., a lecture, war victim speaking out event, organized visits to different places of worship, or different atrocity sites commemorating victims belonging to ethnic group other than your own, joint actions, would you go? Would other people from your community go? Why, why not? Are there any such opportunities in your community? If yes, did you ever go?**

18. **What would have to happen so that people from your community gain trust in each other and become more united?** As individuals, what can we do to improve our relations with other religious and ethnic groups? What can we do to encourage others in our surrounding to be more open-minded?