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EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY IN THE FEDERATION OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA (2023-2030)

Gender Analysis

Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Employment Strategy in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2023 - 2030) Gender Analysis



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Bosnia and Herzegovina (2023 - 2030)
Gender Analysis

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Terminology used in this publication refers to both genders.



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
FBiH	Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
RS	Republika Srpska
Bd	Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina
EU	European Union
EC	European Commission
EUD	European Union Delegation
SAA	Stabilization and Association Agreement
GEL	Law on Gender Equality in Bosnia and Herzegovina

INTRODUCTION

The gender analysis of the Employment Strategy in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) for the period from 2023 to 2027 was conducted as part of the Action “Promoting gender equality through the EU accession process”, led by Reactor – Research in Action (North Macedonia) and implemented in collaboration with the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation (North Macedonia Office), Kosovo Women’s Network (Kosovo¹), Albanian Women’s Empowerment Network (AWEN, Albania), Association RIGHTS FOR ALL (Bosnia and Herzegovina), and the Center for Women’s Rights (Montenegro). This Action aims to enhance and expand current regional collaboration to bolster democracy, and participation, and foster an inclusive, gender-sensitive accession process. Among other things, the Action contributes to strengthening WCSO’s capacities to engage with governments, EU Delegations, and Offices in the country and the region, making all involved actors aware of the importance of gender dimensions of the EU Accession process. In particular, it aims to improve the accountability of governments in implementing commitments to gender equality and women’s rights during the EU Accession process.

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) has ratified several international treaties and adopted laws aimed at establishing gender equality and eliminating discrimination on any grounds. Yet, women in BiH are still not equal and suffer various forms of discrimination. Inequality is present in almost all areas, especially in the sphere of labor and economy. The acknowledgment, fulfillment, and safeguarding of women’s rights are marked by disparities between norms and actual circumstances, women’s underrepresentation in politics, and the unequal distribution of economic and social power. It’s important to note that the legal framework in BiH remains inconsistent, offering opportunities for gender discrimination due to disparities in laws, uneven enforcement, and inadequate monitoring of implementation.

Discrimination in employment is prohibited by the provisions outlined in the Gender Equality Act in Bosnia and Herzegovina (GEA), as well as the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination in Bosnia and Herzegovina (LPD), along with all labor laws enforced at various government levels in the country. Nonetheless, women still encounter discrimination throughout the employment process, spanning from job advertisements and recruitment to their actual work and eventual termination.²

The latest Bosnia and Herzegovina Report (the Report) compiled by the European Commission (EC) in November 2023³, sends a somewhat stronger message, urging governments to take action to ensure the implementation of gender equality standards, human rights, and enabling environment for civil society.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, a notable absence persists regarding gender analyses across various thematic areas and sectors, leaving a gap in understanding the status of women in society and gender equality, particularly within the realm of work and employment. Hence, this analysis seeks to bolster these endeavors by emphasizing the significance of gender mainstreaming in strategies and policies aimed at enhancing the country’s economy and employment sectors. It advocates for the comprehensive implementation of the BiH Gender Equality Act and other pertinent legislation to ensure gender equality in accessing and enjoying human rights.

1 This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence

2 CEDAW Alternative report (Employment, economic and social benefits)
https://pravazasve.ba/bs/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2023/11/lzvjestaj19_23web.pdf

3 https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/SWD_2023_691%20Bosnia%20and%20Herzegovina%20report.pdf

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY IN FBiH (2023-2030)

The Employment Strategy⁴ (the Strategy) was adopted by the FBiH Parliament at the end of 2023 for a seven-year period. It was developed through collaboration between the Federation Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, the International Labor Organization, and other relevant institutions. In addition to introductory notes, the employment strategy offers an analysis of the current state of the labor market in FBiH. It then outlines strategic objectives and, in the final section, specifies the operational framework for attaining the overarching goal of the Strategy, which is to enhance the prospects for dignified employment for all residents of the Federation by achieving four strategic objectives.

1. Enhance individual employability and align skills with labor market demands;
2. Encourage private sector companies to develop formal employment opportunities;
3. Enhance the integration of marginalized individuals into the labor market through the implementation of more effective active labor market policies;
4. Strengthen labor market management and increase capacity for policy implementation.

The Strategy outlines that in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, labor regulations are governed by the Labor Law, which addresses work and labor relations. Additionally, the Law on Mediation in Employment and Social Security of Unemployed Persons governs employment, outlining the rights and responsibilities of the FBiH in formulating and executing comprehensive measures to promote and improve employment conditions, fundamental principles in employment mediation, material, and social security provisions for unemployed individuals during temporary unemployment, the establishment, organization, and operations of the Federation Employment Office, public employment services of the cantons, financing of overall employment activities, and other related matters. This law stipulates that cantonal employment services are tasked with employment mediation, and it also allows for private agencies to undertake these responsibilities. The conditions and procedures for conducting employment mediation activities by private agencies are specified in the Regulation on Private Employment Mediation Agencies. Additionally, the Law on the Employment of Foreigners outlines the conditions, procedures, and methods for employing foreign citizens and stateless individuals in the Federation and other matters of importance for the employment of foreigners.

The key institutions responsible for labor and employment matters in the Federation include the Federation Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, the Federation Employment Institute, the cantonal employment services, the Fund for Professional Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Federation Administration for Inspection Affairs. The Ministry of Development, Entrepreneurship, and Crafts in the Federation, which offers incentives for specific economic sectors, also holds responsibility for employment. The ministry's activities pertain to fostering entrepreneurship and crafts, implementing innovations, and adopting modern technologies within the realm of entrepreneurship and crafts.⁵

GENDER ANALYSIS OF EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY FBiH

The fundamental question we aim to address through this analysis is whether the Strategy incorporates a gender perspective and whether it points to disparities between working-age men and women in terms of conditions, needs, participation rates, and access to resources and opportunities for development. In this regard, the Employment Strategy is expected to recognize the existing inequality between men and women and propose actionable measures to attain gender equality in the realm of employment by identifying issues and outlining

4 Employment Strategy in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2023-2030), Official Gazette of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina No. 94/23.

5 Employment Strategy in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2023-2030) - General legal and institutional framework in the field of labor and employment in the Federation.

strategies to enhance the employability of women.

The strategy acknowledges that employment is a significant challenge, **particularly for specific demographic groups such as youth, low-skilled people, women, and Roma**, and relies, among other policies and strategic documents, on the 2021-2023 Guidelines of the Program of Economic Reforms in the field of employment and the labor market, which addresses high unemployment and inactivity, **particularly among youth, women, long-term unemployed individuals, and those most vulnerable in the labor market**. The guidelines consider measures that also refer to discrimination in access to the labor market.

Therefore, the Strategy primarily concentrates on gender-disaggregated statistical data. These data aim to highlight disparities between women and men regarding the activity levels of the working-age population, employment and unemployment rates, inactivity, education and training policies, and the policy of paying women for work.

The use of statistical data in the Strategy helps in understanding the position and role of women in the labor market, particularly when comparing data collected over specific periods. In general, gender-disaggregated statistical data can facilitate more effective planning of strategies aimed at achieving desired outcomes, ultimately contributing to the successful implementation of the Strategy in the future.

Nevertheless, it is apparent that the Strategy lacks an assessment of gender impact and fails to introduce other gender-sensitive indicators. It also does not provide a comprehensive solution to eliminate the entrenched inequality between women and men, nor does it establish specific measures to address the identified issues.

Regarding demographic trends, the Strategy estimates that Bosnia and Herzegovina is home to slightly over 3.5 million people, with women constituting 50.9% of the population. The percentage of women residing in BiH, estimated to have less than 2.2 million inhabitants in 2019, remains unchanged. The strategy acknowledges significant gender equality in educational trends, as evidenced by the high gross enrollment rates in primary and secondary schools in FBiH, standing at 97% and 72.9%, respectively. However, the Strategy fails to list specific indicators or data that influenced the conclusion regarding significant gender equality. While there is no reason to doubt the accuracy of the statement regarding the overall number and ratio of women and men concerning educational trends, some examples highlight gender disparities in access to different types of secondary schools. For instance, approximately 75% of students in vocational schools are male, whereas other types of secondary schools tend to have a higher proportion of female students.⁶

The gender-specific education indicators for the year 2020 reveal that 23.0% of women and 20.3% of men are classified as youth not employed, engaged in education, or undergoing training. Additionally, 4.6% of women and 4.8% of men are attributed to early school dropout rates, while 34.0% of women and 23.2% of men are reported to have attained higher education achievements.⁷

It is important to note that within the education sector, the Strategy outlines plans to expand preschool facilities through policy interventions, recognizing it as a crucial step to boost women's participation in the workforce. In 2019, only 14% of four-year-olds had access to preschool education, a figure significantly lower than the European Union (EU) average of 92.9%. This disparity is attributed to the insufficient investment in this form of education. Low access to preschool education is especially pronounced in rural areas and among lower-income families.

The following example illustrates the need for introducing additional gender indicators in the Employment Strategy. The Strategy highlights that access to education remains a challenge for the Roma population. It notes

6 "Women and Men in BiH", Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2022.

7 "Women and Men in BiH", Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2022.

that 71.2% have not completed elementary school, while a quarter (25.1%) have only attained lower vocational education, and 12.8% have achieved secondary vocational education. Additionally, it indicates that only 0.5% of Roma individuals have the opportunity to obtain a university degree. However, the provided data does not indicate whether there is a significant equality or inequality among Roma women and men regarding access to the education system. This information is based on the publication of the Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina from 2018 entitled: Women and Men.

In 2022, according to the data presented in the Strategy, the activity rate was 47.9%, the employment rate was 39.6%, and the unemployment rate was 17.2%. The male activity rate was 61.1%, while the female activity rate was 35.3%. The same applies to the employment rate, which was 52.5% for men and 27.4% for women. The unemployment rate for men was 14.1% and for women 22.4%.

In the first quarter of 2023, the activity rate was 47.5%, the employment rate was 40.3%, and the unemployment rate was 15.1%. The male activity rate was 60.6%, while the female activity rate was 35.0%. The same applies to the employment rate, which was 53.2% for men and 28.1% for women. The unemployment rate for men was 12.3% and for women 19.8%. **Viewed by gender, there are almost twice as many active men compared to the number of active women.**

The employment strategy acknowledges gender inequality and notes that gender disparities in activity rates among the working-age population are also narrowed by higher vocational education, albeit only among adults.

In 2019, the activity rate of adult women aged 25-64 with secondary education was 48.9%, compared to 68.7% for adult men with the same level of education, while the activity rate of women with higher education was 84.3%, compared to 85.4% for men. Conversely, among young people, the gender gap in the activity of the working-age population is narrower for those with secondary school education (15.8 percentage points) but significantly widens with higher education, reaching 27.7%.

The employment rate shows continuous growth from 2020 to 2022. However, the Strategy highlights that while this positive trend is reflected in the employment rates of men, the rates for women remain significantly lower in comparison. Below is a summary table illustrating the employment rate by gender during the specified period.⁸

	2020	2021	2022
MEN	50,2%	51%	52,5%
WOMEN	25,5%	25,2%	27,4%
TOTAL	37,5%	37,8%	39,6%

Similar to the trends observed in the activity rates of the working-age population, the Strategy acknowledges that gender gaps in employment diminish at higher levels of vocational education. For instance, among adult women aged 25 to 64, there was an 8.5 percentage point difference compared to adult men, with the proportion of employed individuals in the population standing at 73% for women compared to 81.5% for men.

⁸ Table 5. Employment Strategy of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In terms of the unemployment rate by gender, the Strategy cites official data from the Federal Employment Agency for the year 2022. Out of the total average number of unemployed persons (289,912), 119,041 are men and 170,871 are women, indicating that women constitute a higher proportion of the total number of unemployed individuals at 58.94%. As of the end of March 2023, there were 282,071 registered unemployed persons. In the same month, women accounted for 167,089 of the total number of unemployed persons, or 59.24%, which remains higher than the count of 114,982 unemployed men.

The strategy emphasizes the need to revamp specific programs within active employment policies for certain workforce segments, including youth, women, long-term unemployed individuals, and those with lower or no qualifications to better prepare them for labor, employment, and self-employment. These groups encounter significantly diminished employment prospects and heightened risks of long-term unemployment or migration abroad. However, the strategy falls short in defining gender-sensitive outcomes and outputs to attain these objectives. Additionally, the Strategy lacks gender-disaggregated unemployment rate statistics for vulnerable and other groups, such as youth, low-skilled individuals, and Roma.

While it is acknowledged that there is no systematic information available on employment outcomes by ethnicity, there are indications suggesting that individuals from the Roma community encounter additional barriers in obtaining employment. It is particularly important to emphasize that Roma women face discrimination both in the wider society because they belong to the Roma ethnic group and within the Roma community because of their gender. This dual discrimination is further compounded by the social exclusion faced by Roma women, resulting in very limited access to education, employment, and healthcare, rendering them particularly vulnerable to various forms of gender-based violence.⁹ We should not overlook that aside from women’s employability, another pressing challenge highlighted in the Strategy is the employment of these groups. The Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to collect gender-specific data and data on unemployed individuals from national minorities through employment service records. This enables us to track, for instance, the unemployment rates of Roma women and men over a four-year period.¹⁰

UNEMPLOYED ROMA WOMEN	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
	1505	1635	1678	1749	1799
UNEMPLOYED ROMA MEN	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
	1699	1776	1806	1872	1909

The employment strategy identifies women and young people as the least active participants in the labor market in FBiH. It attributes this trend to women’s primary responsibility for family care and household duties, while young people are often engaged in education and training.

Key data indicating the aforementioned issue can be found in the study titled “The Impact of Gender Division of

⁹ At the Thematic Session in 2018, the Joint Commission for Human Rights of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina (PABiH) stressed the need to integrate gender equality in the drafting of strategic documents and action plans for Roma in the field of health, housing, employment and education, and change the methodology for drafting strategic documents and introduce mandatory monitoring of their implementation, <https://www.bolja-buducnost.org/index.php/bs/o-nama/dokumenti/send/2-dokumenti/36-platforma-za-unapredenje-prava-i-polozaja-romkinja-u-bosni-i-hercegovini>]

¹⁰ “Women and Men in BiH”, Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2022.

Family and Household Responsibilities on the Professional Lives of Working Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina.” Data from this study show that in 93.8% of relationships all or most of the house chores are done by women. When it comes to caring for children, again women do all or most of the work around children, more precisely in as many as 80.8% of surveyed couples women take care of children. This research found that 67% of women, when faced with a choice between work and family, almost always or more often prioritize family¹¹.

Similar to employment and unemployment, the level of vocational qualification inversely correlates with the rate of inactivity. Low-skilled individuals are three times more likely to be inactive compared to those with higher vocational qualifications. The strategy highlights the trend of women’s inactivity in the labor market over the past decade, suggesting a failure of family-oriented policies without further elaboration.

The BiH Agency for Statistics reported that in 2020, less than half of women (42%) with children under the age of 6 were employed full-time, indicating a slight increase in the proportion of employed women with young children compared to previous years. The strategy notes a lack of coordination between active and passive labor market policies, as well as the absence of a strategy aimed at integrating women who are inactive due to childcare responsibilities.

CONCLUSION

Bosnia and Herzegovina remains a deeply patriarchal society where stereotypes regarding the division of roles between men and women persist across all facets of life, with a woman’s role in family care being paramount. Challenges in balancing family and professional life, inadequate support from both family and the business environment, along with societal norms, serve as barriers to women’s employment and career advancement. Young people, women, people with disabilities, insufficiently educated people, and people living in less developed areas are more likely to be unemployed than others. Policies aimed at equal pay for women are also essential for enhancing their workforce participation and achieving a better balance between work and family responsibilities.

Examining the gender aspect of the Strategy, we observe that labor force participation has remained stagnant over the past decade, as evidenced by high rates of inactivity among women due to family responsibilities and youth due to disincentives and limited employment prospects in FBiH. The improvement in activity, employment, and unemployment rates observed in recent years is primarily influenced by significant demographic factors such as population aging and migration, rather than by enhanced labor market opportunities.


The use of statistical data in the Strategy helps in understanding the position and role of women in the labor market, particularly when comparing data collected over specific periods. However, it is apparent that the Strategy lacks an assessment of gender impact and fails to introduce other gender-sensitive indicators. There are no specific measures targeting women to address social exclusion. The strategy highlights the importance of addressing inactive women, particularly those with low education levels, women over 50, and those in rural areas, as well as long-term unemployed individuals, individuals with limited labor market access, young people transitioning from public care, and other “discouraged” groups.

The Strategy emphasizes the need to revamp certain programs within active employment policies for specific workforce categories, including young people, women, the long-term unemployed, and individuals with lower or no qualifications, to enhance their prospects for employment and mitigate the risk of long-term unemployment or emigration. However, it fails to delineate gender-sensitive outcomes and outputs to achieve these objectives. Moreover, the Strategy does not provide gender-specific statistics on unemployment rates for vulnerable groups, such as youth, individuals with limited skills, and Roma.


In the Strategy, the issue of female unemployment is perceived as a persistent, long-standing challenge. The Strategy missed the chance to incorporate gender-sensitive indicators for each of the defined strategic objectives and to prioritize women when implementing specific measures.

11 Representation of women in leadership positions in Bosnia and Herzegovina:
<https://pravazasve.ba/bs/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2022/03/Prava-za-sve-Rodna-analiza-N.pdf>


RECOMMENDATIONS




Ensure regular adoption of employment strategies with an integrated gender perspective and gender-sensitive measures, particularly taking into account the needs of members of marginalized groups.




Establish a regular system of collecting detailed statistics disaggregated by gender at all statistical offices, especially in the field of employment, Salaries, and benefits, by individual sectors of employment, professional development and promotion, and participation in management and governance.



When drafting policies and laws in the areas of labor, employment, and the social system, it is mandatory to assess the impact of these policies and laws on women. New policies must include a system of mandatory, regular monitoring and reporting on their implementation.



Labor and employment laws and policies must respond to the need to strike a balance between work and private life for parents and custodians, and in particular to recognize the need to invest in childcare facilities and the like.



Establish regular and systematic mechanisms to monitor the Strategy's implementation in practice, involving civil society in creating gender-sensitive intersectional indicators and/or enhancing monitoring metrics to accurately gauge the effectiveness of measures in assisting marginalized groups.

