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2021

ANNUAL REPORT

Sarajevo Open Centre

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# ABOUT SOC

Sarajevo Open Centre's activities are aimed at promoting human rights, especially the status and human rights of LGBTI people and women in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is achieved by interpreting, defending, and representing authentic experiences of those who suffer unequal treatment or whose human rights have been violated, as well as by advocating for legal, political, economic, social, and cultural changes in all areas of life.

Sarajevo Open Centre has been successfully working on protecting the rights of women and LGBTI people during the past 15 years. Our activities aim to ensure provision of legal and psychosocial support and counseling to LGBTIQ people; cooperation with government institutions at all levels of government to ensure improvement and implementation of public policies and legislation relating to protection and promotion of the human rights of LGBTI people and women; assistance and support in the implementation of educational and informational programs and activities on issues relating to protection and promotion of the human rights of LGBTI people and women intended for the representatives of institutions, civil society organizations, media and citizens; support in further development and building the capacity of civil society organizations and informal groups that focus on protection and promotion of the human rights of LGBTI persons, women, but also other vulnerable groups and minorities; conducting research, publishing print and electronic publications, media campaigns and art activities related to protection and promotion of the human rights of LGBTI people and women.

Furthermore, Sarajevo Open Centre coordinates the Initiative for Monitoring the European Integrations of BiH, an informal coalition comprising forty civil society organizations, which contributes to the monitoring of reforms, oversees the implementation of policies, laws and standards of the EU by focusing on democracy, rule of law, and human rights.

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# INTRODUCTION

The Annual Report on the activities of Sarajevo Open Centre in 2021 contains core information on the organization itself, key achievements structured based on the organization's 2021-2023 Strategic Framework: its strategic goals and objectives, financial information, communication, development of the organization and future focus and plans.

The Report lays out only key successes and performances of the organization throughout the year while the comprehensive account of the results achieved can be found in the Results Assessment Framework document.

We hope that this Report provides an overview of the efforts of SOC and its position within the civil society sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

# KEY ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

## I ESTABLISHED LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS THROUGHOUT BiH

### THE RIGHT TO PRIVATE AND FAMILY LIFE IS ADVOCATED FOR WITH THE RELEVANT LEGISLATIVE STAKEHOLDERS

- 8 members of the Parliament of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina support adoption of a separate law regulating same-sex partnership.
- Institutional dialogue on legal status of the same-sex partnership initiated in Republika Srpska.
- Unique research on paternity-leave related obstacles initiated.

During 2021, **SOC took an active role in four meetings of the FBiH Government's intersectoral working group established by the government to identify an adequate solution for legal recognition of same-sex partnership.** With our assistance, knowledge and expertise, the working group has conducted an analysis of regulations based on which same-sex couples can exercise their rights stemming from the European Convention on Human Rights and verdicts of the European Court of Human Rights. We will continue to monitor the process aimed at submitting an official conclusion to the FBiH Government on legislation that should be adopted to ensure prevention of discrimination of same-sex couples in FBiH. This process should be followed by the appointment of a working group tasked with producing such legislative proposals to the relevant legislative bodies.

In addition, we have continued advocacy activities aimed at the legal recognition of same-sex partnership in Republika Srpska and **initiated a dialogue with officials from the RS Ministry of Family, Youth and Sports, officials from the Ministry of European Integrations and International Cooperation, and an MP in the RS National Assembly.**

**Moreover, comprehensive research on obstacles to using paternity leave in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been initiated.** The aim of the research is to examine the process of taking paternity leave i.e., access to paternity leave in BiH. It also aims to establish what are the legislative, administrative, economic and wider social obstacles fathers face when exercising this right, if any. In addition to analyzing the legal framework regulating parental leave, we explored administrative procedure for parental leave, and analyzed collected responses from 500 fathers who got a child between 2016 and 2021 in a survey conducted by a polling agency as well as responses of eight fathers who used a paternity leave during this period through focus groups discussions. The results of this analysis will be published in 2022 and will serve as a basis for **creating system and comprehensive recommendations and policy solutions that will accelerate the process of closing the gender gap in childcare.**

## RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION, BODILY AWARENESS, INTEGRITY AND AUTONOMY ARE RESEARCHED AND PRESENTED TO THE STAKEHOLDERS WITH CONCRETE LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY PROPOSALS

- A group of trans persons and parents was established, empowered, and included in the advocacy process aimed at legal recognition of gender identity and coverage of gender affirmation costs.
- A document containing models of legal recognition of gender identity based on legal provisions currently in force in BiH, which will be used by the advocacy group in the consultative meetings and working sessions with relevant institutions.



In 2021, as a part of USAID INSPIRE program, SOC commenced **the implementation of a project aimed at adequate legal gender recognition and ensuring health coverage of the costs of gender affirmation therapy in Bosnia and Herzegovina**. The project includes trans people and their parents in active advocacy for legislative recognition of gender identity, covering costs of gender affirmation process through the public health insurance system, raising awareness in both local communities and general public. The goal of the advocacy for legal gender change is aimed at developing legislation that will systematically and comprehensively regulate the procedure of changing sex markers and unique identification number in the personal identification documents based on trans person's personal request and the right to self-determination, without a preceding request for a medical intervention.

Although SOC produced 3 models of the law on gender identity in 2016, 2022 will be the key year for **targeted advocacy for legislative and policy regulation of legal gender recognition as well as health coverage of gender affirmation process, which will be conducted in close cooperation with representatives of the ministries of health, health institutes, ministries of interior and BiH Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees**.



## FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION, EXPRESSION AND ASSEMBLY ARE SAFEGUARDED AND ADVANCED THROUGH TARGETED AND COORDINATED ADVOCACY ACTIONS

- Amendments to the Draft Law on Peaceful Assembly in the Canton of Sarajevo with special focus on harmonization with international standards and addressing obstacles for (LGBTI) protests and assembly organizers submitted.
- SOC involved in submitting comments on the Draft Law on Peaceful Assembly in Canton 10.
- Freedom of assembly issues related to LGBTI persons, activists and organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina addressed through numerous reports and submissions.

At the end of 2020, Canton Sarajevo Ministry of Interior invited professional public and all interested organizations and citizens to participate in a public consultation on the Draft Law on Peaceful Public Assembly in Sarajevo Canton and Draft Law on Public Events and Other Forms of Assembly in the Canton of Sarajevo. SOC accepted the invitation **and submitted a proposal of amendments to the Draft Law on Peaceful Public Assembly in Sarajevo Canton.** Our comments and suggestions are intended to contribute to an easier exercise of freedom of assembly by the citizens of Sarajevo Canton while assisting the relevant institutions in protection of the freedom of assembly and promotion of this form of democratic communication between institutions and citizens.

In 2021, however, this process was set back and the working group tasked with producing amendments to the two laws created a new draft that was not made available to us despite our efforts to ensure that our comments and suggestions be considered as a part of our contribution to the working group's task, both through addressing the shortcomings we have identified in practice and assisting in establishing a stable foundation for adequate protection and respect of the freedom of assembly as well as improvement of cooperation between BiH civil society and the institutions of the Canton of Sarajevo.

According to the information currently available to SOC, the new draft, which has not entered other legislative phases yet, and whose provisions may be aimed at further restrictions of the freedom of assembly, will not be discussed

until after the upcoming elections. However, SOC shall continue monitoring this process and react adequately both in the decision-making process regarding the amendments and by using other tools and approaches available to civil society organizations.

In the meantime, during 2021, we held a number of meetings with the ministries of interior of the Herzegovina - Neretva Canton and Canton 10 and offered our expert knowledge in producing amendments to the legislation regulating the freedom of public assembly in case such laws become part of the agenda of these two cantons' governments. **The Ministry of Interior of the Canton 10 invited us to submit comments on the Draft Law on Peaceful Assembly in the Canton 10, which we did at the beginning of 2022.**

## PROTECTION FROM VIOLENCE, INEQUALITY AND DISCRIMINATION IS ENSURED AND FOUNDATIONS FOR EQUAL TREATMENT OF ALL ARE LAID OUT THROUGH CONCRETE LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY PROPOSALS AND ADVOCATED TO RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS

- Guidelines for Preventing Sexual and Gender-Based Harassment and Harassment on the Grounds of Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Sex Characteristics at the Academy of Performing Arts in Sarajevo developed and adopted.
- Amendments to the FBiH Criminal Code aimed at harmonizing this law with the Istanbul Convention and regulating hate speech on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity developed.

In cooperation with the Academy of Performing Arts in Sarajevo, and based on the Guidelines for Preventing Sexual and Gender-Based Harassment that was developed by the Atlantic Initiative in cooperation with the Academy, SOC further **developed Guidelines for Preventing Sexual and Gender-Based Harassment and Harassment on the Grounds of Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Sex Characteristics.**

In the developed guidelines we defined/added recognition, prevention and addressing harassment based on sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics, key terms related to sexual orientation, gender identity, sex characteristics, and introduced a possibility of appointment of external advisors for prevention of sexual and gender-based harassment. This is only one of the segments of cooperation between SOC and the Academy that will continue in the future.

During 2021, SOC **developed amendments to the Criminal Code of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, harmonizing it with the Istanbul Convention and regulating hate speech on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity.**

Although we repeatedly attempted to establish a stronger cooperation with the FBiH Ministry of Justice in 2021 to contribute to the activities of the working group tasked with developing amendments to the Criminal Code of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, we did not succeed in those attempts. However, jointly with other organizations that work on achieving adequate regulation of gender based violence, we will continue acting throughout the legislative process and insist on amendments aimed at an improved legislative framework for combatting various types of violence against women and appropriate sanctions: **genital mutilation of women; sexual harassment; psychological violence; considering the family status of perpetrators of sexual offences as an aggravating instead of mitigating circumstance; that statute of limitations for prosecution of criminal offences against sexual freedom is counted from the day the victim turns 18; clearly defining consent within the provisions relating to rape.**

## II STRENGTHENED AGENTS FOR CHANGE THROUGHOUT BIH

MEMBERS OF LGBTI COMMUNITY, WOMEN AND MEN ARE INFORMED, EMPOWERED, ENGAGED AND SELF-ADVOCATE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND EQUALITY BASED ON FEMINIST PRINCIPLES

- 500 LGBTIQ people and supporters visited our 21 events (with all public health measures observed).
- Over 300 visitors at Kvirhana (with all public health measures observed).
- 38 people from LGBTIQ community received peer counseling services.
- 29 people from the LGBTIQ community received some form of legal advice.
- 8 members of the LGBTIQ community undertook further institutional steps.
- 5 strategic lawsuits before BiH courts.



While LGBTIQ people remain the focus of our direct psycho-social and legal services within the regular programs on monthly/constant basis, we are also focusing on cis men and women in terms of provision of key information on their rights and position as well as contribution to the quality of life in terms of equality and equity.

From June 25 to June 27 in Sarajevo and on July 2 and 3 in Tuzla, SOC and Tuzla Open Center (TOC) organized a **new festival of queer art – Kvirhana**. The slogan of the festival 'Where the family is' was selected since many LGBTIQ people have been rejected by their families because of their sexuality and/or gender identity and found a new family in the LGBTIQ community. In cooperation with TOC, we created a safe space where LGBTIQ persons may not only be who they really are, but also celebrate their identity, as well as a meeting and freedom place for all those who support LGBTIQ+ persons or question the norms related to sex, gender, or sexuality. The 3-day festival included a series of movie screenings, workshop, performance, exhibition, publication promotion, panel discussions, and accompanying evening events.

This marks the beginning of a new festival that relies on the tradition of Merlinka in Sarajevo and provides the LGBTIQ community in Bosnia and Herzegovina with a new, local and distinctive experience, not only in terms of culture and activism but also a physical space. In the future, the festival will keep this tradition, and will be held during the month of June – the LGBT pride month.

SOC continued its longstanding work by providing legal aid and legal representation to lesbians, gays, bisexual, transgender, and intersex persons before the institutions and judiciary of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In 2021, **29 members of the LGBTI community requested some form of legal advice while 8 persons undertook further institutional steps in addressing the violation of their human rights**. We continued providing legal representation before BiH courts and are currently leading **5 lawsuits related to discrimination in access to socio-economic rights for same-sex partners, discrimination in the provision of services, or inciting to discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity**. In 2022, we expect two new lawsuits, with one being related to the lack of legal gender recognition as a basis for the legal change of sex markers in the personal document, while the other concerns discrimination in accessing the freedom of assembly.

In December 2021, in order to address the pressing question of recognizing sexual harassment at higher education institutions, SOC organized a **training about sexual harassment for students**, offering information on how to face harassment and what steps they can take in such cases.

## HUMAN RIGHTS, LGBTI AND WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS, INITIATIVES AND ACTIVISTS THROUGHOUT BIH ARE EQUIPPED TO PROVIDE SERVICES AND ADVOCACY AT LOCAL, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL LEVELS

- Oqueerno collective, a non-formal group of LGBTIQ activists in Banja Luka, with SOC's support, continues its activities and successfully organizes events for LGBTIQ community in Banja Luka.
- 5 organizations strengthened and equipped to provide peer-to-peer and psychosocial support to LGBTI persons in Banja Luka, Mostar, Prijedor, Tuzla and Zenica.
- Gender Action Plans that include gender equality measures and guidelines for working with trans and intersex persons adopted in 3 cantons: Bosnia-Podrinje Canton, Tuzla Canton and Zenica-Doboj Canton.
- Civil society sector empowered to advocate for the freedom of assembly and monitor the implementation of recommendations from the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in Bosnia and Herzegovina.



In order to enhance LGBTIQ activism in local communities and to support local initiatives, **Oqueerno collective was established in Banja Luka** in 2020, with the support of Sarajevo Open Centre. *Oqueerno* events that continued throughout 2021 created a safe space for the LGBTIQ community in Banja Luka and its surroundings. With the support from Sarajevo Open Centre, Oqueerno organized 4 events (2 in 2021) that gathered over 100 persons, while over 80 people from the LGBTIQ community were present at the last event. Events held so far included workshops on coming out, community needs, discussions on topics such as featuring LGBTIQ in cinematography, film screenings and organizing parties. It should be emphasized that Oqueerno collective has been begun cooperating with other LGBTIQ organizations and groups, which thus far resulted in their cooperation with Youth Center Kwart and BiH pride Organizing Committee. In addition to SOC's support, they enjoy the support of Banja Luka Social Centre (BASOC) that made its facilities available for their events.

The focus of our activities in 2021 was **regionalization of LGBTI inclusive psychosocial support and access to mental health services in Bosnia and Herzegovina**. Its aim is to create an environment in which LGBTI persons will be encouraged and supported in accessing mental health systems which provide inclusive and sensitized services, as well as to strengthen and widen institutional network and that of civil society organizations that provide psychosocial support to LGBTI persons in BiH. Organization *Be OK* from Banja Luka, *Sensus* from Mostar, Youth Center Kwart from Prijedor, Tuzla Open Center from Tuzla and Center for Women's Rights from Zenica have been equipped with knowledge and skills, and as a result, started to provide free peer-to-peer and psychosocial support to LGBTI persons in their communities.

Based on the identified needs for education, strengthening and ensuring additional resources primarily for experts in mental health and social welfare, but also LGBTI persons and their families, SOC published a handbook *From Support to Acceptance: a Handbook for Inclusive Psychological, Psychotherapeutical and Other Forms of Comprehensive Support to LGBTI people*.

In 2021, Bosnian-Podrinje Canton adopted **Gender Action Plan** that incorporates measures aimed at establishing gender equality and measures aimed at ensuring a better treatment of LGBTI people such as developing guidelines for healthcare workers on working with transgender and intersex people. Those measures are part of the Gender Action Plans developed for Tuzla and Zenica-Doboje Canton that have also been adopted in 2021, at the proposal of Sara-

jevo Open Centre. Our partner organizations Center of Women's Rights Zenica and Women's Association Seka from Goražde were engaged in the activities of the working group tasked with developing those documents by advocating for the above-mentioned Guidelines.

Sarajevo Open Centre organized **education for civil society representatives who work on issues related to the freedom of assembly** and initiated an informal coalition comprising Sarajevo Open Centre (SOC), Association for Democratic Initiatives (ADI), Civil Right Defenders (CRD), Transparency International BiH (TI BiH), Organizing Committee of BiH Pride March. The goal of this coalition are different forms of joint activities of the civil sector on exercising the right to peaceful assembly, especially on amending current legislation regulating this issue.

In 2021, members of **BiH Civil Society Initiative for UPR were empowered to jointly conduct monitoring and reporting on the protection of human rights and advocating** to the institutions and international organizations for their improved protection. Several meetings were held, a handbook was developed for CSOs that will report on the fourth UPR cycle as well as UPR national online monitor - an interactive tool to be used by civil society organizations, institutions and other relevant actors as a comprehensive mechanism for monitoring of Universal Periodic Review (UPR) development in Bosnia and Herzegovina by reviewing the received recommendations and their implementation.



## STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS ESTABLISHED WITH PROMINENT ACTORS ACROSS DIFFERENT SECTORS OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPHERE

- Memorandum of cooperation with the Academy of Performing Arts in Sarajevo signed
- 6 local companies received Excelling in Diversity certificate



By signing the **Memorandum of Cooperation, Sarajevo Open Centre established a formal cooperation with the Academy of Performing Arts in Sarajevo**. This cooperation resulted in the development of the **Guidelines for Preventing Sexual and Gender-Based Harassment and Harassment on the Grounds of Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Sex Characteristics**, which have been adopted by the Academy. In addition, Sarajevo Open Centre plans to organize education and training on prevention of sexual harassment for teaching staff and students of this higher education institution and discrimination in the future.

In cooperation with the **Faculty of Sports and Physical Education of the University of Sarajevo**, we have held a lecture on 'Women in Sport' which was delivered by Azra Numanović, the secretary of a women's football club - SFK 2000 Sarajevo and Samira Hurem, a coach.

SOC also **cooperated with the association Equilibrium – School of sport balance** in the implantation of *Inspire Change* project, which was aimed at promoting gender equality in sports and social inclusion of migrant children through sport activities.

As a part of Excelling in Diversity project, which was implemented by a coalition formed by Sarajevo Open Centre, Citizens' Association for Promotion of Roma education "Otaharin", Foundation 787, and People in Need Bosnia and Herzegovina, 6 local companies were certified in 2021: Vienna insurance, McCann, Klika.ba, Smart Accounting Union, Orbio Beauty BiH, and SSST - Sarajevo School of Science and Technology. Biona company has participated in the marking of 16 Days of Activism by sharing content related to gender-based violence created in cooperation with Sarajevo Open Centre.

A special importance of 2021 lies in **establishing a contact with religious communities** aimed at initiating a dialogue on gender equality and LGBTI rights. Initial meetings were already held with representatives of the Roman Catholic Church in BiH, while a set of meetings with other religious communities is planned for 2022.

## DUTY BEARERS AND RELEVANT PROFESSIONALS ARE INFORMED, ENGAGED AND EQUIPPED WITH NECESSARY KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS TO CONTRIBUTE TO BUILDING AND MAINTAINING THE INCLUSIVE HUMAN RIGHTS APPROACH WITHIN THE BIH INSTITUTIONS AND SOCIETY

- 20 lawyers attended SOC's Informal Law Academy and are equipped to adequately protect LGBTI people, women and other minorities from human rights violations.
- 4 contact persons designated at cantonal prosecutor's offices in Mostar, Trebinje, Tuzla and Zenica.
- 20 police officers and 28 prosecutors, judges and lawyers trained on human rights of LGBTI people and related protection mechanisms.
- 27 experts in 10 mental health care centers trained about inclusive psychosocial support for LGBTI people.
- 5 members of FBiH cantonal assemblies informed about HPV vaccination program.



In 2021, an Informal Law Academy was held and attended by 20 lawyers from various parts of BiH. The Academy consisted of four modules: Hate speech and hate crimes; Freedom of peaceful assembly, Anti-discrimination, and Exercising and protection of human rights and freedoms of minorities. A handbook on human rights for lawyers was also developed, thus making mechanisms for legal representation in cases of human rights violations in BiH.

A significant success in working with professionals from BiH judiciary institutions was achieved. Cooperation to date and continuous education have resulted in the **appointment of 4 contact persons in prosecutor's offices in Mostar, Trebinje, Tuzla and Zenica for all LGBTI people** who may need assistance in reporting hate crimes based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity. In 2021, a set of trainings was held for police officers from Sarajevo and Tuzla cantons. As a result, **20 police officers increased their knowledge by 80% in peaceful assembly issues**, national legislation, international standards, best practices from the region, and BiH experience in these spheres. Trainings were held for prosecutors and judges about LGBTI related human rights and relevant protection mechanisms. A total of 28 persons who attended the trainings demonstrated an increase in knowledge by 90%.

**27 professionals from public institutions that provide psycho-social protection**, namely mental health centers from Čelić, Čelinac, Kladanj, Laktaši, Maglaj, Mostar, Tuzla, Zavidovići, Zenica and Živinice, as well as social services centers from Banovići, Banja Luka, Breza, Doboje, Kalesija, Kladanj, Maglaj, Prnjavor, Teočak, Tuzla, Vareš and Zenica were trained in providing inclusive psycho-social support and access to mental health services for LGBTI people in their communities.

At a one-day event held in October 2021, **5 members of cantonal assemblies in the Federation** of BiH were **informed about the HPV vaccination program** and the importance of ensuring access to HPV vaccines for both women and men.

### III STRENGTHENING HUMAN RIGHTS VALUES, EQUALITY AND INCLUSION IN BH SOCIETY AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE

#### THE PUBLIC IS INFORMED AND ENGAGED IN THE PROMOTION OF VALUES, STANDARDS AND CONCRETE ACTIONS FOR ADVANCEMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

- 3 media campaigns focused on promoting the freedom of assembly, the rights of transgender persons in BiH and regulating sexual harassment through criminal codes of BiH, implemented and reached 332,340 people.
- 253 media outputs on lgbti.ba and soc.ba websites.



Sarajevo Open Centre successfully implemented **three media campaigns in 2021**.

**Campaign on freedom of assembly** comprised infographics and reports featuring the current legislative framework relating to freedom of assembly in BiH and recommendations for improving the current practice. The campaign presented the gist and key messages and recommendations of the following Sarajevo Open Centre's publications: 'Price of the Protests: Practice of Institutions Competent for Freedom of Assembly in BiH' and Freedom of Assembly in a Labyrinth of Laws: Analysis of BiH Legislation Regulating the Freedom of Assembly'.

To mark the International Transgender Day of Visibility, SOC implemented a social network **campaign on trans persons' rights in BiH** in March 2021. The campaign was aimed at raising awareness about the problems faced by trans persons. The campaign comprised several videos and visuals explaining trans identities, main terminology and problems trans people face. Trans people and their parents were included in this campaign as well as trans friendly healthcare workers who shared their experience.

Based on the **accounts of sexual violence** posted on the Facebook page 'I did not ask for it', we have realized that many victims of sexual violence fear to share their experience or ask their parents for help, if they're underage. Even when they ask for help, it is met with a lack of understanding. This has inspired us to **produce a video for parents**, which provides information on what to do in case your child experiences violence, how to react and what is the best way to help.

In 2021, a **total of 253 articles were published on our websites lgbti.ba and soc.ba** to inform the general public about the activities of Sarajevo Open Centre, events, activities, problems and needs relating to LGBTI and women's rights, activism and culture. Apart from this, we have regularly published reactions, articles and publications that follow the activities of the Initiative for Monitoring the European Integrations of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the response of the civil society to the level of progress BiH made towards it EU integration on the **eu-monitoring.ba** website.

## ORGANIZED AND COORDINATED JOINT ACTIONS AND RESPONSES OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY AND ACTIVISTS TO THE CHANGES IN THE FIELD OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS IN BIH

Sarajevo Open Centre continued having a coordinating role in the activities of several networks: the **Initiative for Monitoring the European Integrations of BiH**, **BiH Civil Society Initiative for UPR**, **Coalition for the Fight Against Hate Speech and Hate Crimes**, and **Excelling in Diversity**.

SOC also continued being an active member of **BiH Women's Network and Initiative of Women Citizens for Constitutional Reform**, and provided active support to an informal initiative "I did not ask for it".

**Initiative for Monitoring the European Integrations of BiH** continued its activities aimed at contributing to the process of monitoring reforms, implementation of policies, laws and EU standards. We have published the **Alternative Report on the Application of Bosnia and Herzegovina for the European Union Membership: Political Criteria**, which offered a perspective of the civil society on the progress made. Apart from this report, the Initiative published two policy briefs, and continued to inform the general public on topics related to the EU integration/reforms processes and general political situation in the country by publishing articles and open letters.

**BiH Civil Society Initiative for UPR**, continued its joint activities related to reporting and contribution of the civil society to the process of monitoring the implementation of recommendations from the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). At the beginning of 2021, a large multi-stakeholder conference on civil society organizations' participation and accountability of the institutions for the UPR was held. Two publications were issued, and a series of informative meetings were held with the aim of strengthening the capacity of the Coalition members of the UPR Initiative. These activities were conducted with an aim to ensure an efficient protection of human rights by raised monitoring, reporting and advocating skills and knowledge.

SOC and its partner organizations Tuzla Open Centre, Youth Center Kwart from Prijedor and 2021 BiH Pride March Organizing Committee jointly organized activities that marked the International Transgender Day of Visibility (March 31<sup>st</sup>) and International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia (IDA-HOBIT – May 17<sup>th</sup>).

**Women's Network BiH** has supported the SOC's initiative to abolish so-called "pink tax" - tax on personal hygiene products (sanitary pads, tampons for women and diapers for children), and issued a joint statement in the case of the inadequate decision of the Canton Sarajevo Prosecutor's office in a rape case, demanding that the rape be prosecuted as a sexual intercourse without victim's consent, as well as drawing attention to inadequate procedure in the process. SOC also had an active role in the '**Let's Share the Responsibility Equally**' initiative that advocates amendments to the Election Law of BiH that would ensure more gender parity in legislative bodies.

**Coalition for the Fight Against Hate Speech and Hate Crimes** reacted to the attack on the people on the move in Bihac, demanding that this attack be qualified as a hate crime.

**Excelling in Diversity** coalition organized an activity titled "Walk in my shoes", exposing civil society activists and citizens to audio recordings played in a closed booth, thus allowing them to directly experience negative situations that LGBTIQ persons face daily in the public space. This was done in an ethical manner.

## RELEVANT, EVIDENCE-BASED AND ACCURATE INFORMATION ON THE STATE OF HUMAN RIGHTS, EXISTING LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK, AS WELL AS LIVED REALITIES OF LGBTI PERSONS, WOMEN AND MEN IN BIH, COLLECTED, PRODUCED AND PUBLISHED

- Research on socio-economic position of LGBTI people in BiH undertaken and published.
- 3 regular annual reports: on the state of the human rights of LGBTI people, women and BiH's progress towards EU integration produced and published.
- 8 handbooks and policy documents: on psychosocial and legal support, freedom of assembly, European integration and UPR intended for institutional representatives, professionals from the public, private and civil society sector produced and published.





During 2021, Sarajevo Open Centre conducted the **Research of Socio-Economic Position of Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transgender, and Intersex People in Bosnia and Herzegovina** in order to collect and analyze information on the status of LGBTI persons in education, labor market, housing policies, and the ways in which such opportunities and possibilities affect their socio-economic status in general. The survey covered the entire territory of BiH and included 1,300 participants in total and found serious shortcomings that affect LGBTI people based on their sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics.

**Three regular annual reports** were also published:

1. Orange Report 6: Report on the State of Human Rights of Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2020
2. Pink Report 2021: Annual Report on the State of Human Rights of LGBTI People in Bosnia and Herzegovina
3. Alternative Report on the Application of Bosnia and Herzegovina for the European Union Membership: Political Criteria

In order to inform and strengthen the capacity of various duty bearers, professionals from the public, private and civil sector to contribute to the development of inclusive approach to human rights, we have **developed and published 8 handbooks and policy documents**:

1. From Support to Acceptance: Handbook on Inclusive Psychological, Psychotherapeutical and Other Forms of Comprehensive Support to LGBTI people
2. Guidelines for Organizing Public Assemblies for the Civil Society Organizations
3. Handbook for the Inclusion of the LGBTIQ Perspective into the Work of Civil Society Organizations
4. Online Instrument for Monitoring the Recommendations of the Universal Periodic Review
5. Handbook for Civil Society Organizations in BiH on Universal Periodic Review
6. Human Rights Handbook for Law Practitioners
7. Recommendations for Amending the BiH Conflict of Interest Law
8. BiH and EU Relations: How to Achieve Complete Respect of Human Rights of Migrants and Asylum Seekers

The UPR national online monitoring instrument was developed in 2021 as an **interactive tool** that serves the civil society organizations in BiH, Civil Society Initiative for UPR, institutions and other relevant actors as a comprehensive mechanism to monitor the implementation of the UPR recommendations in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We also focused on improving Sarajevo Open Centre's human rights violation documentation system of discrimination cases, hate speech and hate crimes against LGBTI persons. Currently, we are planning to develop a tool for monitoring the respect of the freedom of assembly in BiH as well as a tool for monitoring the implementation of cantonal Gender Action Plans.

**In cooperation with the Austrian Cultural Forum, a photography exhibition by Elodie Grethen titled 'Guarding Lions'** was organized in October at the Museum of Literature and Theater Arts of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The exhibition offered modern portraits of activists, artists and people who challenge traditional patterns of gender division in a post-war society.

# COMMUNICATIONS

Sarajevo Open Centre manages, creates content and communicates via three websites: organizational website [www.soc.ba](http://www.soc.ba), [www.lgbti.ba](http://www.lgbti.ba), as the first news portal primarily intended for the LGBTI community in Bosnia and Herzegovina, providing information for the members of this community on events, activities and problems related to LGBTI rights and culture, and website of the Initiative for monitoring European integrations: [www.eu-monitoring.ba](http://www.eu-monitoring.ba).

In 2021, these websites registered a total of 160,000 unique visits.

58 451

[www.soc.ba](http://www.soc.ba)

98 994

[www.lgbti.ba](http://www.lgbti.ba)

10 135

[www.eu-monitoring.ba](http://www.eu-monitoring.ba)

10 589

Number of SOC  
Facebook followers

1 923

Number of SOC  
Instagram followers

1 899

Number of SOC  
Twitter followers

3 130

Number of lgbti.ba  
Facebook followers

4 154

Number of Facebook  
followers of the  
Initiative

625

Number of Twitter  
followers of the  
Initiative

The topics covered and worked on by Sarajevo Open Centre had visibility in the media reporting as well. As established based on press clipping, Sarajevo Open Centre was mentioned in 147 media releases and reports while 7 team members were featured in a total of 78 media reports.

10 media outlets that most frequently reported on Sarajevo Open Centre in 2021

Fena.ba	21 reports
Klix.ba	11 reports
Oslobođenje	11 reports
Oslobođenje.ba	10 reports
Radiosarajevo.ba	8 reports
Fokus.ba	8 reports
Bljesak.info	7 reports
Face.ba	5 reports
6yka.com	5 reports
Depo.ba	4 reports

Sarajevo Open Centre continues its media activities by creating unique content on the [lgbti.ba](http://lgbti.ba) website and offering it to other media, media campaigns, media releases and appearance in the media as well as strategic partnerships with key TV, radio, print and online media outlets.

## FINANCES

In 2021 we've started with the implementation of the organizational strategy for 2021-2023 period, with constant monitoring and annual evaluation of the results through our Results Assessment Framework, measuring 60 indicators that point us toward our outcomes and results.

In 2019 and 2020, funds were provided for the expenses planned, while the funds received are shown in the table below.

Funds received	BAM	EUR	Increase/ decrease (%)	Comments
Funds received in 2007	-	-		No funds received
Funds received in 2008	104,318	53,337		
Funds received in 2009	55,554	28,404	-47%	
Funds received in 2010	123,904	63,351	123%	
Funds received in 2011	218,011	111,467	76%	
Funds received in 2012	493,607	252,377	126%	
Funds received in 2013	448,008	229,063	-9%	
Funds received in 2014	841,295	430,147	88%	
Funds received in 2015	1,151,727	588.869	37%	
Funds received in 2016	506,157	258,794	-56%	
Funds received in 2017	951,773	486,634	88%	
Funds received in 2018	793,825	405,876	-17%	
Funds received in 2019	875,541	447,657	10%	
Funds received in 2020	934,174	477,636	7%	
Funds received in 2021	1,070,820	547,502	15%	
Total funds received 2007-2021	8,568,715	4,381,114		

Table: Increase/decrease of received funds broken down by years

	BAM	EUR
Unspent balance from 2020	245.728	125.639
Funds received from international donors in 2021	1.019.598	521.312
Funds from other sources in 2021	51.222	26.189
Total funds available for 2021	1.316.548	673.140

Table: Total funds available for 2021

Over the years, we managed to increase the share of core funding in the organization's budget, which in 2021 amounted to 72%. The list below contains the most important donors in 2021.

Donors in 2021	BAM	EUR
Sweden (SIDA)	454.430	232.346
Sigrid Rausing Trust	154.273	78.879
Open Society Fund BiH	74.191	37.933
EIDHR	71.986	36.806
National Democracy Fund (NED)	65.846	33.667
Embassy of Netherlands in Sarajevo/MATRA program	56.349	28.811
Equality Fund (Canada)	53.271	27.237
Embassy of Netherlands in Sarajevo /Human Rights Fund	36.238	18.528
USAID Inspire	23.997	12.270
ViiV Healthcare UK Ltd.	12.265	6.271
Foundation of Local Democracy (FLD)	4.200	2.147
Youth Resource Center/CAT	345	176
Other donors	12.207	6.241
Total funds from international donors	1.019.598	521.312
Donations and membership fees	7.866	4.022
Funds from commercial activities	43.356	22.167
Total funds in 2021	1.070.820	547.501

Table: Funds received in 2021

Since the introduction of fiscal cash register in October of 2020, and offering commercial services in line with our statute, in 2021 **we received 43.356 BAM from commercial activities**, and managed to remain under the VAT threshold.

	BAM	EUR	%
Gross staff costs	474.926	242.826	45%
Office costs (rent, utilities, maintenance, cleaning, supplies)	41.360	21.147	4%
Communication costs (telephone and internet)	2.251	1.151	0%
Employees' travel costs	2.854	1.459	0%
Bank commissions	6.361	3.252	1%
Accounting, audit and legal costs	29.764	15.218	3%
Project activity costs	494.443	252.805	47%
Acquisition of fixed assets	11.267	5.761	1%
Total expenditure in 2021	1.063.225	543.618	100%

Table: Expenditure in 2021

	BAM	EUR
Total available funds in 2021	1.316.548	673.140
Total expenditure in 2021	1.063.225	543.618
2021 balance – unspent funds transferred to 2022	253.323	129.522

Table: Unspent funds in 2021

Find out more about our finances in the Audit report for 2021, which will be available on our website as of May, 2022.

Audit report along with other reports may be downloaded from [www.soc.ba](http://www.soc.ba) -> **About us** -> **Reports**.

# ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

During 2021, Sarajevo Open Centre underwent a change both within the team and its governance structure. Vladana Vasić, Aida Malkić and Rasim Ibrahimagić, as former team members who successfully continued their professional careers outside of Sarajevo Open Centre, joined the Association's Assembly. Dajana Bakić and Darko Pandurević joined the team as Operations Manager and Advocacy and Program Manager, respectively. Edo Kanlić and Amil Brković also joined the team as Program Coordinators.

In addition, Matej Vrebac joined the program team as a young professional.

At the end of 2021, under the organizational capacity development component of USAID/ISPIRE program, **Sarajevo Open Centre underwent the Organizational Performance Assessment, and received 7.81 organizational performance assessment index points, which qualified the organization as a stable leader.** This organizational performance assessment index will be valid during the next three years. The assessment of organizational performance included evaluation of several segments: the relation of the organization with the target group, the relation of the organization with stakeholders, and the relation of the organization with the community, among others. In 2022, with KULT's mentorship, SOC will implement selected recommendations through adopting more formalized procedures and practices.

With respect to building the capacities of team members, their individual skills and knowledge, in line with the organization's strategic goal 2.2. *Human rights, LGBTI and women's organizations, initiatives and activists throughout BiH are equipped to provide services and advocacy at local, regional and national levels*, allocated funds within the organizational budget and with the support of our partners, efforts aimed at supporting ongoing development and strengthening the position of SOC as an organization are also included here.



The Administrative-Financial Team participated in trainings on financial sustainability, specifics of the use of official vehicle and other benefits in the context of the amendments to the Law on Income Tax, as well as the possibilities of introduction of and issuing of digital signature.

Program Team enhanced their knowledge in the areas of gender equality, gender-based discrimination in the workplace, standards of citizens' participation and key concepts/practical tools of participatory democracy as well as regionally relevant topics of LGBTIQ persons family life.

Apart from enhancing knowledge, efforts were made to strengthen skills and processes through so-called *Policy Coffee Sessions*, which were organized in cooperation with the Steering Board members in order to improve processes and approaches in advocacy and policy development. In addition, team members attended M&E trainings with the support from core donors/partners.

To strengthen our communication with stakeholders and target groups (audiences), our Communication Coordinator attended a PR digital academy which provided her with an opportunity to widen her knowledge on creating and implementing online campaigns.

Despite the changes within the team, Sarajevo Open Centre retained a very high quality of work and results, credibility and expertise in the fields related to gender equality, LGBTI persons' rights, hate speech, hate crimes and discrimination, but also processes such as public policy design, development of legislative proposals, advocacy, capacity building, and high quality financial and HR management. This is evident from the demand for expertise that exists within the SOC team, which comes from other civil society organizations and the public. The fact that, in 2021, a number of team members facilitated or conducted a series of workshops is another testimony to this.

## LOOKING AHEAD

In addition to the activities related to further advocacy for legal recognition of gender identity and health coverage of the costs of sex reassignment, same-sex marriages, freedom of assembly in the cantons of FBiH and in the RS, in 2022, we will analyze and commence working on prevention of so called **conversion therapies** by conducting the initial mapping and research, cooperate with mental health professionals, judiciary bodies, religious communities, competent sectors of the ministries of health, executive government institutions.

A novelty introduced in the advocacy for the rights of trans persons, but also SOC's advocacy activities in general, is the involvement of trans persons and their parents in direct consultations and advocacy activities with the representatives of relevant institutions, with SOC acting as an expert facilitator and a bridge between the needs of the targeted community and institutional representatives. This model is initially showing its positive effects, and if useful in the long run, we'll try to incorporate it in our further advocacy efforts.

Moreover, we intend to address issues related to **access to HIV testing** for both LGBTI persons and the general public. This will be done by organizing meetings with the representatives of the Clinical Center University of Sarajevo, FBiH Ministry of Health and by submitting delegate questions to the FBiH Parliament and follow-up activities related to the Response to HIV/AIDS Strategy at the state level.

With respect to gender equality and women's rights, we will continue **advocating for the adoption of cantonal (LGBTI inclusive) GAPs** in those cantons that haven't adopted them yet. Advocacy for the harmonization of BiH criminal legislation with the Istanbul Convention will also be continued in cooperation with relevant local and international community actors.

Another novelty we intend to introduce is advocacy for **parental leave in cooperation with trade unions, associations of employers, relevant institutions, and civil society organizations**, which will be based on the research conducted by SOC.

In addition, SOC is expected to **start working more systematically on the issue of reproductive and sexual rights of women and their health** in 2022. This is planned to be conducted by forming a strong advocacy coalition with feminist and other lateral actors as a response to **violations of the right to choose abortion and abortion access**. We will also advocate for the abortion to become a part of the agenda of decision makers as a human rights question and the medical care question.

In order to increase the use of online tools developed for monitoring of the UPR recommendations as well as monitoring of the state of freedom of assembly, we will continuously provide information and presentations of the tools to ensure their use by civil society organizations. Apart from this, we intend to expand SOC's internal documentation of LGBTI human rights violation system by **adding additional tools to monitor online hate speech, but also detrimental narratives based on prejudices and stereotypes**. This will be done using tools such as *CrowdTangle* and *Pulsar*.

We will continue trainings for both future police officers regarding freedom of assembly and judiciary representatives regarding discrimination, hate speech and crime, which will simultaneously serve to train future contact persons for all LGBTI persons who may need support in reporting hate crimes based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Trainings will also be continued for public administration representatives regarding best practices of legal gender recognition, mental health professionals regarding inclusive psychosocial support for LGBTI persons, lawyers regarding human rights of women and LGBTI persons, medical staff regarding trans inclusive medical care, and experts in gynecology and endocrinology regarding medical care for women.

Some of our former programs such as **Feminist school Žarana Papić and Equality Academy will be expanded to include a strong policy component and an alumni program**. Feminist school Žarana Papić is expected to resume in 2023.

**Kvirhana festival**, which is organized in cooperation with Tuzla Open Centre, as a successor of Merlinka festival in Sarajevo, will be organized for the **second time in June of 2022 in Sarajevo**, and at the beginning July in Tuzla.

Thanks to an EIDHR supported project – **Regionalization of LGBTI inclusive psychosocial support and access to mental health institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina** - SOC will continue regular gatherings and activities for the community through psychosocial and legal support as well as activities on strengthening informal groups and LGBTIQ organizations throughout BiH by applying mentorship approach and providing legal, financial, technical and other forms of support.

In 2022, we will start **the process of planning and establishing a financial structure for an inclusive and LGBTI friendly space in Sarajevo**, which will satisfy the community needs that have not been addressed to date. This is planned to be achieved in cooperation with local authorities, private and business sector, and with a support of the wider community. We also plan to establish a **sustainable model of business Excelling in Diversity certification** together with our partners in D&I coalition.

We will continue strengthening our cooperation with the economic sector, religious communities, sport associations, academic community but also with influencers and opinion makers, with whom we test new approaches to inter-sectoral activism.

When it comes to the Initiative for Monitoring the European Integrations of BiH, new **European Classroom Lectures for social sciences students will be introduced throughout BiH** as well as a new **quarterly Initiative's Newsletter**, while we continue the expansion of the network of European MPs for human rights, rule of law and democratization by, among other things, **advocacy event in Brussels**.

Finally, we will continue our efforts to generate knowledge and relevant information regarding human rights, current legal and institutional framework, and authentic experiences of LGBTI persons, women and men in BiH. The book **Žene BiH adapted for children, in cooperation with Žene BiH**, and **collection of queer readings of religion** represent two publications we intend to issue in 2022. Working on collecting materials for the mapping of queer history in Bosnia and Herzegovina will also be continued in 2022, and the book is expected to be published in 2023.

We will continue communicating with various audiences via existing channels (soc.ba, lgbti.ba and eu-monitoring.ba), and will conduct **three key campaigns that focus on mental health issues of LGBTIQ persons, general elections and parental leave**.

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Vladana Vasić, Aida Malkić

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