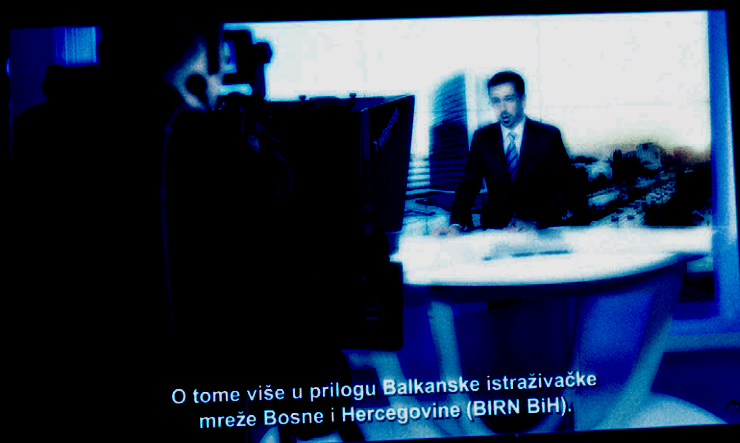


How and Why To Report On Transitional Justice

A Practical Handbook
from BIRN BiH
Journalists and Editors



O tome više u prilogu Balkanske istraživačke
mreže Bosne i Hercegovine (BIRN BiH).

How and Why To Report On Transitional Justice

A PRACTICAL HANDBOOK FROM BIRN BiH
JOURNALISTS AND EDITORS

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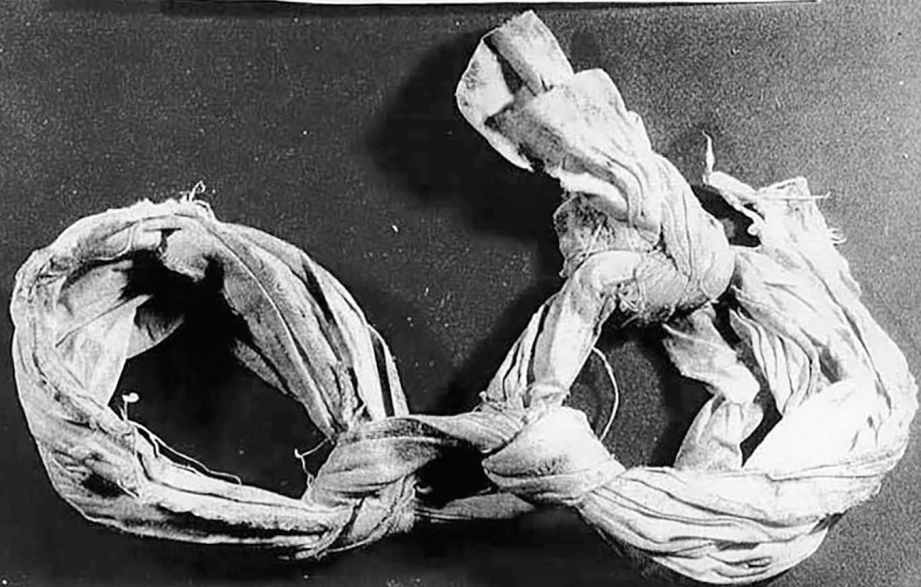
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A Twenty-Year Journey Reporting on "Our" Justice

It's December 2023, and I'm riding in a cramped compartment of an old Soviet coal-fired train, traveling with three colleagues on a fourteen-hour journey from Kyiv to Poland. We've been discussing the training of Ukrainian journalists on wartime sexual violence reporting and the videos we made to highlight the parallels in accessing justice for war crimes in Ukraine and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). Our conversation is interrupted by a message from *Detektor* Editor Semir Mujkic.

"I know you won't like this, but we need to extend these panels. We've added an extra hour, people keep calling in, they say this is the first time they've had a platform to speak," he wrote.

That morning, Semir led a team from the newsroom in presenting a year's worth of research by *Detektor* on how the regional character of the conflicts in BiH from 1992 to 1995 has been addressed in the verdicts of the Hague Tribunal and local courts.

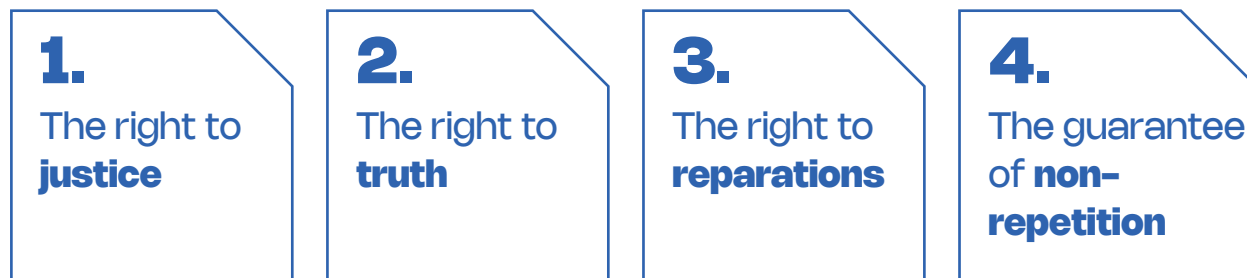
The role of Serbia and Croatia in the war, and thus the very nature of the conflict itself, remains a key issue in the country and the region, still unresolved even 30 years after the end of the war. In the absence of fact-based scholarship on the subject, populist politicians exploit these divisions, using fear to mobilize voters. The Balkan Investigative Reporting Network of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BIRN BiH) has compiled excerpts from the complete body of Hague verdicts on the role of Serbia and Croatia in the war, in order to combat the politicization of the issue and spark evidence-based debates about the true nature of the conflict.

For the remainder of our trip from Ukraine, we talked about how little has been systemically done to advance transitional justice mechanisms, and how NGOs like BIRN BiH have taken on the responsibilities of the state to address the consequences of mass human rights violations and build societies based on the rule of law—and how Ukraine might follow this example one day.

In 2024, BIRN BiH celebrates its 20th anniversary. I have been part of this organization since 2008, beginning as a reporter. It was originally conceived as an agency for the monitoring of war crimes trials, and BIRN BiH has followed every hearing at every war crimes trial since the establishment of the Court and Prosecutor's Office of BiH. From this, it has created a unique database of testimonies, rulings, and findings on wartime suffering in the country.

Over time, BIRN BiH developed a specialized model for reporting on transitional justice, in response to the systematic failure to engage in transitional justice processes and the politicization of the judiciary—particularly war crimes proceedings. Through all available mechanisms, the organization strives to be a true watchdog, championing victims' rights, giving a voice to the marginalized, and advocating for the creation of a fairer state grounded in the rule of law.

Theoretically, the concept of transitional justice requires the engagement of the entire society, with the essential participation of institutions, to address the consequences of mass human rights violations through four pillars:



The essence of these processes, as their names suggest, is to ensure a multi-perspective approach that secures access to justice for victims and survivors. **The first pillar** refers to prosecuting those responsible for human rights violations—typically war crimes. **The second pillar**, acknowledging the impossibility of prosecuting every perpetrator, aims to uncover the truth of the suffering through non-judicial mechanisms like fact-finding commissions. This pillar also seeks to establish the fate of missing persons and ensure that the truth about human rights violations is taught in both formal and informal education. **The third pillar** obliges states to take systematic action by providing reparations to victims and survivors. These reparations can be material, such as social benefits, as well as non-material, like monuments and memorial centers. Finally, **the fourth pillar** mandates institutional reforms to guarantee that such human rights violations cannot be repeated.

In 2004, BIRN BiH began systematically monitoring all war crimes trials, offering daily coverage that identified trends, challenges, and irregularities. This work grew to encompass analyses, investigative research, and eventually television programs and special multimedia projects.

We have maintained this methodological approach as we've expanded into other fields of transitional justice. In relation to the right to truth, BIRN BiH has reported regularly on the search for the missing, educated the public about the war, and documented various challenges, actions, and initiatives pertaining to reconciliation commissions. Coverage of news related to monuments and memorials, as well as the ongoing struggles of survivors and their families to receive reparations from the state, has also become part of our daily reporting. When we identify a new trend or problem, we conduct investigative analyses and present this research through multimedia content.

With regard to the guarantee of non-repetition, BiH has done very little in terms of vetting and lustration—the process of removing people involved in human rights violations from public life. For this reason, we expanded our professional scope to include the issues that serve as the clearest indicators of whether BiH has achieved full respect for human rights and equality before the law. Our coverage now includes reporting on the judiciary, legal reforms, hate crimes, crimes against minorities, corruption, extremism, and even media and digital rights, all of which indicate the stage of development of Bosnian society and its institutions.

This work earned BIRN BiH the prestigious European Press Prize in 2020 for its reporting on transitional justice.

In recent years, particularly since the onset of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, this expertise in systematic reporting on war crimes has, unfortunately, become even more relevant. Through various projects, BIRN BiH has developed curricula on reporting on war crimes trials, missing persons, and extremism, as well as specialized training on wartime sexual violence and reporting on corruption, public procurement, and oral history.

This document represents the first attempt to showcase the organization's overarching approach to transitional justice reporting. It is primarily intended for journalists and researchers that are unfortunate enough to live and work in countries and communities affected by large-scale human rights violations. I say they are unfortunate, but they are also incredibly fortunate in that they have the opportunity to dedicate their career to reporting the truth about suffering and to defending the rights of the underprivileged in places where human rights are neglected by those responsible for protecting them. Additionally, it is a tremendous honor to receive the gratitude of victims for our coverage, to be told we have given a voice to those who have been robbed of theirs, and to be lauded by our courageous colleagues in Ukraine who report from war zones and strive to convey the images and consequences of war to the world.

The road we have taken to amplify the voices of thousands of victims and survivors is far from its end. Likewise, this document does not represent a definitive or final methodology, as the essence of our approach lies in finding innovative ways to ensure a more comprehensive vision of "our" justice. This document has been a collaborative effort among various colleagues with whom I have worked on a daily basis for years, and who have done their best to tell the stories that matter most to them.

Last year, the Global Investigative Journalism Network published its first comprehensive guide to reporting on war crimes, and I had the privilege of contributing BIRN BiH's expertise to the chapters on genocide and crimes against prisoners of war. More importantly, I was able to write it from the perspective of the story I am most proud to have told: the story of a man who survived wartime sexual abuse in a detention camp in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

This story, for me, embodies the quest for a justice that is all-encompassing. I hope this resource will be valuable to my fellow journalists, researchers, and advocates who share a passion for justice.

Pillar 1

The right to justice

Prosecuting those responsible for human rights violations

War Crimes Trials

Since 2005, the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BIRN BiH) has been monitoring trials for crimes committed during the Bosnian war. Today, the archives maintained by our organization enable students, researchers and other journalists to search nearly two decades of testimonies. BIRN BiH's reports are freely available, and over the years, we have earned the trust of victims, witnesses, institutions, and other media outlets.

War crimes trials methods vary by country, the legal codification of the crime, and criminal procedure. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, trials for war crimes committed on domestic soil are conducted by the Court of BiH, as well as cantonal and district courts and in the Basic and Appeal Courts of Brcko District. Additionally, war crimes in BiH have been prosecuted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and its successor, the International Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IMCT) in The Hague, as well as courts in Serbia, Montenegro, and Croatia.

Through daily coverage of war crimes trials, BIRN BiH endeavors to bridge the gap between judicial institutions, security agencies, local authorities, and BiH citizens, with timely, objective, and reliable reporting on the past. In monitoring war crimes trials, we contribute to the establishment of truth and other pillars of transitional justice.

Why Report from War Crimes Trials?

Courtroom reporting is critical as it creates a lasting archive of trial proceedings that will eventually come to a close. It is also a powerful tool in fostering cultures of remembrance and combatting revisionism and denial of war crimes. In post-conflict societies, such narratives are common, especially if not penalized. However, reports that contain testimonies, material evidence, and established facts that have culminated in final verdicts reduce the potential for denial and shape public awareness of the war's history and the process of confronting the past—an essential element for reconciliation.

With this reporting, the media contributes to building a more democratic society and promoting understanding between once-warring parties. This journalism ensures that the voices of victims and families are heard, which can create cross-community connections when victims find common ground in shared experiences of pain, loss, and suffering.

In the part of the courtroom reserved for the public, journalists are often the only ones present. Families of victims and defendants as well as others affected by the crimes are often interested in attending trials but unable to do so for practical reasons, such as the court's distance from their homes, travel expenses, or time constraints. For some, the emotional burden of hearing the details of what was survived or being in the same room as those accused of harming their loved ones is simply too much to bear.

That is why reporting from these trials is crucial. It ensures that the general public is informed about the proceedings, allowing those who cannot attend to stay updated on the case from a distance.

For instance, BIRN BiH followed the trial for war crimes committed in Zecovi village, near Prijedor, which began in 2015.¹ The trial lasted for nearly a decade, during which several defendants died. The first-instance verdict was not issued until December 2023, when five defendants were sentenced to a total of 59 years in prison, while seven others were acquitted.² During the trial, BIRN BiH also reported on the actions of the court and prosecutor's office regarding the escape of some defendants. When the proceedings began, 14 individuals were on trial.

Not only does media coverage encourage victims to report war crimes and advocate for their rights, but it also indicates the efficiency or inefficiency of judicial bodies. This includes exposing potential misapplications of the law, untimely institutional responses, and inadequate punishments.

Journalists in the Courtroom

War crimes trials are generally open to the public, except in special cases where the trial chamber opts to close the proceedings. The media is allowed to attend and report on trials, although the permissible reporting equipment varies from country to country. In BiH, the filming of trials is prohibited, and journalists are not allowed to bring in any recording equipment into the courtroom. An exception is made when the court allows the media to film the opening of a hearing before it officially begins.

The State Court sometimes issues brief trial recordings to journalists upon request, but these are typically limited to ten-minute segments of low-quality surveillance camera footage, generally unsuitable for television broadcasts. Moreover, the first few minutes of the hearings capture little of practical value, as most of this time is spent either introducing those in the courtroom, reading the oath, or on general questions.

Thus, the tools that journalists have at their disposal in the courtroom are paper and pen, so it is extremely important that they document the content of the trial accurately and effectively.

Before attending and reporting on war crimes trials, journalists should familiarize themselves with the basics of court proceedings and legal terminology. Understanding the structure of trial proceedings helps journalists to follow the events and, ultimately, produce accurate reports. The task of the journalist is not to produce trial transcripts but to summarize often hours-long proceedings in a report of less than 600 words (with the exception of complex cases involving many defendants, where this limitation would pose a

WAR CRIMES IN ZECОВI VILLAGE

5

defendants were sentenced

59

total years in prison

7

defendants were acquitted

1 [Trial of Bosnian Serb Forces Accused of Zecovi Attack Begins](#), Detektor.ba

2 [Total of 59 Years in Prison for Crimes in Zecovi Village, Prijedor](#), Detektor.ba

particular challenge). This makes knowledge of the proceedings and terminology crucial, in order to identify the most important aspects of each trial.

In BiH, legal proceedings typically begin with a report and an investigation. Once the evidence is collected, the prosecutor's office files an indictment on legal grounds, which is then confirmed by a competent court. After this, the accused enters a plea, and the trial begins with the reading of the indictment and the opening statements of the prosecution and possibly the defense. At this stage, both sides usually present the number of witnesses and other evidence they intend to introduce. The trial then proceeds with the examination of witnesses, expert testimonies, and the submission of material evidence by both the prosecution and the defense. After the evidence has been presented, the parties give their closing arguments, summarizing the court proceedings and the submitted evidence. This is followed by the court's pronouncement of a first-instance verdict, which can be appealed. The appeal is decided on in the second-instance proceedings, with some cases ultimately determined by a third-instance chamber or higher courts. While this may appear quite simple in writing, trials in BiH are not necessarily so efficient. Proceedings are often protracted, spanning several years and involving hundreds of witnesses, some of whom may not even live to see the end of the trial.

The indictment, as the main document in a trial, is an essential resource for journalists in preparing daily coverage. In BiH, the State Prosecutor's Office, along with cantonal and district prosecutor's offices, publishes anonymized indictments on their official websites. However, this was not always the case. For many years, the only information journalists had about the indictment was what they heard when it was read aloud at the beginning of the trial. Some indictments contain more than 40 charges, making it extremely difficult to write down and requiring subsequent follow-up. Additionally, these documents often contain an abundance of highly specific information—such as, for instance, the names of all the villages and hamlets surrounding a town targeted in an attack—which is very important to the case but is likely unfamiliar to the reporter.

That is why BIRN BiH editors and journalists have repeatedly called on institutions to make indictments and verdicts available to the public on their official websites. Over many years, we have launched campaigns such as “Stop Censorship of War Crimes,”³ demanding that indictments be published.⁴

3 [Struggle for Public Justice and Truth](#), Detektor.ba

4 [Combatting Corruption in Judiciary by Transparency](#), Detektor.ba
[Prosecutions in BiH Are Changing Indictment Publication Practice, But Still Slowly](#), Detektor.ba

Guidelines for Professional and Responsible Reporting from War Crimes Trials

- First and foremost, publish accurate and impartial reports from trials.
- If you are uncertain whether you heard or recorded something correctly at the trial, do not include it in your report, as it may lead to errors.
- Continuous reporting is important for understanding the entire case, monitoring the judiciary, and ensuring fair coverage.
- Do not portray the accused as guilty or innocent until the court has delivered a final verdict. Avoid premature judgments about the guilt of defendants in accordance with the principle of the presumption of innocence.
- Do not express your own views or commentary in reports, as such views should be reserved for other formats, such as editorial columns.
- Refrain from making inferences when reporting. Write only what is said in the courtroom, exactly as it is said. Quotes should be clear and accurate.
- If charges are dismissed or a person is acquitted, it is essential to report this, especially if their trial or indictment has previously been covered.
- Maintain balanced reporting by allocating due space to both the prosecution and the defense throughout the proceedings
- Provide background information in every report, so that the public understands the broader context of the case, including who stands accused, the nature of the charges, and the location of the alleged crime.
- Exercise particular care in word choice, taking into account that victims' families or survivors may read the reports. In cases involving sexual violence, avoid detailed descriptions of the acts and any language that could further stigmatize survivors.⁵
- Adapt legal jargon for a general audience. As with other journalistic tasks, aim to communicate in simple and accessible language.
- Exercise particular caution when reporting on trials where witnesses are under protective measures.

5 [“Guide to Media Reporting on Wartime Sexual and Gender-Based Violence”](#), Trial International in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

War Crimes Trial Witnesses

One of the most important forms of evidence presented at war crimes trials is witness testimony, provided in the courtroom before the judicial chamber, the prosecution, the accused, and the defense.

While witnesses typically testify publicly, many seek protective measures for their personal and family safety. This may be due to the publicity surrounding the trial, the prevailing attitudes in their living environment, or the nature of the facts about which they will testify. A variety of protective measures are granted by courts, pseudonyms or initials to protect the identity of the witness, face and voice distortion, testimony from a separate room, and restrictions on the publishing of testimony.

Although the trial chamber determines how witnesses are dealt with in the courtroom, their identities are sometimes inadvertently revealed by parties to the proceedings or by the witnesses themselves. This can happen when personal details are mentioned, such as names, addresses, occupations, or other identifying information known to the public or acquaintances. This is particularly true for witnesses living in smaller communities, where they may be well-known and easily identified.

In cases of sexual violence, victims often seek protection measures due to the stigma and shame associated with their experiences. Even the closest family members of many victims may be unaware of they have endured, and survivors often fear societal and familial condemnation. In these cases, journalists have a particular responsibility to avoid including any information in their reporting that could identify the witness in any way. Endangering a protected witness by revealing their identity is a criminal offense, and there have been several convictions in BiH for this violation.

Even when victims of sexual violence testify publicly under their full names, journalists should still seek to protect their identities, out of respect for their dignity and personal safety. While these steps are not legally mandated, they should be followed for the sake of journalistic ethics and moral responsibility.

An example is the case against Bozidar Perisic and Vinko Zoranovic, charged with crimes committed in the Rogatica area in 1992. One witness testified publicly under her full name about the rape she suffered at the hands of one of the accused. However, journalists chose to protect her identity.⁶ In a later interview with BIRN BiH, she described how the testimony affected her mental and physical health, and how exhausting the process was for victims. Although she confronted the accused in court under her real name, unlike many witnesses who receive pseudonyms, she later regretted her decision, describing how the defendants insulted her as she left the courtroom. In a subsequent story published by *Detektor*,⁷ she chose to be referred to as “Witness A.” In the accompanying video interview, journalists also protected her face and voice.

6 [Perisic and Zoranovic: “I Know You Very Well”](#), Detektor.ba

7 [Focus on War Crimes Verdicts Leaves Victims Feeling Disappointed](#), Detektor.ba

BIRN BiH journalists take particular pride in an interview conducted with a sexual violence survivor that resulted in an indictment and subsequent conviction for rape near Srebrenica. Following the interview's publication, the prosecutor contacted the survivor through a BIRN BiH journalist, prompting an investigation that was quickly concluded.

BIRN BiH also produced the documentary "The Silent Scream,"⁸ which depicts the trauma still experienced by sexual violence survivors decades after the war. Featuring the testimonies of both women and men who survived sexual abuse during the war in BiH, as well as in neighboring countries, the film aims to encourage survivors to report crimes and speak out about what happened to them. While some interlocutors spoke publicly about the torture they endured, others chose to tell their story under the condition of anonymity, a choice that the journalists fully respected.

Harmful Practices in Trial Reporting

For those who testify at war crimes trials, this is usually their first experience as a witness, subject to direct and cross-examination. Their credibility is often questioned, and if the court addresses inappropriate lines of questioning, journalists should document this response and inform the public. If the judge fails to respond, that too should be reported.

In cases involving sexual violence, journalists may observe instances where the defense shifts blame onto the victim, potentially questioning their prior intimate experiences, suggesting consent, or implying an emotional connection with the accused. Additionally, due to the nature of legal proceedings, court questioning can be explicit, including graphic details of the assault. Journalists should refrain from including such descriptions in their reports, which should convey what happens in court without compromising the safety or dignity of the victim. It is important to recognize that testimony itself can re-traumatize witnesses, as can reading a trial report. For this reason, journalists must exercise particular caution when reporting on these cases.

Journalists should not make premature judgements before the court has issued a final verdict and should refrain from using terms like "perpetrator" or "guilty" prior to a final ruling. Additionally, sensationalist headlines and phrases such as "bloodbath" or "horrific confession" should be avoided. Journalists must always bear in mind that

“

"I entered the arena. Then they started fighting with me, because I was a key witness. One needed a defense, the other wanted a conviction ... And I was caught in between. Everyone was proving themselves, and I was the only one there who needed justice," she told BIRN BiH reporters, stressing that today she feels like a "wrung-out cloth."

A witness to a rape in
the area of Rogatica in
1992

behind these published stories are survivors of war who may relive their traumas when reading about them.

Stories Beyond the Courtroom

In addition to courtroom reporting, journalists attending trials often find ideas for other types of stories. These can be told through various formats, including feature stories, television segments, analyses, and investigative articles. Journalists can also create content tailored for social media platforms, such as short videos, reels, or stories aimed at specific audiences. Topics might include missing persons, unprosecuted crimes, or inefficiencies within the judiciary.

BIRN BiH covers such stories not only from BiH but also from neighboring countries. They have also reported on trials in absentia in Ukraine, as well as transitional justice and the challenges facing the country since the Russian invasion.⁹ In the midst of this war, journalists have recorded numerous stories of victims and analyzed the similarities and differences between the suffering of Ukrainian citizens today and that of Bosnians 30 years ago.

During visits to Ukraine, journalists saw important buildings and even kindergartens destroyed, as was the case in many cities across BiH. One such story is told in the film “Underground,” about a hospital in Olovo that was destroyed and then rebuilt four meters underground to ensure the safety of patients and medical staff. Without electricity and basic medical supplies, more than 500 babies were delivered there, and the hospital treated around 1,300 wounded and other patients per month.

Originally featured on BIRN BiH’s monthly TV program *TV Justice*,¹⁰ the story of the Olovo hospital soon grew beyond this format’s scope, prompting the decision to tell it through the documentary “Underground.”¹¹ The film was released symbolically on the anniversary of the Olovo Health Center’s relocation on May 3-4, 1993, and premiered in 2020 at the Sarajevo Film Festival in the “BH Film” category.

Another BIRN BiH documentary, “Samir Mehic Bowie: Letters from Srebrenica,” originated from what was initially a short report about Samir Mehic, known as ‘Bowie’, a Srebrenica rock guitarist who was killed in the July 1995 genocide.¹² During the reporting process, one interviewee shared letters he had exchanged with Mehic, his best friend, during the war. The way Faruk Smajlovic spoke about his friend in a short social media video,¹³ along with the letters in which Mehic described life in Srebrenica, prompted BIRN BiH to create a documentary not only about Samir Mehic but also about the rock music scene in Srebrenica before and during the war. BIRN BiH’s journalistic team enlisted a professional film crew and actor to help reconstruct Mehic’s story.

9 [In Race for Justice, Ukraine Repeats Bosnia’s Mistakes](#), Detektor.ba

10 [Underground Hospital: How a Hidden Bosnian War Clinic Saved Lives](#), Detektor.ba

11 [Underground](#), Detektor.ba

12 [Samir Played Guitar: The Life and Death of Srebrenica’s ‘Bowie’](#), Detektor.ba

13 [“Bowie” from Srebrenica: The Day When Music Died Down](#), Detektor.ba

When interviewing individuals who have experienced war, journalists must adopt a sensitive approach, demonstrating empathy and understanding without pressuring survivors or victims' families to speak. For example, during the filming of the project "The Lives Behind the Fields of Death,"¹⁴ a BIRN BiH journalist halted an interview with one Srebrenica genocide survivor. The interviewee became visibly distressed while recalling memories of her father, who was killed in the genocide, revealed that she was in the early stages of pregnancy. The journalist chose to stop the interview out of concern for her emotional and physical health as well as her pregnancy. Despite the fact that she was the hundredth and final participant in the project, another interviewee was found to take her place.

Journalists must be transparent about the purpose of the interview and take all possible steps to familiarize participants with the story-making process. Given the sensitive nature of these interviews, protecting the identity of interlocutors may be necessary, but protecting their dignity and well-being should always be the priority.

BIRN BiH also took part in the "Four Silos" peace initiative, organized by the Sarajevo-Belgrade Center for Nonviolent Action, in which former camp detainees, veterans, and peace activists visited four wartime detention camps. On this occasion, Marijan Krajina, a former detainee, revisited the cell in Kacuni, near Busovaca, where he had been imprisoned in 1993.¹⁵ Overcome by emotion, Krajina still agreed to speak with a journalist, who carefully considered his mental and physical state, given his age. Instead of a single continuous interview, as is the norm, Krajina shared the story of what he survived in a series of shorter conversations over the two-day event. Given the re-traumatization resulting from both visiting the location and speaking his experiences, the journalist decided that this format would allow him to tell his story at his own pace. He remained fully informed of how his statements would be used throughout the process.

When reporting on investigations where potential perpetrators of criminal offenses are named, journalists must make every effort to inform these individuals and give them an opportunity to respond.

In cases involving minors, written consent from a legal guardian must be obtained for filming or interviews.

The trust that interviewees repose in journalists must never be lost, compromised, or violated. The media serves to ensure the voices of victims are heard and must always treat them with the utmost respect.

In 2020, BIRN BiH was awarded a special European Press Prize¹⁶ for its "efforts and success in ensuring justice for victims of war crimes." The jury members commended the organization, stating that "BIRN's work ensures a unique archive of all war crime trials, as well as many personal stories of survivors, documentary films about the victims of sexual violence and families of the missing, and numerous other research and analytical stories."

14 [The Lives Behind the Fields of Death](#), Detektor.ba

15 [Tears, Apologies and Shaking Hands Between Detainees and Veterans at Detention Sites](#), Detektor.ba

16 [BIRN BiH Wins European Press Prize for Justice Reporting](#), Detektor.ba

Pillar 2

The right to truth

Ensuring that the truth about human rights violations is taught in both formal and informal education

The Right to Truth

The Transitional Justice Strategy in Bosnia and Herzegovina,¹⁷ adopted in draft form more than a decade ago but never enacted, affirms the right to truth as an independent right, extending beyond the resolution of the fate of the missing. This right is recognized as belonging to victims and their families as well as society as a whole. It encompasses the right to know what happened, the underlying causes, and the identities of victims and perpetrators. Preserving documentation of rights violations is essential to prevent historical revision and the denial of crimes.

According to international experts, prosecuting war crimes is not sufficient on its own to establish the truth and must be combined with additional fact-finding and truth-telling activities. These efforts include forming commissions to objectively investigate events, which not only contributes to truth-telling but also paves the way for reconciliation. Creating databases, mapping crimes, and integrating the study of established facts into the educational curriculum are also necessary steps.

Historically, the right to truth primarily referred to the rights of families to learn the fate of missing loved ones. For decades in BiH, numerous associations—comprising camp survivors, war victims, families of the deceased and wounded, and displaced persons—have been searching for the truth. Through our reporting, feature stories, analyses, and investigations, BIRN BiH has sought to support this pursuit.

In 2019, the European Commission adopted an Opinion on BiH's application for European Union membership,¹⁸ which stipulates 14 key priorities in the field of democracy that must be fulfilled on the country's path to accession. Among these is the need to take concrete steps to promote an environment conducive to reconciliation and overcoming the legacy of the war. The Commission states that the current political environment does not support reconciliation or reckoning with the past. High-ranking officials frequently contest established facts and cast doubt on the independence and impartiality of international tribunals.

The Transitional Justice Strategy proposed strategies to establish truth commissions, improve memorialization process, facilitate the search for the missing, prevent historical manipulation, and ensure justice for victims. However, as noted in the EU's Opinion, the lack of political will has hindered the implementation of these initiatives.

In our reporting, we are mindful of the data we use and sources we rely on, particularly given the absence of institutional mechanisms for dealing with the past in BiH. There are no official reports, databases, or truth and reconciliation commissions. Additionally, we have reported on attempts to manipulate victim numbers and minimize war crimes.

17 [Transitional Justice Strategy in BiH, 2012-2016](#), draft, Ministry of Justice of Bosnia and Herzegovina

18 [Commission's Opinion on Bosnia and Herzegovina's Application for Membership of the European Union](#), EUR-Lex

Commissions for Determining Wartime Casualty Numbers and Events

Truth commissions are defined across several European conventions as “flexible instruments, victim-oriented in their nature, that can be used to create historical records, initiate dialogue and formulate recommendations for various reforms.” According to the EU Political Framework for Supporting Transitional Justice, the documentation and fact-finding efforts of truth commissions, investigative bodies, or other missions can contribute to uncovering and publicly acknowledging human rights violations and the suffering of victims.

Such commissions work to ensure that society as a whole learns the truth, including the identities of perpetrators as well as the causes, facts, and circumstances of wartime events.

However, 32 years after the beginning of the war in BiH, no state-level commissions have been established to compile an accurate list of victims by name or to document the facts of various wartime events.¹⁹ The Transitional Justice Strategy envisioned the formation of such commissions, but since the document was never adopted, many events from the war remain disputed or obscured by conflicting information.²⁰

Neighboring countries have not made more progress than BiH in addressing these issues. Earlier efforts to institutionalize the Regional Commission for the Establishment of Facts about War Crimes Victims (RECOM) encountered political obstacles, despite public support and a petition signed by 200,000 citizens in BiH.

It is common in BiH for at least two parties involved in the 1992-1995 conflict to present differing accounts, death tolls, or material damage estimates when interpreting the same event.

Even before the Transitional Justice Strategy was drafted, attempts were made by domestic and international organizations to establish truth commissions. However, lacking the support of political actors, these initiatives were never realized. In BiH, political figures often rely on or manipulate unverified data, using it for their own purposes or ignoring it altogether in their public statements. In our reporting, we give special attention to the voices of those most negatively affected by such statements.

An attempt to establish a non-governmental regional commission in BiH also encountered various obstacles.

In 2006, the Council of Ministers formed a commission to investigate the suffering of Serbs, Croats, Bosniaks, Jews, and others in Sarajevo between 1992 and 1995.²¹ Its mandate was to investigate, in a transparent manner, incidents of mass and individual murders, locate victims' remains, and document cases of detention, rape, deportation, and disappearances. However, despite spending around 230,000 BAM, the commission never produced a report.

19 [Absence of Credible Truth Commissions Leaves the Number of Killed Children for Debate](#), Detektor.ba

20 [Transitional Justice Strategy Forgotten for Nearly a Decade](#), Detektor.ba

21 [Decisions of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina – June 2006](#), Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Similarly, in 2007, the Municipal Assembly of Bijeljina established a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which claimed to have submitted a report to the Assembly that was never placed on the agenda.

In 2019, the entity of the Republika Srpska (RS) established two commissions: the Commission for the Investigation of the Suffering of Serbs in Sarajevo from 1991 to 1995, and the Independent International Commission for the Investigation of the Suffering of All Peoples in the Srebrenica Region from 1992 to 1995. These commissions produced reports that contradicted judicially established facts, as our analyses have shown.

Apart from one chapter on the murders of Serbs at the Kazani location, the Sarajevo report mainly discussed the historical context in BiH, the role of radical Islamism, media influence, and the physical and psychological aspects of suffering. Our analysis revealed that the report denies the established facts of the Markale market massacres in Sarajevo, as determined by several trial chambers of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. The report reiterated claims that one side has been pushing for decades—namely, that the explosive device was planted, the grenade could not have been fired from Republika Srpska Army positions, the death toll is inaccurate, and some victims were brought to the site after the attack.²² Echoing this report, politicians from the RS frequently deny the suffering at Markale, despite the ICTY verdicts. These rulings, which we use in our work, have nevertheless proven to be a powerful tool for challenging such claims.²³

In its report, the RS Commission on Srebrenica concluded that genocide was not committed in July 1995 and that the actual number of victims was half of what has been established by the ICTY verdicts. These narratives are also frequently used by political figures in the RS and Serbia, as well as Russian media outlets. By analyzing the ICTY judgements, we were able to accurately present the facts that this report misinterpreted.²⁴

The absence of commissions dedicated to establishing accurate facts creates space for manipulation and conflicting interpretations of historical events. We must therefore rely on final court judgments as the most authoritative documents, whether from international or local courts

It is a judicially established fact that Sarajevo was under siege during the war. However, no court judgement has conclusively the total number of civilians killed in the Bosnian capital during the four-year war. The courts have documented the numbers of dead and injured in specific shelling and sniping incidents, but a definitive total is lacking. For this reason, in our reporting, we often refer to the data provided by associations, relying on lists compiled from survivor testimonies and reports from victims' families.²⁵ This extends to other cities and detention camps, where we cite association data unless the figures are specified in a final verdict.

22 [BIRN Fact-Check: Is the Bosnian Serb Report on the Sarajevo Siege Accurate?](#), Detektor.ba

23 [Detektor Fact-Check: Denying Judicially Established Facts about Markale](#), Detektor.ba

24 [BIRN Fact-Check: Trial Evidence Contradicts Claims in Bosnian Serbs' Srebrenica Report](#), Detektor.ba

25 [Thirty One Years Since the Murder of Children in Cekalusa, Parents No Longer Have Strength to Talk](#), Detektor.ba

An exception to this is the Srebrenica genocide, where the ICTY verdicts have established that more than 7,000 men and boys were killed.²⁶ This is the figure that we use in our reporting, in contrast to sources that claim a higher or significantly lower number. When writing about this subject, we are also careful to note the legal distinction that not all of those prosecuted for crimes Srebrenica were convicted of genocide; some were convicted of crimes against humanity and other war crimes.

Final verdicts, court documents, witness statements, and expert reports are also a primary resource for investigating unprosecuted crimes, as these sources provide names, testimony, and material evidence that point to potential perpetrators.

Other institutions can also contribute to data collection, and we use their findings while carefully reviewing their methodology and credibility. For example, the Srebrenica Memorial Center regularly publishes reports²⁷ on genocide denial in the public media space of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the region. These reports include information on public figures and social media, as well as recommendations on prosecuting war crimes, advocating for educational reform, and protecting activists and truth advocates.²⁸



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Databases

Databases are often used by institutions working to locate the missing, as well as associations representing displaced persons, former detainees, civilian victims of war, the families of the deceased, and disabled war veterans. Some institutions, like the Institute for Missing Persons of BiH, have been developing their databases for years, but most associations and organizations are limited by the specific geographical areas they cover.

Data should be easily accessible through searches and organized chronologically, alphabetically, or by region—particularly in databases encompassing multiple countries or

26 [Bosnian Serb Military Police Chiefs Never Charged with Srebrenica Killings](#), Detektor.ba

27 [What You Should Know about Latest Srebrenica Memorial Center's Report on Genocide Denial](#), Detektor.ba

28 [Genocide Denial Reduced, But Still Significantly Present: Report of Srebrenica Memorial Center](#), Detektor.ba

large volumes of data for a single country. In such cases, the content can be displayed by territorial or some other divisions.

In addition to institutions, non-governmental organizations and media outlets can contribute to data collection, which can ultimately form databases. Methodologically sound data can then be used by institutions, associations, citizens, and even commissions engaged in establishing the actual numbers of victims, refugees, detainees, or sexual violence survivors from the war.

BIRN BiH has created several databases, some of which are updated regularly. Chiefly among these is the “Database of Judicially Established Facts on the War in Bosnia and Herzegovina,”²⁹ based on conclusions reached by ICTY trial chambers.

The methodology behind this database involves a thorough analysis of thousands of pages across approximately 50 ICTY judgments related to crimes committed in BiH. The result is a compilation of more than 2,000 judicially established facts about mass and individual killings, detention, rape, expulsion, and the destruction of cultural and religious property. In addition to crimes against civilians, the database also includes crimes against prisoners of war.

Unlike some of our published research, the goal of this database is not to list the specific names of perpetrators and victims but to document crimes that have been established by court verdicts. In some cases, perpetrators were acquitted of responsibility, but trial chambers established the existence of the crime—whether persecution, mass murder, unlawful detention, sexual violence, or expulsion. These verified crimes constitute the core of the database.

Each fact is accompanied by the relevant paragraph and page number from the judgment, enabling readers to find more information. The material is divided into ten regions, each accompanied by a short documentary. These films, in addition to presenting judicial conclusions and cases, also contain personal testimonies from witnesses, victims, and survivors. This approach aims to contribute to the fight against denial and minimization of crimes and judicially established facts while offering educational material for students, researchers, and the general public.

In our work, we frequently draw from this database, incorporating established facts into reports, special features, anniversary pieces, and thematic coverage of certain events. The database also contains instructional material, which builds upon existing journalism with insights from history education, is already being used in schools in some cantons of BiH.

Although not designed primarily as a database, our “Months under Siege” subpage³⁰ provides similar resources. With month-by-month testimonies from the Sarajevo siege, spanning from April 1992 to November 1995, it conveys the suffering of citizens—from personal injuries and the loss of loved ones, to daily survival under sniper fire and shelling—as well as the resilience of cultural life under siege. Launched on the 30th anniversary of the beginning of the siege, this subpage, like the Database of Judicially Established Facts, has been widely used by BIRN BiH journalists and other media outlets.

29 [Database of Judicially Established Facts about the War in BiH](#), Detektor.ba

30 [44 Months Under Siege](#), Detektor.ba

Additionally, we created a research subpage investigating Serbia's role in the war.³¹ This page consolidates key facts from the final ICTY verdicts pertaining to crimes committed in BiH, alongside a chronological overview of how the ICTY has characterized the conflict since the prosecution of war crimes began in the mid-1990s. This content is supplemented with statements of witnesses whose family members were killed, as documented in the judgements, or from those who were imprisoned in detention camps in Serbia. Given the potential for re-traumatization, our journalists approach these interviews with special care, ensuring a pleasant atmosphere, informed consent, and fair publication.

The project “Lives Behind the Fields of Death,”³² a collaboration between BIRN BiH and the Srebrenica Memorial Center, was also not originally conceived as a database. However, the webpage where it was published turned into a valuable collection of witness testimonies about wartime atrocities and genocide. This resource is likewise used in our reporting, analyses, and special features.³³

The primary audience for the project includes genocide survivors, their families, and those directly or indirectly affected by the crimes, including returnees to the Srebrenica area. Preserving these testimonies was crucial to ensure that they remain accessible even after the witnesses pass away. Many family members and survivors have contributed their final memories of loved ones lost in the genocide to the Srebrenica Memorial Center for permanent safekeeping. These items are now part of a permanent exhibit in the memorial room in Potocari.

Given the frequent denial of genocide and other war crimes, as well as the glorification of war criminals, we also created the database “Mapping Hate”³⁴ to document such incidents.

While not directly related to transitional justice or the right to truth, the BIRN BiH database of terrorism verdicts³⁵ offers a prime example of how to begin creating a database. It includes verdicts related to domestic terrorism and foreign fighters involved in the conflicts in Syria and Ukraine, with cases from BiH, Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Kosovo.

This database also contains detailed case overviews, complete with photographs and videos, using BIRN BiH's extensive reporting on these cases. It also features a resource center with video tutorials and PDF brochures on how

Mapiranje mržnje

Mapiranje mržnje je baza podataka o govoru mržnje, diskriminatorskom govoru, negiranju genocida i drugih ratnih zločina koje zvanjenci ili javni ličnosti izgovaraju u medijima ili na društvenim mrežama te incidentima u kojima se izaziva mržnja ili negiranje ratnih zločina. Podaci se redovito osvježavaju i unose od početka oktobra 2021. godine. Video o metodologiji projekta pogledajte na ovom linku.

Osoba Medij

Mapa incidenata

Incident
SNSD u predložbenom programu negiranja genocida i druge zločine
30. septembar 2022.

Incident
Zastava crn. Herceg-Bosne pred izbornom lokalizacijom u Mostaru
30. septembar 2022.

“Mapping Hate”

Given the frequent denial of genocide and other war crimes, as well as the glorification of war criminals, we also created the database “Mapping Hate” to document such incidents.

31 [Serbia's Role in the War – A Jigsaw Puzzle of Court Verdicts](#), Detektor.ba

32 [The Lives Behind the Fields of Death](#), Detektor.ba

33 [A Hundred Flowers for Those Killed and Injured on Srebrenica School Playground](#), Detektor.ba

34 [Mapping Hate](#), Detektor.ba

35 [Verdicts for Terrorism and Participation in Foreign Battlefields](#), Detektor.ba

to report on violent extremism and terrorism. The webpage includes an in-depth webinar prepared by BIRN BiH journalists on professional reporting on terrorism and the use of the database, as well as short videos outlining best reporting practices, prepared in cooperation with the OSCE and the Press Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Similarly, we developed the “Database of Official Vehicles,”³⁶ which the media has referenced for years, as well as the “Database of Disciplinary Proceedings against Police Officers,”³⁷ clearly presenting both minor and serious violations of official duties. These databases can serve as models for similar efforts in many areas.

Educational Curriculum

In the BiH education system, there are three separate curricula—Croatian, Serbian, and Bosnian. There are no standardized textbooks,³⁸ so children learn “three truths” about the wartime past in History classes, three different literary canons, and even geographical terms are divided along ethnic lines.³⁹

In several municipalities, the system of “two schools under one roof” persists, despite rulings from the Constitutional Court of the Federation of BiH declaring this such system a violation of children’s human rights.

Because of the divergent History curricula, primary and secondary school students learn about the 1992-1995 war in BiH from content that is not grounded in the verdicts of international and domestic courts. Furthermore, truth commissions that could establish a more detailed account of victims and events do not exist. This educational climate creates a favorable environment for the spread of disinformation and subjective interpretations that present conflicting narratives of the war and war crimes.

Several years ago, it was announced that students in Serbia and the Republika Srpska could be taught certain “national” subjects using the same curricula. In a BIRN BiH analysis,⁴⁰ we demonstrated that elementary school children are taught alternative narratives of wartime events, often disregarding established judicial facts.

A comparative analysis of History textbooks in BiH and Serbia showed that certain topics, events, and individuals are approached differently, and in some cases, even omitted. Additionally, the historical narratives emphasized the suffering of one’s own group while minimizing or neglecting the victims of other ethnicities. For example, the siege of Sarajevo, ethnic cleansing, war crimes, the Srebrenica genocide, and the roles of Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic —wartime RS leaders sentenced to life imprisonment by the ICTY—are portrayed differently.

36 [BIRN BiH: Database of Official Cars](#), Detektor.ba

37 [Internal Penalties Do not Prevent Police Violence and Misconduct](#), Detektor.ba

38 [Episode 87: Education in BiH – What We \(Don’t\) Teach Our Children in Schools](#), Detektor.ba

39 [Bosnia’s Segregated Schooling Entrenches Wartime Divisions](#), Detektor.ba

40 [Bosnian, Serbian Schoolbooks Teach Rival Versions of History](#), Detektor.ba

In Tuzla Canton, the appendix of a ninth grade History textbook for a nine-year primary school program avoided referencing domestic and international verdicts in its list of sources. Instead, the author cites a book titled “The Army, a Key to Peace,” by Rasim Delic, who was sentenced to three years in prison by the ICTY for failing to take measures to prevent or punish crimes committed by Mujahideen against Serb prisoners near Zavidovici.⁴¹

Education experts we collaborate with have explained that more than 15 years ago, in 2007, all relevant ministries in BiH adopted guidelines for writing and evaluating primary and secondary school textbooks. These guidelines state that “textbooks should be made in such a way that historical sources are included in the textbook content for each teaching unit and that they are diverse.” In practice, however, some textbooks still reflect the biased interpretation of their authors.

While recording an episode of *TV Justice*,⁴² BIRN BiH journalists spoke with Sarajevo high school seniors who shared that much of their knowledge about the war came from their parents, grandparents, and neighbors, as well as content they found on social media. They also noted that the coverage of the war in textbooks was somewhat limited.

In recent years, students in Sarajevo have begun learning about the siege of the city and the Srebrenica genocide from resources that reference judicial rulings. However, teachers in the capital and elsewhere still lack sufficient material from reliable sources for instruction.⁴³

To address this gap, we stepped beyond traditional journalism and created the Database of Judicially Established Facts, intended for use not only by teachers and researchers but also ministries of education. This database can enable students to learn what has been established by the courts, rather than selective interpretations from different sides of the conflict that suit their agendas and deny key judicial facts.

The educational tools we offer provide teachers with materials for lesson planning as well as methodologies for teaching about the war. As part of the database project, Professor Melisa Foric-Plasto created a handbook for History teachers and professors⁴⁴ to help them more easily prepare lessons and engage with students. Two cantons in the Federation of BiH have signed a memorandum to use the database’s content,⁴⁵ and workshops with teachers have been held in Sarajevo.⁴⁶

As part of our contribution to a better education system, our journalists participated in the Srebrenica Oral History Summer School,⁴⁷ where we presented our methodology as a resource for the preservation the culture, tradition, and history of a nation while combatting harmful ideologies.

41 [Experts Warn that New History Textbook in Tuzla Deepens Divisions](#), Detektor.ba

42 [TV Justice I Episode 148: Bringing Wartime Facts to Bosnia’s Schools](#), Detektor.ba

43 [From Court to Classroom: Bringing Wartime Facts to Bosnia’s Schools](#), Detektor.ba

44 [How to Teach About Judicially Established Facts about the War in BiH: Material for History Teachers](#), Detektor.ba

45 [History Teachers in Tuzla Canton Will Use BIRN BiH’s Database of Facts about the War in BiH](#), Detektor.ba

46 [Workshop on Teaching History from Database of Judicially Established Facts to Be Held for Sarajevo Canton Teachers in October](#), Detektor.ba

47 [Oral History School in Srebrenica Ends](#), Detektor.ba

Missing from the War

The International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) defines a missing person as “anyone whose whereabouts are not known and who is being sought by another person or other persons.” The ICMP guide “Resolving the Missing Persons Cases from Conflicts in the Former Yugoslavia,” details the search for those who went missing during the wars in Croatia and BiH from 1991 to 1992, and in Kosovo in 1998 and 1999.

The guide explains that institutions use a variety of sources to obtain information about the locations of hidden graves. These include witness testimonies, government records, court proceedings, police reports, and information provided through bilateral or multilateral cooperation between countries.

According to the Missing Persons Institute (INO), around 30,000 people disappeared in BiH during the war, and almost 30 years later, the search continues for just over 7,000 missing persons.

The main challenges in locating missing persons include inaccessible terrain, insufficient information on the locations of individual and mass graves, and limited resources, which we report on regularly.⁴⁸ In the first 11 months of 2023, 90 exhumations took place, uncovering the remains of approximately 60 people. Additionally, INO received about 30 new reports of persons who disappeared during the war.

The issue of missing persons remains an extremely sensitive but very important topic. Since 2005, we have been reporting on efforts to locate the remains of war victims, producing news articles, special features, analyses, TV programs, research, and documentaries. As a nongovernmental media organization, our content has been broadcast by numerous media outlets in the country, across the region, and worldwide.

This is why we have transformed our extensive knowledge and experience into the handbook, “Media Reporting on Persons Missing from the 1992-1995 Conflict in BiH.”⁴⁹ This was developed in collaboration with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), INO, and the State Prosecutor’s Office, as well as journalists from across the country.

PRAKTIČNI PRIRUČNIK

MEDIJSKO IZVJEŠTAVANJE O OSOBAMA NESTALIM USLJED SUKOBA U BiH 1992.–1995.

REZULTAT ISKUSTVA I PRAKSE NOVINARA, UREDNIKA, GLASNOGOVORNIKA, ISTRAŽILACA I HUMANITARNIH RADNIKA, REAKCIJA JAVNOSTI I PERCEPCIJE PORODICA NESTALIH IZ BiH

“Media Reporting on Persons Missing from the 1992–1995 Conflict in BiH”

This was developed in collaboration with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), INO, and the State Prosecutor’s Office, as well as journalists from across the country.

⁴⁸ [Sixty More Persons, Who Went Missing During the War, Found in 2023](#), Detektor.ba

⁴⁹ [Media Reporting on Persons Missing Due to 1992-1995 Conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Practical Handbook](#), Detektor.ba

The handbook draws on the experiences and practices of spokespersons, investigators, humanitarian workers, and the public responses and perceptions of families searching for their loved ones. It was designed to assist journalists in their work and to encourage media outlets to return these topics to prime time. It also aims to remind professors to supplement theoretical lectures with real-life examples and to serve as a guide for students, future reporters, and journalists. Victims' families, too, can gain insight into what to expect from the media and understand the media's responsibilities in covering these stories. The handbook is also valuable for anyone wishing to learn more about missing persons and the media's approach to this subject.

One of our main goals was to prevent the stories of missing persons from being forgotten. We want the public to recognize that these are not just statistics, but real people who are still being searched for by their loved ones. We also seek to ensure that the voices of families are heard and to highlight the challenges and institutional shortcomings they face.

The media serves as a vital tool for these families, providing them a platform to appeal to those who may know the whereabouts of their loved remains to speak up. The media can also give families space to share who their missing loved ones were, what their lives were like, under what circumstances they disappeared, and how the search has impacted their lives over the years.

We can help families by amplifying their voices, their call for justice, and the struggles they face during their search. It is essential that reporting be objective, truthful, and free of bias or nationalist undertones. Despite concerns that public space is oversaturated with this issue, it is crucial to stress that the search for the missing is very real and relevant in BiH.

The standards we teach journalists emphasize the importance of empathy and impartiality when reporting on missing persons, regardless of their identity or the background of those involved. For us, a victim is a victim—regardless of ethnic, national, or religious affiliation.

In reporting on missing persons, we advocate careful attention to language and word choice. For instance, terms like “body” and “remains” should be used instead of “corpse,” and “war” instead of “aggression,” in line with the ICTY judgements. Legal qualifications must also be respected, avoiding minimizing language like calling genocide “a terrible crime.”

While personal experiences and stories about the war that we carry from home naturally stir up strong emotions, these must be set aside in reporting. Journalism should be based on an accurate, timely information from credible sources, verified documents, and court evidence.⁵⁰ Whenever possible, testimonies of interviewees should be corroborated by additional sources.⁵¹

Careful preparation is necessary for interviewing families of the missing, including agreeing on terms for publishing their stories. In cases of protected witnesses, measures like face and voice distortion and the use of pseudonyms should be applied to ensure their safety. It is crucial to be mindful not to offend interviewees in any way and to allow breaks and the possibility to withdraw from the interview if necessary to protect their well-being.

50 [Boy Remembering Last Encounter with Father Killed in Grabovica 30 Years Ago](#), Detektor.ba

51 [Hiding the Bodies of the Missing Increases Pain of Families of Those Killed in Grabovica 29 Years Ago](#), Detektor.ba

After interviews, BIRN BiH journalists follow up to ensure interviewees are not retraumatized and are in good health. We make post-interview calls to check on their well-being,⁵² as discussing traumatic events or remembering loved ones can be distressing.⁵³

Victims and survivors of war, including families of the missing, are often subjected to prejudice, stigmatization, ridicule, and even threats, particularly on social media. Journalists have a responsibility to do everything in their power to protect these individuals in their reporting. They must give advance consideration to any potential consequences and pay careful attention to the impact of language and word choice.⁵⁴

At the end of 2023, we presented our handbook at the University of Sarajevo Faculty of Political Sciences,⁵⁵ where it was integrated into the student library. During this event, it was noted that the standards established in BiH for reporting on missing persons can serve as a model worldwide.

To mark the International Day of the Disappeared in 2023, BIRN BiH launched the campaign “I’m Still Searching for...” aimed at raising awareness about the pain and hope of families searching for loved ones who disappeared without a trace during the war. The campaign also appealed to those with knowledge of potential gravesites to come forward with information. Family members shared the arduous journey of searching for missing loved ones.⁵⁶

On this occasion, we published ten videos on our social media platforms featuring family members of the missing from across BiH. In these videos, they talk about those they are searching for, share memories, and appeal for help in finding them. These families share common pain as well as the hope of finding the remains of their loved ones before the end of their own lives.

Among the missing are several hundred children, including nearly 30 who were less than a year old when they disappeared.⁵⁷ We continue to remind the public of this in our reporting, and as this handbook is being written, BIRN BiH is preparing a new database on children who went missing during the war.

Our experience has shown that family members of the missing are often dissatisfied with the efforts of institutions charged with locating the missing and prosecuting those responsible.⁵⁸ Empathy and understanding are crucial in these situations, while also seeking answers from authorities. In that way, we have become allies to families in their search for truth and accountability.

52 [No Monument to 500 Missing Persons, Foca Still Far from Coming to Terms with the Past](#), Detektor.ba

53 [TV Justice, Episode 150: Painful Memories of Rape, Torture and Killings in Rogatica in 1992](#), Detektor.ba

54 [How Reporting on the Missing Has Become My Personal Journalistic Mission](#), Detektor.ba

55 [Handbook on Reporting on Missing Persons in BiH Presented](#), Detektor.ba

56 [BIRN BiH Launches Video Campaign About Missing Persons](#), Detektor.ba

57 [Parents of About 400 Children Gone Missing in the War Live in Hope to Find Them, While Racing against Time](#), Detektor.ba

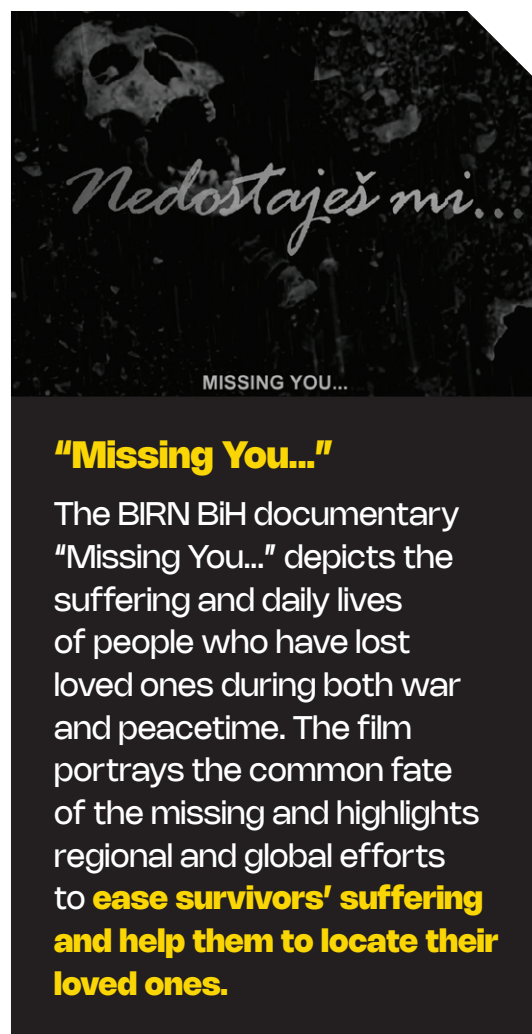
58 [Bosnian War’s ‘Disappeared’ Remembered with Roses](#), Detektor.ba

The BIRN BiH documentary “Missing You...”⁵⁹ depicts the suffering and daily lives of people who have lost loved ones during both war and peacetime. The film portrays the common fate of the missing and highlights regional and global efforts to ease survivors’ suffering and help them to locate their loved ones.

In addition to producing reports and feature stories, we also cover court proceedings related to the missing, where family members often recount their last encounters⁶⁰ with the disappeared, or where official institutions present information.⁶¹

Our journalists have made frequent visits to exhumation sites, speaking with those searching for their loved ones.⁶² In these situations, it is necessary to wait for the official results of identification and DNA analysis,⁶³ as it is not always certain that those buried at a particular site are local victims. This has been demonstrated in our reports on numerous secondary and tertiary graves throughout the country.

Despite years, even decades, of hardship, families of the missing do not lose hope that they will find the remains of their loved ones and that justice will be served. These families should be given the space and time they deserve in the media. BIRN BiH journalists have received international recognitions for their reporting on the missing, including the second International Award for Contribution to Peace, granted by the Fetisov organization.⁶⁴



"Missing You..."

The BIRN BiH documentary "Missing You..." depicts the suffering and daily lives of people who have lost loved ones during both war and peacetime. The film portrays the common fate of the missing and highlights regional and global efforts to **ease survivors' suffering and help them to locate their loved ones.**

59 [Missing You...](#), Detektor.ba

60 [Marjanovic: Seeing Father for the Last Time](#), Detektor.ba

61 [Mane Djuric and others: High percentage of Children Among the Missing in First Two Years of War](#), Detektor.ba

62 [Bosnian Families Hope Grave Discovery Will End Search for Bodies](#), Detektor.ba

63 [Kalinovik Mass Grave Contains Srebrenica Victims, Experts Confirm](#), Detektor.ba

64 [28 Years on, Families Still Searching for Missing Bosnian Soldiers](#), Detektor.ba

Pillar 3

The right to reparations

Systemic action by
states to ensure
reparations for victims
and survivors

Reparations and Memorialization

Reparations, as the third pillar of transitional justice, is a mechanism to provide both material and non-material compensation to victims for their pain, loss, and trauma suffered, while also focusing on their social reintegration. In addition to its social role, reparations also have an economic dimension, in the form of compensation to victims made by the state. In the aftermath of war, states in transition must establish systems that guarantee equal reparation programs and rehabilitation for all victims.

The European Convention on the Compensation of Victims of Violent Crimes explicitly mandates that if full compensation is not available, the state should compensate victims. Based on this obligation, BiH is required to compensate all victims of violent crimes, especially when compensation is not obtainable from perpetrators or other sources. A similar obligation is outlined in an interpretation of the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment and Punishment, which stipulates that member states must ensure that victims of torture and other inhumane acts have the right to just and adequate reparations, including the means for their fullest possible rehabilitation.

Since 2005, BIRN BiH has been reporting on issues related to material and non-material compensation for victims of crimes in BiH, with court reporting, analyses, feature articles, and documentaries. BIRN BiH's mission is to highlight systemic shortcomings, amplify the voices of victims seeking justice, reparations, and memorialization, and to educate the public about the stigma that victims often face.

Legal Measures for Reparations

For the transitional justice process, including reparations, to be effective and for victims to receive the necessary information, the role of the media is essential alongside the efforts of institutions and non-governmental organizations. Introducing more effective reparation mechanisms, particularly compensation for victims, is crucial. In BiH, there are two forms of material reparation programs: administrative reparations, which are granted based on the status of civilian victim of war through administrative proceedings or litigation, and judicial reparations, which are pursued through criminal proceedings.

The administrative reparation system operates at the sub-state level, in the entities of the Federation of BiH, the RS, and Brcko District. Accordingly, this system is governed by the Law on the Protection of Civilian Victims of War in the Federation of BiH, the Law on the Protection of Victims of War Torture of the RS and the Law on Civilian Victims of War in Brcko District. Reparations for victims include recognition of civilian victim of war status and a potential monthly stipend, as well as access to healthcare, rehabilitation, and personal care.

While these provisions exist “on paper,” in practice, victims encounter numerous challenges and obstacles. One of the most significant issues is that survivors of rape and sexual abuse, who were granted identity protection during trials, must disclose their identity during legal proceedings for reparations and bear all associated legal costs. BIRN BiH journalists have witnessed these difficulties repeatedly during trial monitoring. The

fragmented legal framework results in unequal treatment and access to rights for wartime sexual violence survivors in BiH. Recognition of victim status and associated rights depends on the survivor's place of residence.

Many survivors of sexual violence feel abandoned and betrayed by the system. The frequent use of statutes of limitations to dismiss civil lawsuits for damages, combined with the financial burdens of legal costs, leave victims feeling disappointed and “punished for having survived.”⁶⁵ Social stigma continues to prevent many survivors from speaking out about their trauma. Coupled with the lack of adequate support, this fosters fear of seeking justice and reparation.

There is yet another significant problem in the RS, where the deadline to apply for victim status under the Law on the Protection of Victims of War Torture has already expired. For years, victims' associations and other organizations unsuccessfully petitioned the RS Ministry of Labor, War Veterans, and Disabled Persons' Protection to extend this deadline for an additional five years or to abolish it altogether.⁶⁶

This topic has been explored in the BIRN BiH video explainer “BIRN BiH – EXPLAINS: Deadline for Victims of War Torture in Republika Srpska Expires.”⁶⁷ Using video explainers are effective in engaging a broader and more diverse audience. These short, adaptable videos are ideal for sharing on social media and can communicate complex topics in a concise manner. This is why we chose this medium in our attempt to encourage torture survivors to apply for victim status at the last minute.

The media plays an important role in helping victims to share their stories, connect with each other, and demand their rights. Unfortunately, due to victims' poor economic and social status and the lack of institutional support and access to legal aid, many struggle to obtain the necessary information. Victims themselves often tell journalists that they do not know where to turn for help.



“When I see, the tears start to come on their own. (...) After 23 years, you still keep reliving it. (...) When the crisis hits, the anxiety... and the older I get, the worse it is for me. You don't know who to turn to, who to talk to, who can help you,” shared one woman we interviewed, who was raped eight times at the age of 14.⁶⁸

Suzana J., rape victim
in Odžak municipality in 1992

65 [Bosnian Wartime Sexual Violence Survivors 'Feel Betrayed By System'](#), Detektor.ba

66 [BIRN BiH – EXPLAINS: Deadline for War Torture Victims in Republika Srpska Expires](#), Detektor.ba

67 [BIRN BiH – EXPLAINS: Deadline for War Torture Victims in Republika Srpska Expires](#) - video, Detektor.ba

68 [A Child Taken from Her Mother: Wartime Rape Survivor Suzana Tells Her Story](#), Detektor.ba

In 2019, the UN Committee Against Torture issued a decision calling on BiH to issue a public apology to sexual violence survivors, provide compensation as soon as possible, and establish systemic measures for reparations at the state level. This was the first such ruling against BiH, but it has yet to be implemented.⁶⁹

The Role of the Media

For the media to fulfill its educational role in transitional justice, including in reparations, independent editorial interest is essential. Reporting must be professional, without political interest or sensationalism, and emphasize reducing the stigmatization and discrimination of survivors.

Stigmatization implies negative, gender-based stereotypes that lead to the marginalization of survivors. The publication “Myths about Rape in War Sexual Violence Trials” identifies the four basic myths prevalent in these trials: those related to promiscuity, consent, credibility, and shame.

Victims are often burdened with feelings of guilt and shame imposed by society, with little understanding of the trauma they endured or how they are affected today. Many survivors of wartime rape do not even tell their spouses or children about their experiences. In some cases, BIRN BiH journalists have discovered that spouses have even blamed each other for what happened. In criminal proceedings, it is not uncommon for the defense or the accused to challenge the credibility of the victims. The first step in raising public awareness is to recognize rape for what it is—an extreme act of violence for which the victim bears no responsibility.

Today, victim care is primarily provided by non-governmental and international organizations, while official state institutions contribute the least. We have reported that many of those suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder rely on NGOs for support as they grapple with stigma, symptoms, loneliness, and the feeling of being unable to confide in anyone but medical professionals.⁷⁰

In order to reach as large and diverse audience as possible and to raise awareness of the stigmatization, stereotypes, and injustices survivors face in their pursuit of reparations, BIRN BiH journalists have employed various media formats. These include news reports, in-depth analysis, investigative articles, features, documentaries, TV shows, short social media videos, podcasts, and organized debates and conferences where victims, activists, and government officials can share their experiences and discuss problems and solutions.

Through sustained, professional reporting, the media can earn the trust of survivors and become recognized as allies in their struggle. Journalists can support survivors in speaking out as well as draw attention to inefficiencies and shortcomings in the system.

69 [BIRN BiH – EXPLAINS: Deadline for War Torture Victims in Republika Srpska Expires](#), Detektor.ba

70 [PTSD in BiH](#), Detektor.ba

In addition to traditional media coverage of these issues, BIRN BiH engages experts who provide professional knowledge to enhance understanding of issues like reparations. One such example is the policy paper “Reparations in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Justice (Not) Coming,” written by lawyer and expert Lejla Gacanica.

In this document, Gacanica argues that despite numerous existing challenges and obstacles in achieving reparations in BiH, it is important to emphasize the evident progress that has been made in the development of this aspect of transitional justice. Over the years, the state and its entities have moved from a lack of understanding and genuine interest to establishing standards and involving victims and civil society in planning and reform processes. This is the direct result of persistent work and advocacy by victims’ associations, other civil society organizations, and the media. However, the true measure of BiH’s progress lies in what has been achieved for victims themselves, and unfortunately, there is a serious concern that this progress may be too little, too late, for many.

According to Gacanica, the biggest challenges victims face in exercising their right to reparations stem from BiH’s complicated legal system, fragmented laws, unequal treatment of victims, limited access to an effective criminal justice, extremely inefficient civil proceedings, and, ultimately, a lack of political will.

Nearly three decades after the war, not enough has been done in BiH to address the urgent needs of civilian victims of war. They continue to be doubly disadvantaged—first by the harm they suffered and then by the systemic barriers to exercising their own rights. This perpetuates their trauma, denies them the chance for a dignified life (in which the acknowledgment of their pain is the minimum for a fresh start), and deepens mistrust in authorities and institutions. Some victims describe the process of seeking reparations as a form of renewed violence against them, only by different means.

Guidelines for Professional and Responsible Reporting on Reparations:

- Report in an objective, balanced, and impartial way, treating all victims equally regardless of nationality, religion, ethnicity, or other affiliation;
- Publish accurate and verified information from reliable sources, such as relevant domestic and international institutions, laws, final judgments, reports from associations;
- Use several different sources and interlocutors to verify information and exclude any unverified information from media content;
- Respect the privacy of victims, taking all necessary steps to protect their identity even if this was not done in court proceedings, but especially if they are protected witnesses;
- Do not pressure victims to speak if they are unable to provide information immediately or do not give the information you are seeking or deem necessary;
- Carefully formulate questions;
- When appropriate, refer interlocutors to institutions and organizations that can provide psychological help and support;
- Offer resources and referrals for victims seeking compensation, informing them where they can find professional support and assistance.
- Journalists should treat victims, i.e. survivors, fairly and with empathy, taking into account the potential for re-traumatization;
- Approach interviewees responsibly and with sensitivity.

When reporting on reparations, it is extremely important to highlight the challenges faced by victims, such as the absence or inadequacy of laws, the poor implementation of existing legislation, and complicated bureaucratic procedures. It is also important to discuss the connection between society and the conditions in which survivors live. BIRN BiH frequently analyzes these shortcomings or irregularities with the help of experts, often comparing them with positive practices elsewhere to highlight deficiencies. However, when possible, it is impactful to supplement such analyses with the personal experiences of survivors.

Strong examples of this reporting can be found in articles such as “Instead of Reparations, Detainees Forced to Pay Procedural Costs,”⁷¹ “Two Decisions of Courts in Republika

71 [Instead of Reparations, Detainees Forced to Pay Procedural Costs](#), Detektor.ba

Srpska Set a Precedent in Cases of Compensation to Detainees,”⁷² “Transitional Justice Strategy Forgotten for Almost a Decade.”⁷³

BIRN BiH has repeatedly pointed to the absence of this document in BiH when sharing lessons with other countries currently experiencing conflict, with the aim of helping others to avoid the same mistakes made by Bosnian authorities.

Numerous aid organizations have reached out to NGOs and victims’ associations from BiH. For instance, a recent project initiated by the New Lines Institute seeks to learn from the past in BiH to improve the future for survivors of sexual violence in Ukraine.⁷⁴ Their report, which BIRN BiH has covered, offers useful recommendations for the international community, Ukraine, and the United States, including creating a national loss and damage registry to compliment the international one, establishing legal protections for children born from wartime rape, and providing psychosocial support to all survivors. The report also highlights that, three decades after the war in BiH, many victims of sexual violence are still awaiting justice.

We have also reported on the pursuit of justice by Ukrainian victims of sexual violence. According to the Department for Conflict-Related Sexual Violence Crimes, there are 212 such cases, involving 69 men and 143 women, including minors—12 girls and one boy.

BIRN BiH has produced numerous news stories on this topic, frequently referencing events and reports from domestic institutions, the non-governmental sector, and international organizations. Examples include: “Discussion on Victims’ Rights to Reparations and Justice: Now You Are the Victim and I Am the Winner,”⁷⁵ “Time Is Running out and Victims Are Finding It Increasingly Difficult to Achieve Justice, Shows a New Report by the Council of Europe’s Commissioner,”⁷⁶ “Children Born as a Result of Wartime Sexual Violence Legally Recognized in Brcko District,”⁷⁷ Additional examples can be found on our website, Detektor.ba, under the tags of war crimes, sexual violence, and detention camps in BiH.

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“During the quarter-century since the end of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a transitional justice strategy defining extrajudicial mechanisms for establishing facts and truth about the events of 1992–1995 has never been adopted or implemented. A document that was drafted almost ten years ago by an expert group of the Council of Ministers is now forgotten.”

⁷² [Two Decisions of Courts in Republika Srpska Set a Precedent in Cases of Compensation to Detainees](#), Detektor.ba

⁷³ [Transitional Justice Strategy Forgotten for Almost a Decade](#), Detektor.ba

⁷⁴ [Lessons from BiH as Preparation for Response to Sexual Violence in Ukraine](#), Detektor.ba

⁷⁵ [Discussion on Victims’ Right to Reparations and Justice: Now You Are the Victim, and I Am the Winner](#), Detektor.ba

⁷⁶ [Time Is Running out and Victims Are Finding It Increasingly Difficult to Achieve Justice, Shows a New Report by the Council of Europe’s Commissioner](#), Detektor.ba

⁷⁷ [Children Born as a Result of Wartime Sexual Violence Legally Recognized in Brcko District](#), Detektor.ba

The most important sources for creating content are the survivors themselves, who share their stories with us. Many of these contacts were initially made at trials, commemorations, and roundtable discussions. Over time, these survivors began reaching out to our editorial office directly, recognizing our earnestness and commitment. In our reporting, we often use documents provided to us by victims, which our journalists later verify through official institutions. BIRN BiH also collaborates with associations advocating for victims' rights, such as TRIAL International in BiH, which often provides free legal assistance to victims. We also engage with official institutions to obtain responses and perspectives.

What are the Needs and Demands of Victims?

There are five basic forms of reparations. By reporting on all of these forms, journalists can raise awareness and encourage competent institutions to address the demands and needs of victims. These forms are as follows:

- **Compensation:** Providing material satisfaction to victims through one-time payments, monthly stipends, or other allowances based on legal provisions. This may also include initiating criminal or civil proceedings for material or non-material damages incurred during the period of human rights violations;
- **Restitution:** Restoring victims to their pre-violation circumstances, including releasing detainees, ensuring civil rights and freedoms, returning property, and facilitating the return of displaced persons;
- **Rehabilitation:** Offering psychological and medical support for victims who have sustained war-related trauma or physical injuries;
- **Various forms of redress:** Implementing symbolic methods to mitigate the harm suffered, such as resolving the fate of missing persons, issuing public apologies, erecting memorials, and establishing the facts of the crimes committed;
- **Guarantees of non-repetition:** Ensuring that human rights violations will not recur by enacting procedures such as demobilizing armed groups, disbanding paramilitary formations, destroying weapons, placing security services under civilian control, and reforming the security and judicial sectors.

BIRN BiH journalists have reported on nearly every aspect of these issues, using personal examples and feature stories to illustrate the realities of returnees, struggles for compensation, the search for the missing, the repentance of perpetrators, and the impact of daily denial and minimization of survivors' suffering.

Memorialization

BiH lacks a unified and organized approach to memorialization. There is no genuine state effort to commemorate the past, nor is there a national law on memorialization. Instead, the erection of monuments is primarily regulated by entity, cantonal, and Brčko District laws on spatial planning and land use. Typically, local governments and urban planning services grant permission for the construction of memorials. While the Law on Missing Persons of BiH provides guidelines for the marking of graves, it does not establish criteria or standards for erecting memorials in the context of the transitional justice processes.

The only memorial that has been established by law with a clear purpose is the Srebrenica-Potočari Memorial Center and Cemetery for the Victims of the 1995 Genocide. Created by the decision of the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2000, the center's mandate is "to create a dignified place for burial of persons who died due to the events in Srebrenica."

In BiH, the construction of monuments is a politicized issue. According to victims' associations, progress on this issue is impeded by a lack of institutional and political interest in addressing memorialization by enabling families to mark places of suffering like mass graves, and former detention camps. At the same time, inscriptions on monuments erected by one ethnic group are often perceived as offensive by other groups. These monuments often carry overtly political messages about the roles of victim and perpetrator, and there are frequent refusals to commemorate certain events and atrocities from the past.

It is important to highlight that memorialization, as a form of transitional justice, is not solely focused on the past. Rather, this process also serves the present by promoting healing and rebuilding trust, and it looks to the future with the aim of preventing violence and guaranteeing the non-repetition of crimes.⁷⁸ Alongside reporting on memorialization efforts, it is important to emphasize the importance of public apologies, which can contribute to a sense of closure for victims.



"How monuments are constructed in Bosnia and Herzegovina and what they are intended to show reflect the political elites and the kind of society they want."⁷⁹

Roundtable on the role of memorialization in building cultures of remembrance during which conceptual designs were discussed for a monument at the Kazani site

⁷⁸ Shaheed, F., *Report of the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, Farida Shaheed: Memorialization processes (A/HRC/25/49)*. United Nations General Assembly Human Rights Council, 2014. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/766862?ln=en>.

⁷⁹ [Erection of Monuments in BiH Part of Unemphatic Exclusive Collective Memory: Round Table](#), Detektor.ba

At a roundtable on the role of memorialization in building cultures of remembrance during which conceptual designs were discussed for a monument at the Kazani site, it was observed that “how monuments are constructed in Bosnia and Herzegovina and what they are intended to show reflect the political elites and the kind of society they want.”

In reporting on monuments and cultures of remembrance, BIRN BiH has produced several documentaries, such as “Bosnia Spends Euro 2 million on ‘Divisive’ War Memorials,”⁸⁰ and “Mostar’s Unpunished Massacres, Part 3: The Long Wait for the Memorial,”⁸¹ which explore this topic through the stories of those who have lost loved ones.

To contribute to the preservation of memory, BIRN BiH and the Srebrenica Memorial Center launched the project “The Lives Behind the Fields of Death.”⁸² This project has archived approximately 300 testimonies from survivors of the Srebrenica genocide as well as preserved 100 personal items from victims,⁸³ ensuring that their stories remain a part of the ongoing fight against denial and historical revisionism.

A group of peace activists and the Center for Nonviolent Action, through the initiative “Unmarked Sites of Suffering,” have been highlighting for years the existence of locations of past atrocities that remain unmarked, without memorials or signage. This is often due to a lack of political will from local authorities, despite survivors and organizations repeatedly calling for the installation of such markers.

BIRN BiH regularly reports on these efforts through news, features, and TV programs,⁸⁴ speaking to survivors at these unmarked sites to help preserve their memories and educate the public. The hope is that these stories will raise awareness and contribute to the societal effort to come to terms with the past.

One of the most recent actions covered by the BIRN BiH team took place in Herzegovina, at the former detention sites of the Mostar Heliodrom and Jablanica Museum. Although they encountered closed doors, former detainees and peace activists visited and marked these locations during a two-day peace initiative organized by the Sarajevo-Belgrade Center for Nonviolence. The message of the initiative was empathy for shared suffering, and the imperative that such crimes be neither repeated nor forgotten.⁸⁵

In March 2023, BIRN BiH documented how former camp inmates from Tarcin, Busovaca, Zepc, and Derventa—now peace activists—visited the cells where they and their loved ones had been tortured. Despite the painful memories of these horrors, these two-day campaigns sent messages of peace, forgiveness, and understanding.⁸⁶

In 2016, in the municipality of Vares, a monument without national or religious symbols was constructed to honor all victims from the local community, located approximately 50 kilometers from Sarajevo. At the time, BIRN BiH reported concerns about potential opposition to the monument’s existence, as local victims and politicians were divided over

80 [TV Justice, Episode 109: Bosnia Spends Euro 2 Million on ‘Divisive’ War Memorials](#), Detektor.ba

81 [Mostar’s Unpunished Massacres, Part 3: The Long Wait for the Memorial](#), Detektor.ba

82 [The Lives Behind the Fields of Death](#), Detektor.ba

83 [Memorial Room “The Lives Behind the Fields of Death” Opened in Srebrenica](#), Detektor.ba

84 [TV Justice, Episode 132: Marking Unmarked Sites of Suffering](#), Detektor.ba

85 [Closed Door not an Obstacle to Reconciliation of Former Detainees](#), Detektor.ba

86 [Tears, Apologies and Shaking Hands of Detainees and Veterans at Detention Sites](#), Detektor.ba

the memorial.⁸⁷ Representatives of Croatian and Bosniak victims' associations in Vares confirmed they had not been consulted regarding its construction.

In January 2024, the City Administration of Sarajevo issued a public call for conceptual designs for a memorial to the civilian victims of the war from 1992 to 1995. This memorial aims to serve as a symbol of memory and resistance against the violence and hatred endured by Sarajevo's citizens during the longest siege in modern history. The Union of Civilian War Victims of Sarajevo Canton has encouraged citizens to submit the names of civilians who were killed.⁸⁸

In contrast, there are monuments erected with the intent to divide ethnic groups by emphasizing which side suffered most during the war, hindering justice and reconciliation.⁸⁹

In 2021, BIRN BiH reported that local authorities in BiH chose to ignore calls from the former High Representative to remove murals honoring convicted war criminals. These murals, present in at least five municipalities, continue to create a hostile environment for returnees in these areas.⁹⁰

Every year on May 31, White Armband Day is commemorated in remembrance of the non-Serb residents of Prijedor who were killed during the war. For the past decade, surviving victims and the parents of murdered children in Prijedor have been advocating for a monument to be built in honor of the children who lost their lives.

"It has been ten full years since we submitted a request for building a monument to our killed children. To date, the Town Assembly has not expressed its opinion on this request, so we have not been able to initiate the procedure for building the monument. So far, four mayors and four assembly presidents have changed, and none of them has had enough humanity to make a historical step forward and approve the building of the first monument for civilian victims of war in Prijedor," said Fikret Bacic, a family member of war victims and one of the leading advocates for the monument, during White Armband Day.⁹¹



May 31

Every year on May 31, **White Armband Day** is commemorated in remembrance of the non-Serb residents of Prijedor who were killed during the war. For the past decade, surviving victims and the parents of murdered children in Prijedor have been advocating for a monument to be built in honor of the children who lost their lives.

87 [Multi-Ethnic Bosnian War Memorial Faces Removal](#), Detektor.ba

88 [By the End of Year, Sarajevo to Get Monument to Civilians Killed During Siege](#), Detektor.ba

89 [Most Monuments in the Region Dedicated to Wartime Suffering with Controversial Content](#), Detektor.ba

90 [Bosnian Authorities Fail to Remove Murals of War Criminals](#), Detektor.ba

91 [White Armband Day Marked with Hope for Monument to Killed Children](#), Detektor.ba

BIRN BiH is currently developing a virtual monument project, which will allow visitors to explore an online map highlighting locations where civilians were killed during the war—particularly those sites that have not been officially marked.

Monuments dedicated to victims without national or religious symbols represent a significant step forward for transitional and post-war societies and offer a universal expression of remembrance and reconciliation.

Journalists are guided by BIRN BiH's guidelines and standards in reporting:

- Report in an objective, balanced, and impartial way, treating all victims equally regardless of nationality, religion, ethnicity, or other affiliation;
- Publish accurate and verified information from reliable sources, such as relevant domestic and international institutions, laws, final judgments, reports from associations;
- Use several different sources and interlocutors to verify information and exclude any unverified information from media content;
- Respect the privacy of victims, taking all necessary steps to protect their identity even if this was not done in court proceedings, but especially if they are protected witnesses;
- Do not pressure victims to speak if they are unable to provide information immediately or do not give the information you are seeking or deem necessary;
- Carefully formulate questions;
- When appropriate, refer interlocutors to institutions and organizations that can provide psychological help and support;
- Offer resources and referrals for victims seeking compensation, informing them where they can find professional support and assistance.
- Journalists should treat victims, i.e. survivors, fairly and with empathy, taking into account the potential for re-traumatization;
- Approach interviewees responsibly and with sensitivity.

Recommendations

As outlined by Lejla Gacanica, ensuring this critical pillar of transitional justice in BiH requires several key steps, which journalists must continue to report on:

- Establish a unified framework of administrative reparations for the whole of BiH that would replace the multitude of existing laws and ensure the provision of easily accessible support to victims, free from any form of discrimination, including discrimination based on place of residence. It is essential to ensure equal access to social benefits and other support measures to which victims are entitled.
- Ensure the continuation of the practice of awarding property claims in criminal proceedings and ensure uniform practice before all judicial institutions in BiH, including district/cantonal institutions. Judges should decide on civil claims within criminal proceedings, without unjustifiably referring victims to civil proceedings.
- Bosnian authorities need to ensure the urgent and comprehensive implementation of the 2019 UNCAT Decision and the 2021 CEDAW, including compensation and public apologies, as well as the establishment of an effective state-level mechanism for awarding damages to all victims of war crimes.
- It is necessary to establish uniform criteria for the entire territory of the country on the amount of compensation awarded for various types of damages in war crimes cases.
- Authorities in BiH need to ensure that victims effectively receive the compensation awarded in criminal proceedings. This means that – even in cases where the perpetrator fails to pay the awarded amount of compensation – the authorities must ensure that the damages awarded to the victims are paid. Bosnian authorities need to ensure the establishment of a fund from which compensation and other forms of reparations would be paid to victims.
- Amend the laws on civil procedure of the Federation, Republika Srpska and Brcko District so that the identity of victims, who have been granted identity protection in criminal proceedings, is also protected in civil proceedings when seeking compensation.
- Authorities in BiH should ensure that the statute of limitations does not apply to lawsuits for compensation for non-material damage in war crimes cases and that victims whose claims have been rejected on the ground of the statute of limitations are exempted from paying procedural costs.
- It is necessary to establish standards and criteria for erecting memorials and holding commemorative activities at the state level.
- Representatives of authorities should acknowledge the suffering of all victims in BiH, without ethnic discrimination and exclusivity. Only a responsible policy of remembrance can produce the effects of symbolic reparations and moral satisfaction in acknowledging the suffering of victims and their families.
- Reparation programs must be developed and implemented continuously, and particularly in relation towards other transitional justice mechanisms.

Pillar 4

The guarantee of non- repetition

Institutional reforms
that will ensure that
human rights violations
can not reoccur

Institutional Reforms

In addition to the right to truth, transitional justice, includes the pursuit of justice and the guarantee of preventing future human rights violations through the creation of independent, trustworthy institutions—especially within the judicial and security sectors. For the past thirty years, the authorities in BiH have been responsible for building such institutions and enacting laws aligned with international and European standards.

The establishment of a contemporary legal framework for constant verification of employees in public institutions at all levels is one of these important reforms. Equally important is ensuring that these institutions operate according to principles of professionalism, transparency, and full accountability.

Furthermore, raising awareness among citizens and institutions about the importance of transitional justice and institutional reforms is crucial in post-conflict societies.⁹² In BiH, media, civil society, international, non-governmental organizations, and part of the society has played a major role in contributing to understanding, accountability, critical inquiry and advocacy.

Independent and free media are essential pillars of a democratic society, particularly in post-conflict environments like BiH. In these settings, other reform activities are necessary to increase institutional responsibility, enhance independence and representativeness, and ensure that institutions are more responsive to citizens' needs. These reforms would also help legitimize public institutions through the initiation of a range of activities aimed at building trust and accountability.

However, BiH has made limited progress in these areas. The education system remains deeply fragmented, with little chance of reaching consensus.⁹³

Experts interviewed by BIRN BiH in 2017 believed that the education system BiH perpetuates ethnic divisions by either omitting information about war crimes or selectively teaching about them. Children are often separated based on their ethnic affiliation, further entrenching these divisions.⁹⁴ Historians argue that textbooks are intentionally discriminatory, reinforcing stereotypes about other ethnic groups to sustain these separations.

A 2020 journalistic analysis of history textbooks used in the final grades of elementary schools in BiH and Serbia, focusing on events leading up to and during the breakup of Yugoslavia and the 1992-1995 war, revealed that students are taught about these events in divergent ways. Judicially established facts are frequently omitted or distorted.⁹⁵

The system of “two schools under one roof” is still in place in several cantons, despite rulings by the Constitutional Court of the Federation declaring this practice a violation of children's human rights. *Detektor* journalists have meticulously documented these decisions to track potential changes in the coming years.

92 [Transitional Justice Strategy in BiH, 2012-2016](#)

93 [Episode 87: Education in BiH - What We \(Don't\) Teach our Children in Schools](#), Detektor.ba

94 [Bosnia's Segregated Schooling Entrenches Wartime Divisions](#), Detektor.ba

95 [Bosnian, Serbian Schoolbooks Teach Rival Versions of History](#), Detektor.ba

For more on the role of the media and civil society in education and related topics, see the section “Curriculum in Education.”

In addition to transitional justice and institutional reforms, the broader framework of reform in BiH must address challenges such as corruption, extremism, terrorism, right-wing influence, threats to the rights of marginalized groups, hate crime prevention, and the denial of genocide and glorification of war criminals. It must also protect media freedoms and support a society where many members suffer from post-traumatic stress syndrome.⁹⁶

BIRN BiH has reported on all of these aspects over the years, as well as on disciplinary proceedings against judicial function holders and vetting processes, which are crucial for establishing trustworthy institutions that can deliver justice to victims of various crimes.

The greatest responsibility of the media is in uncovering corruption within the judiciary, political elites, and ruling parties, while also informing citizens of irregularities.

In covering all pillars of transitional justice, BIRN BiH has consistently adhered to its standards of objectivity, independence, truthfulness, and fair treatment.

In addition to journalistic reporting, BIRN BiH editors and journalists have actively supported citizens, institutions, and organizations through participation, organization, and collaboration on numerous events over the years.

Corruption and disciplinary procedures

As this handbook is being written, BiH is still the worst-ranked country in the region in terms of perceived corruption, a status that has seen little change over the past decade. What does this mean? For years, BIRN BiH has reported on the judiciary’s ineffective fight against corruption, particularly so-called “high” corruption. Corruption and corruption-related crimes affect BiH citizens’ daily lives, limiting access to education, healthcare, and employment. This persistent issue has driven tens of thousands of citizens to leave the country.

The failure to prosecute high-level corruption undermines public trust in the judiciary,⁹⁷ which many citizens rely on for justice but continue to wait for in vain. Few institutions have taken the fight against corruption seriously, and journalists frequently report that the judicial system across the country must demonstrate a greater commitment to combating corruption.⁹⁸

Corruption is on the rise in BiH, providing journalists with ongoing material for their reports—even during the coronavirus pandemic. In December 2020, reports of irregularities in public procurement within the Sarajevo Canton doubled.

Since the start of the pandemic, health institutions and various levels of government in BiH launched numerous procurements for medical equipment and supplies, as well as other items related to combating the spread of the virus. However, organizations and investigators

96 [PTSD in BiH](#), Detektor.ba

97 [Non-Prosecution of High Corruption a Reason for Public’s Distrust in Judiciary](#), Detektor.ba

98 [Judicial System in BiH Must Demonstrate Greater Desire to Fight Corruption](#), Detektor.ba

overseeing public procurement warned that the urgency of the pandemic was being used to justify abuses and bypass regulations. In response, we published data on medical equipment procurement during the pandemic to inform citizens, journalists, and researchers.

BIRN BiH journalists monitored the public procurement portal and the websites of health institutions, ministries, public health institutes, and other bodies daily. This allowed us to compile as much information as possible regarding the purchase of critical equipment and supplies. Our reporting⁹⁹ covered initiated procurement procedures and, where disclosed, the companies selected and the prices paid. We also found that many procurements—such as those for protective suits and medical equipment—were conducted through negotiated procedures, and some were carried out via competitive processes for which no contract award notices were published.

While journalists uncovered numerous scandals despite curfews and other restrictions during the pandemic, the judiciary often lagged behind, suspending many of the investigations opened at the time.¹⁰⁰ One of these cases involved a scandal that was exposed by our news team.¹⁰¹

To present the rampant problem of corruption in BiH credibly, it is essential to understand that BIRN BiH has been monitoring corruption trials at all levels of the judiciary for years. These trials, like those for other criminal offenses, are typically public unless the court, upon request by the prosecution or defense, closes a trial or testimony to the public. Over the years, our journalists have faced various challenges in reporting on these cases.

Digital media outlets encounter major challenges when reporting on court trials, as video and audio recordings are prohibited. At the State Court, journalists can request a brief ten-minute video clip, though this is often unsuitable for TV reporting. In the Municipal and Cantonal Courts of Sarajevo, video recording is permitted before the trial begins, allowing journalists to capture footage of the accused and lawyers—provided they consent. Inside the courtroom, a journalist's only tools are a pen and paper. Given these limitations, it is crucial to accurately document and convey the events that transpired on a given day.

In previous years, BIRN BiH journalists were often the only ones attending every hearing. Due to the complexity of the crimes, the lack of public access to indictments was especially challenging. In cases where an indictment contained 50 counts, journalists had to rely on their swift note-taking to ensure colleagues and the public could understand the details of the case. This prompted BIRN BiH, with the support of public figures and a citizen signature campaign in 2021, to call attention to the issue of the unavailability of indictments and verdicts in corruption cases. Our organization submitted a petition with 5,000 signatures to the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council, which ultimately led to the publication of indictments on the State Prosecution's website.

99 [BIRN BiH Data: Procurement of Medical Equipment](#), Detektor.ba

100 [Most Investigations into Abuse During Coronavirus Ended with Suspension](#), Detektor.ba

101 [Prosecution not to Conduct Investigation into Procurement of 50,000 Protective Masks in Sarajevo](#), Detektor.ba

In addition to indictments, it is important that journalists are familiar with the laws in their country, so that they can more easily follow corruption trials. In this case, the Criminal Procedure Code and the Criminal Code of BiH are necessary resources, along with the following guidelines:

Guidelines for easier monitoring of trials for corruption offences:

- Publish accurate and impartial reports from trials and other new sources;
- If you are uncertain whether you heard or recorded something correctly at the trial, do not include it in your report, as it may lead to errors.
- Continuous reporting is important for understanding the entire case, monitoring the judiciary, and ensuring fair coverage.
- Do not portray the accused as guilty or innocent until the court has delivered a final verdict, respecting the principle of the presumption of innocence.
- Do not express your own views or commentary;
- Do not draw conclusions when reporting on dismissal of charges or acquittal of a person who was previously announced to have been indicted;
- Maintain balanced reporting by allocating due space to both the prosecution and the defense throughout the proceedings
- Provide background information in every report, so that the public understands the broader context of the case, including who stands accused and the nature of the corruption charges;
- Adapt legal jargon for a general audience, aiming to communicate in simple and accessible language;
- Exercise particular caution when reporting on trials where witnesses are under protective measures;
- Avoid sensationalist headlines and phrases.

The importance of journalistic coverage of trials for BiH citizens is underscored by an analysis conducted by Transparency International and BIRN BiH on disciplinary proceedings against judges and prosecutors, as well as corruption trials. This extensive analysis revealed exposed problems within the judiciary, including inefficiency, a lack of integrity, and poor transparency. It highlighted the need for reforms in planning and managing court proceedings related to corruption and organized crime, alongside stricter criminal policies.¹⁰²

The Transparency Index, developed by Transparency International and BIRN BiH, shows that many courts and prosecutor's offices have failed to meet the legal deadlines for responding to requests for free access to information.¹⁰³

The online platform [Index of the Judiciary](#) contains the results of the Transparency Index for Courts and Prosecutor's Offices in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It also provides information on corruption and organized crime cases, as well as details of disciplinary proceedings subject to monitoring. Four areas were assessed: the availability of information on websites, responses to media inquiries, compliance with the Law on Free Access to Information, and communication with citizens.

The data shows that 90% of prosecutions in BiH do not publish any information about criminal cases on their websites; 50% of courts completely ignored media inquiries; and 42% of courts and prosecutor's offices violated the 15-day legal deadline for responding to requests for free access to information. This shows that the very institutions responsible for upholding the law are themselves violating legal obligations. Moreover, more than half of the courts do not publish information about their first-instance verdicts, making it difficult for the public to stay informed without journalistic reporting.

The report, presented at the conference "Integrity of the Judiciary and Prosecution of Corruption in BiH" held in Sarajevo, highlighted other systemic issues, such as lengthy court proceedings, lenient sentences, poor-quality indictments, and frequent changes in trial chamber composition.

Alfredo Strippoli, Head of the Rule of Law Department of the Delegation of the European Union to BiH, stated when these findings were published that corruption is eating away at BiH from within, harming both citizens and institutions. The fight against corruption should

THE ONLINE PLATFORM INDEX OF THE JUDICIARY

90%

of prosecutions in BiH do not publish any information about criminal cases on their websites

50%

of courts completely ignored media inquiries

42%

of courts and prosecutor's offices violated the 15-day legal deadline for responding to requests for free access to information

102 [Poor Efficiency of Judiciary and Penal Policy Affect the Prevention of Corruption in BiH](#), Detektor.ba

103 [Devastating Results of Transparency of Judicial Institutions](#), Detektor.ba

be a top priority for the country, a stance strongly advocated by the EU. However, this has not been the case, as evidenced by annual reports from *Detektor*.

At the start of this year, when this handbook was being written, *Detektor* reported that state prosecutors had filed fewer indictments for corruption in 2023 than in the previous year—issuing only four indictments against 14 individuals and four companies. These analyses by our journalists are possible because no public hearing at the State Court goes unreported. During these hearings, we often learned additional information that led to further investigation of corruption.

Those indicted for corruption are not only private citizens but also judicial officials, further undermining public trust in the justice system. Currently, there are at least five criminal proceedings and investigations in BiH involving judicial officials accused of corruption, abuse of office, and negligence. Many of these officials have faced or are facing disciplinary proceedings, with some temporarily removed from their duties pending the outcome of their cases. The latest example we reported was the arrest of the president of the State Court, a case that disturbed the public.¹⁰⁴

These proceedings are often lengthy and complicated by jurisdictional issues, with some cases not reaching a conclusion due to the death of the accused.¹⁰⁵

In the past, media coverage of irregularities and corruption played a role in the removal of the Chief Prosecutor of the State Prosecutor's Office through disciplinary action, as well as the resignation of the former president of the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council, who stepped following media reports to avoid disciplinary proceedings.

However, reporting on disciplinary proceedings in BiH is no easy task. The “Analysis of the Efficiency and Integrity of Disciplinary Proceedings Against Judges and Prosecutors” exposed the lack of transparency in holding judicial officials accountable. These proceedings are often complex and protracted, and sanctions are relatively mild and ineffective given the level of responsibility these positions entail. Reporting on these cases in BiH is further hindered because lawsuits are not made public, and journalists often learn about them only during closed preliminary hearings. Moreover, sanctions and even public reprimands are issued anonymously, undermining their purpose.

Through investigative reports, analyses, and articles that highlight systemic corruption issues, the media can ensure that these irregularities receive the attention and critique they deserve, regardless of the judiciary's inadequate response.

In 2019, BIRN BiH editor-in-chief Semir Mujkic received the European Union's second prize for investigative journalism for his series on corruption in public procurement. The panel highlighted the significance of the series, saying “the author shows the abuse through examples of the purchase of official cars and children's soccer goals, transferring corruption from an abstract to an easily understandable sphere.”¹⁰⁶

BIRN BiH previously reported that employees in state institutions in BiH have had the opportunity for several years to report corruption and obtain whistleblower status, granting

104 [Bosnian Court President Debevec and Former OSA Director Mehmedagic Arrested](#), Detektor.ba

105 [Former Chief State Prosecutor Goran Salihovic Passes Away](#), Detektor.ba

106 [BIRN BiH Journalist Given EU Award for Investigating Corruption in Public Procurement](#), Detektor.ba

them protection. However, to date, only a few have received this status. In one episode of our *TV Justice* program, we highlighted what whistleblowers face when reporting corruption, why they are still unprotected, and what needs to change to this.

In one of the BiH entities, no law has yet been passed to protect persons who report corruption in institutions or companies with majority ownership by the Federation. This directly benefits perpetrators of corruption.

For its role in bringing attention to these issues, BIRN BiH was recognized by the Coalition for the Protection of Whistleblowers of Southeast Europe, which awarded our journalists for their reporting on whistleblower cases.¹⁰⁷

Often times, years pass before the results of corruption stories are visible to the public. For example, on May 11, 2023, Senaid Memic, former mayor of Ilidza municipality and current BiH ambassador to Malaysia, was arrested, partly due to permits related to the construction of the Regency Hotel, whose investor was the Malak Group—a case *Detektor* reported on back in 2016.¹⁰⁸

Such outcomes, along with journalistic awards, represent the highest recognition for our editorial team and confirm that thorough investigative reporting yields results. For more stories that expose irregularities, visit our website, *Detektor.ba*, under the “Corruption” tag.

The Vetting Process

The vetting process is characteristic of transitional democracies, as a measure that supports the integrity of key sectors such as the police, judiciary, military, and public administration. Through this process, officeholders in these sectors are subjected to a review of their qualifications, job performance, and other relevant criteria. This includes checking their assets, any connections to individuals linked to organized crime, as well as their competencies and knowledge.

As early as 2020, BIRN BiH recognized the importance of this process by examining the example of neighboring Albania, where nearly 100 high-ranking judicial officials were dismissed following a vetting procedure that included asset verification. In BiH, judges and prosecutors then found ways to delay the submission and review of their asset declarations.¹⁰⁹

An October 2023 analysis by BIRN BiH revealed that a review of judges’ and prosecutors’ asset declarations in Bosnia and Herzegovina remains improbable.¹¹⁰ While judicial corruption is a widespread issue across the Balkans, no other country has followed Albania’s example of rigorous vetting and removal of officials who cannot account for their wealth.

107 [BIRN BiH Recognized for Reporting on Corruption Whistleblowers](#), *Detektor.ba*

108 [Bosnia Arrests Ex-Mayor of Ilidza Over Hotel Building Permits](#), *Detektor.ba*

109 [While BiH Refuses the Process, More than 90 Judges and Prosecutors Removed in Albania through Vetting](#), *Detektor.ba*

110 [Albania’s Justice Vetting Raises Uncomfortable Questions for Balkan Peers](#), *Detektor.ba*

In other countries in the region, a judge's public asset declaration is often the sole criterion for assessing their integrity. In BiH, however, such asset declarations can only be published with the consent of the judge or prosecutor in question. Of the approximately 1,400 judges and prosecutors in the country, only about 10 percent had given such consent at the time of this writing. Asset data is collected by the HJPC, but the law does not properly regulate which body is responsible for verifying this information.

Amendments to the law that would authorize the HJPC to verify asset declarations—part of the four key laws BiH must adopt to begin EU accession negotiations—have been delayed for years. Despite the implementation of recent amendments to the Law on the HJPC, the Council remains far from being ready to conduct proper asset verification for judges and prosecutors.¹¹¹

In March 2024, just two days before the new provision of the Law on the HJPC requiring asset verification for judicial officeholders was set to take effect, the HJPC appointed court presidents. However, since the department responsible for implementing the reporting requirements had yet to be formed,¹¹² it became clear that BiH will not follow Albania's example for long.

In 2021, the President of the Court of BiH, Ranko Debevec, who is now suspended, faced disciplinary proceedings after failing to disclose his co-ownership of an apartment in Spain. When the time came for detailed testimony, the case was closed to the public.

Without this type of vetting in place for the judiciary, police, military, or public administration in BiH, journalists have taken on the role of uncovering potential irregularities through their analyses.

BIRN BiH has reported on amendments to the Law on the HJPC, which leave room for judicial officeholders to hide assets by transferring them to relatives or children not living in the same household. In our reports, we also warned that these amendments weaken the ability to verify asset declarations if entities withhold information, and there are no clearly defined penalties for potential violations.

BIRN BiH uncovered that prosecutor Ivanka Stanic was promoted to the position of Chief Cantonal Prosecutor in Posavina Canton while serving a suspended sentence and facing ongoing disciplinary proceedings, thereby disregarding the European Commission's recommendation.¹¹³

Media freedom

Because they write about sensitive topics like corruption and crime, journalists in BiH are often the target of threats or attacks. Journalistic freedoms are increasingly threatened by law amendments, such as the Criminal Code of Republika Srpska, which classifies

¹¹¹ [HJPC Nowhere Near Ready to Check Assets of Judges and Prosecutor 12 Days Before the Application of the Law](#), Detektor.ba

¹¹² [HJPC Appoints Holders of Judicial Functions to Avoid Asset Declaration Checks](#), Detektor.ba

¹¹³ [Prosecutor in Posavina Promoted While on Probation](#), Detektor.ba

defamation as a criminal offence,¹¹⁴ meaning every journalist is at risk of being arbitrarily prosecuted. This economic burden particularly affects smaller media outlets in BiH.

After criminalising defamation, the authorities of Republika Srpska have brought their attention back to developing a law on “agents of foreign influence”. Politicians from this entity are increasingly vocal in their intention to adopt a law declaring non-governmental organisations as foreign agents, which, many activists and experts say will significantly reduce democratic rights and freedoms of citizens.¹¹⁵

At the end of March 2023, the Government of Republika Srpska adopted the Draft Law on the Special Register and Publicity of the Work of Non-Profit Organisations. The law designates non-profit organisations established in Republika Srpska, which are fully or only partially financed by other countries or international organisations, as “agents of foreign influence”. A similar law is used in Russia to repress NGOs and the media, and over time has become an inspiration to politicians in other countries, such as Georgia – which we have also reported on. At the time of writing, this law had not been adopted by the National Assembly or entered into force.

In addition to this, censorship and self-censorship, as well as lawsuits initiated by politicians and public officials such as judges and prosecutors, pose a threat to media freedom throughout the country. These actions are attempts to intimidate journalists and discourage them from doing their job.

“

“An analysis of proceedings in defamation cases before the courts in Bosnia and Herzegovina over the past four years reveals that in more than 80 percent of these cases, lawsuits against journalists are initiated by politicians and other public officials such as judges and prosecutors, and that judgements are often made within an unreasonable time frame and without compliance with the standards of the European Court for Human Rights. Journalists and media experts warn that the increased number of groundless lawsuits, which have been going on for years, is an attempt to intimidate journalists and discourage them from doing research.”¹¹⁶

Censorship through lawsuits – the growth of proceedings against journalists limits media freedom

114 [Draft amendments to the Criminal Code criminalizing defamation and insult in the Republic of Srpska were adopted](#), Detektor.ba

115 [After the criminalization of defamation, the authorities of Republika Srpska return their focus to the law on “agents of foreign influence”](#), Detektor.ba

116 [Suing to Silence: Lawsuits Used to Censor Bosnian Journalists](#), Detektor.ba

The constriction of media freedom affects democracy and the rule of law, and makes it impossible to fight for the truth.¹¹⁷ For these reasons, we always point out violations of the rights of journalists and the attacks they are victims of as part of our work.

The BIRN BiH documentary “Journalism is not a crime,”¹¹⁸ vividly shows and conveys the experiences of journalists who have been attacked and talks about the challenges that journalists face every day while doing their job, in addition to highlighting insufficient processing of attacks on media workers and low penalties for the perpetrators.

The film points to the mounting pressure on the media in the Western Balkans, as well as the increasingly difficult position of journalists. It showcases how the penalties are very low and often end in non-preventative disciplinary measures in cases brought forth by journalists who are victims of job-related crimes.

“When they started beating me with bats, I was afraid they were going to kill me and I was trying to protect my head,” said Banja Luka-based journalist Vladimir Kovačević, who was severely beaten in his home city on August 26, 2018.

“One of [the attackers] approached me from the front and one from behind. Then I heard the sound of a metal bat being extended, and by the time I realised what it was, I had already been hit on the head by the one from the front, and then by the other one who was behind me. They hit me on the head with bats several times,” Kovačević testified at the trial on 21 February 2019.¹¹⁹

The perpetrators of this attack have been sentenced, but the question of who ordered the attack on Kovačević remains unanswered.

Impunity for attacks on journalists is a threat to freedom of speech and democratic society in BiH, and one of them is the attack on Mirza Dervišević, a journalist from Brčko who was beaten. Dervišević told BIRN BiH that after the attack, he felt great dissatisfaction and anger due to the slow pace of the proceedings in his case. He currently lives in Qatar, but notes that every time he comes back to Brčko, he receives police protection because the police believe that his life is still in danger.



117 [The reduction of media freedom affects democracy and makes it impossible to fight for the truth, Detektor.ba](#)

118 [Documentary | Journalism is not a crime: Bosnian journalists speak out](#), Detektor.ba

119 [Kovačević at the beginning of the trial: I was afraid that they would kill me](#), Detektor.ba

In July of last year, [the Municipal Court in Sarajevo sentenced Nefail Čehić to a suspended sentence](#) for threatening *Detektor* journalists.

Over the past five years, the number of reported attacks in Bosnia and Herzegovina, including open death threats, hate speech, and gender-based violence against female journalists has increased, especially in the online sphere. From 2019 to the present, the Journalist Helpline in Bosnia and Herzegovina recorded 340 attacks on journalists. The Association “BH Journalists” says that only 25.4 percent of cases reported to the helpline for journalists are resolved in favour of journalists and that this is a sign of the entrenched practice of impunity for these criminal acts.

At the Regional Conference on Freedom of the Media, Access to Information, and Safety of Journalists¹²⁰ in September 2023, it was reported that there was a drastic deterioration in media freedom and safety of journalists in Bosnia and Herzegovina after receiving candidate status for membership in the European Union.

Terrorism, extremism, and the right-wing

Almost a decade ago, BIRN BiH started monitoring and reporting on cases of terrorism, with a special focus on the increasingly frequent trips to foreign battlefields and joining paramilitary and parapolice formations in Syria and Iraq, which were declared terrorist organizations by a United Nations resolution. Since then, a number of analyses, research papers and documentaries have been published about unprocessed crimes and trips to foreign battlefields.

In the years that followed, our journalists pointed to the spread of extremist and right-wing groups in the region, revealing trends that spill over into Bosnia and Herzegovina, and warned of the negative consequences of the narratives used by far-right movements. Through this, our journalists and editors were recognised by the public as experts on extremism, and they are a frequent source of information in the media about this topic and foreign influences in Bosnia and Herzegovina – especially in regard to Russia’s heightened activities following the invasion of Ukraine – as well as about other topics.

Together with our colleagues from the region, we published the Terrorism Judgements Database,¹²¹ which also contains video materials on professional reporting on terrorism, as well as our proposals for external resources that would improve the quality of reporting on these crimes. We prepared detailed webinars on professional reporting, short video content with the basic rules of reporting, and manuals that can be of great use to journalists, some of which were prepared in cooperation with the OSCE and the Press Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In addition to analysing reports from trials for cases of terrorism and joining terrorist organisations such as ISIL or the “Al-Nusrah Front”, we have also been reporting on the participation of BiH citizens who fought on the side of Russia in the war in Ukraine since 2014. It should be noted here that, unlike in other countries of the Western Balkans, primarily

120 [The number of attacks on journalists increased by more than 100 percent, Detektor.ba](#)

121 [The Terrorism Judgements Database, Detektor.ba](#)

Serbia, very few were prosecuted for participating in the war in Ukraine. The Criminal Code of BiH does not connect the struggle in Ukraine with terrorism or the organisation of a terrorist group, as is the case with Syria and Iraq, because Russian and pro-Russian units in Eastern Europe have not been declared terrorist organisations by a United Nations resolution.

Along with terrorism, it is particularly interesting to follow the growth of extreme and radical right-wing groups, which, unlike European countries, the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina did not single out in its reports on the state of security in the country.

Terrorism

The Global Terrorism Database defines terrorism as “the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation.”

The Criminal Code of Bosnia and Herzegovina states that a terrorist act, among other things, includes actions that, given their nature or context, may cause serious damage to a state or international organisation such as: attacks upon a person’s life or physical integrity; unlawful imprisonment; causing great damage to BiH state facilities; hijacking of an airplane or other transportation infrastructure; and financing, inciting, recruiting, training, or organising a terrorist group.

According to the amendments to the Law from a few years ago, “going to a foreign battlefield, that is, joining foreign military or paramilitary formations, if it is not part of an officially approved peace mission,” is considered a criminal offence.

It is also important to know how and when to designate an organisation as a terrorist one. BIRN BiH is guided by the official list of organisations declared terrorist by the UN. The Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina also uses this list when passing judgments, and therefore does not consider going to Ukraine as terrorism.

In the past 20 years or so, several terrorist attacks have been carried out in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which resulted in human casualties and caused enormous material damage to state and public facilities. The state police and security agencies prevented several other terrorist acts and thwarted plans¹²² through timely interventions, which also received judicial epilogues¹²³ that our journalists reported on.

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The Criminal Code of Bosnia and Herzegovina

122 [Due to planning an attack, detention was proposed for Kapić, who was previously convicted for fighting in Syria](#), Detektor.ba

123 [Increased sentences for Božić and Hastor for planning a terrorist attack](#), Detektor.ba

Given that terrorism is a complex and sensitive topic, so is reporting on it, which is why we published a Handbook based on the experience and practice of our journalists.¹²⁴

The handbook is intended for journalism students and young journalists who are starting their reporting on terrorism, but it can also be useful for more experienced journalists who have not reported on terrorism before. In order to make the best use of the handbook, it is necessary to have basic knowledge of journalistic forms, writing a journalistic text and basic journalistic techniques of working on text. Prior knowledge of the phenomenon of terrorism is desirable, but not a prerequisite for using this handbook.

The most important thing to know about reporting on a terrorist act is that the data on the qualification of the act, the victims and the perpetrators – always and without exception – must be obtained from official sources.

Due to the need for timely updates and greater readership, journalists often resort to using other unofficial sources – which has proven to be harmful and counterproductive. Although some unofficial sources give a quick piece of information that allows media outlets to publish more quickly, but the possibility that such outlets might have to publish a correction is significantly higher. Additionally, such mistakes can be very damaging to the victims, survivors, and families.

Statements by eyewitnesses are of course desirable, but eyewitnesses cannot be the source for the number of injured or killed individuals, nor can they reliably provide the identity of the perpetrator. That is the job of the police and prosecutors, or doctors who can provide confirmation about the injured or killed. Witnesses are great sources to talk about what happened to them and how they experienced it.

In April 2015, Nerdin Ibrić shot and killed police officer Dragan Đurić and wounded two of his colleagues at the entrance to the Zvornik Police Station. The police retaliated and killed the attacker, and because witnesses claimed that Ibrić uttered words “related to the practice of the Islamic faith”, the media and institutions in Republika Srpska immediately qualified the attack as terrorism. The fact that should be kept in mind is that dozens of police officers were killed while performing their official duties, that is, during patrols, interventions, in conflicts with criminal groups, but none of those murders were qualified as terrorism. The actual motive for the attack was never officially established as the attacker was killed.

Zvornik

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124 [Reporting on Terrorism and Violent Extremism: A Handbook Based on the Practice and Experience of Balkan Investigative Reporting Network](#), Detektor.ba

After the murder of the policeman and the assailant, several people were arrested in Republika Srpska on suspicion of being connected to Ibrić, some were detained, but later this measure was lifted. Due to the lack of evidence, no charges were ever brought against them, and some sought and received compensation for damages.¹²⁵

When reporting, one should be especially mindful of the fact that one of the reasons why the police or prosecutors do not immediately disclose identities is that they want to inform the family first. You need to think about when something should be reported – whether the family will hear about the suffering of their loved ones for the first time from your news, and what if someone's identity is wrongly published on that occasion, and the family learns the information from you.

In Rajlovac¹²⁶ in November 2015 Enes Omeragić killed two members of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Armin Salkić and Nedeljko Radić, and wounded their colleague Dževad Ljukovac in a terrorist attack. In this instance, numerous media reported live about the perpetrator and the victims long before their families knew about what happened, or they live-streamed the moment the families found out.

When Omeragić committed suicide with a bomb after killing two officers and wounding a third, the Prosecutor's Office of Bosnia and Herzegovina characterised the event as terrorism. Ljukovac was later awarded compensation for this attack.¹²⁷

In October 2010, Mevlid Jašarević attacked the United States Embassy building and wounded police officer Mirsad Velić, who was working as a security guard, for which he was sentenced to 15 years in prison for a terrorist act. The terrorist attack on the police building in Bugojno in June 2010 attracted the most public attention. During the 2010 attack, policeman Tarik Ljubuškić was killed, his colleague Edina Hindić suffered life-threatening injuries, and several other policemen were wounded.

Haris Čaušević was sentenced to 35 years in prison for the terrorist attack in Bugojno, while Adnan Haračić was sentenced to 14 years in prison for helping Čaušević deliver an explosive device to the police building. The verdict states that the damage to the building cost at least 189,939 BAM, while the total minimum damage to the surrounding buildings totalled 275,000 BAM.¹²⁸

We should particularly keep in mind the presumption of innocence and call someone a terrorist only when they are legally convicted of it.

Every journalist has the right to follow terrorism trials, which are public in Bosnia and Herzegovina, except when the court decides it is necessary to protect witnesses, or when parts of the trial are closed to the general public due to their sensitivity. Journalists should never convey details from those parts of the trial, even when the information about it is obtained from a lawyer, prosecutor or judge. This is true even at times when, or as experienced by BIRN BiH journalists, the judge leaves you in the courtroom when it is closed to the public.

125 [Hasanović paid BAM 3,000 for unjustified detention](#), Detektor.ba

126 [Croatian tourists in fear of Bosnian terrorism](#), Detektor.ba

127 [Ljukovac awarded around BAM 6,500 for the attack in Rajlovac](#), Detektor.ba

128 [A quarter of a million for lawsuits after terrorist attacks](#), Detektor.ba

Safeguarding the identity of protected witnesses is necessary when monitoring a trial. It is your responsibility as a journalist to not reveal any potentially revealing details from the trial. Even innocuous details could reveal to others the identity of protected witnesses. This is especially important when witnesses come from small communities where anonymity is nearly impossible to maintain.

Revealing the identity of a protected witness is a criminal offence and you could be jailed for it. Imagine that a protected witness from a village or small town describes that an attack or crime happened in front of his house near a store called XY. If you publish the name of that store and its location, you have narrowed down the “search for the protected witness”.

In essence, all the obligations of journalists covering war crimes trials also apply to covering terrorism proceedings, and it is very important to keep in mind that there are those who will try to reach a protected witness in order to intimidate them and prevent them from testifying. We learned about such cases taking place during court proceedings.

The best way to prepare for a trial is to read the indictment if it is available. It is also worth knowing that the indictment is read publicly at the beginning of each trial.¹²⁹ When reporting, be mindful to give enough space to the prosecution as well as the defence, but if it happened that way in the proceedings, you should always start with the allegations of the prosecution.¹³⁰ The same applies to the defence.¹³¹

We often report on cases before they come before the court, and in that sensitive time period, it is important to follow clear rules, i.e. it is necessary to pay attention when publishing sensitive information and consider whether it could jeopardise the investigation. We report on cases even before the indictment is filed, mostly from the hearings where the determination and extension of detention or banning measures are discussed.¹³² We present information that can be heard in the courtroom if the court does not warn us in advance that we must not publish it to avoid jeopardising the investigation.

Along with journalistic tools and good sources, journalistic ethics play a special role when reporting on ongoing investigations and terrorism in general. In the past, journalists and media in BiH reported on numerous police actions and arrests, publishing the names of suspects or those arrested.

In some of these investigations, the suspects were later released and no charges were ever brought against them.¹³³ In a large number of such cases, journalistic reports would remain the only trace of it and in the long run they would appear as search results of those persons' names.¹³⁴ Of course, journalists are not police officers or prosecutors and are not responsible for the work of investigators, but it is important at all times to weigh the interest of the public against the right to privacy and the presumption of innocence for suspects.

An important part of reporting on terrorism is analysis and research, so we recommend that ¹³⁵ you familiarise yourself with the terms and terminology of terrorism and extremism

129 [Trial of Mehmed Tutnić for waging war in Syria begins](#), Detektor.ba

130 [New trial begins for waging war in Syria](#), Detektor.ba

131 [Keserović: Closing arguments at the trial for the war in Syria in mid-February](#), Detektor.ba

132 [Detention extension requested for “last ISIL warriors”](#), Detektor.ba

133 [Action “Rez”: almost BAM 3,000 in compensation to Tabaković](#), Detektor.ba

134 [Peco agrees to a settlement for damages](#), Detektor.ba

135 [Terrorism convictions stop departures to Syria](#), Detektor.ba

before starting analytical reporting. If possible, follow the trials and write news about them to better understand the topic. The experiences of international organisations that monitor these cases are also of great benefit to BIRN BiH journalists. Thus, in analyses and other forms, we are guided by the guidelines of the OSCE Mission in BiH, which state that terrorism cannot be called “Islamic”, “Christian”, “Jewish”, nor can the perpetrator of terrorist acts be “a member of Islam”, “member of Christianity”, “member of Judaism” and so on. Such qualifications spread stereotypes and prejudices against the whole community, and may generate violence against the innocent.

This way, an entire community is stigmatised simply because they only nominally share a particular value system, skin colour, ethnicity or cultural and historical background. Clumsily formulated qualification may point to carelessness, ignorance, malice, and thus cause damage on several levels. In such situations, the question of the relevance of the author, the media, and the sources they use always arises. Therefore, choose who you speak to carefully, and because of the context, let the scope be diverse and cover the security, political, social and psychological segment. In the case of violent extremism and terrorism, which is attributed to religion, the interlocutors should be sought in registered, official religious communities.

With analytical texts, take into account the context of your story. Several years ago, along with an analysis, we did a show¹³⁶ for our Justice TV on the topic “Can ex-ISIL fighters in Bosnia and Herzegovina be tried for war crimes?”¹³⁷ where we analysed how several European countries started to try former fighters for war crimes with accusations of terrorism, thereby increasing their sentences, and what is needed for domestic judicial institutions to start prosecuting such acts. Along with international experts, we spoke with lawyers and judges who represented the accused and tried them for war crimes and terrorism, but also with a convicted returnee from Syria. When they have served their sentence or most of their sentence, and you are allowed to interview them, it is important to contrast the evidence of the convicted with the facts of the verdict. The editorial board will likely weigh the public interest in interviewing convicted persons. Sometimes it is important to hear repentance or a warning from the mouths of those who have committed a crime, for the sake of prevention.

Annual overviews of terrorism trials can always be good stories¹³⁸ because such texts can help to see trends and evaluate the work of police and judicial institutions, but also to show



بين عسكري وغير عسكري لأن طلائعهم لا تفرق بين عسكري وغير عسكري في الدولة الإسلامية

Terrorism

Several European countries started to try former fighters for war crimes with **accusations of terrorism**, thereby increasing their sentences

“Can ex-ISIL fighters in Bosnia and Herzegovina be tried for war crimes?”,
TV Justice

136 [TV Justice, Episode 116: Can former ISIL fighters be tried in Bosnia and Herzegovina for war crimes?](#), Detektor.ba

137 [Can former ISIL fighters be tried in Bosnia and Herzegovina for war crimes?](#), Detektor.ba

138 [Two indictments and verdicts for terrorism each](#), Detektor.ba

trends in terrorism in the country.¹³⁹ Such texts can also show how the judiciary sanctions criminal acts of terrorism.

Among the reports and analyses are those that talk about returning prisoners to society, their rehabilitation, as well as what kind of response society has provided. BIRN BiH has often written about the conditions in which women and children live in the camps that were created after the collapse of ISIL. We also produced a show about Dino Pečenović, who himself was under investigation for assisting in a terrorist act and whose entire family later went to Syria. His story of how he got out of the radicalisation process is an excellent counter-narrative to stories about radicalisation. Always try to start your stories with examples of how terrorism affects the lives of people and families.

It is also very important to monitor whether there is a strategy and action plan for the fight against terrorism in the country. In Bosnia and Herzegovina there was a specific situation because it was without a valid strategy for years due to the non-allocation of money from the budget, which was reported by journalists.¹⁴⁰

When we published all verdicts for terrorism handed down in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia from 2010 to the end of 2020 in the Terrorism Database, we found that the same sentences were not given for terrorism and going to foreign battlefields.¹⁴¹ In particular, we should take into account the fact that a large number of people in Serbia have been sentenced to suspended sentences because of being active in the war in Ukraine, as shown by the data from the Terrorist Database.

It is also important to monitor the work of the parliaments and the adoption of the laws required of BiH by the European Union. On that path, the Law on Prevention of Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorist Activities,¹⁴² which was harmonised and adopted with the directives and provisions of the European Union, was significant for BiH.

Had the new law not been adopted, there was a risk of BiH returning to the “grey list” of Moneyval, which would make it difficult for citizens and companies to make financial transactions with the European Union. Before that, the Council of Ministers adopted a risk assessment and an action plan for the fight against money laundering and financing of terrorism in BiH 2024–2027.

Extremism

Our journalists investigate and report on radicalisation that leads to violent extremism and even terrorism. We investigated the causes of radicalisation, and how the processes of radicalisation and terrorism affect individuals, their families, local communities, and society as a whole.¹⁴³

139 [Five things you need to know from the 2019 Terrorism Report](#), Detektor.ba

140 [Council of Ministers adopted the Strategy for Prevention and Combating Terrorism](#), Detektor.ba

141 [BIRN analysis: Unequal prosecution of terrorism in six countries of the Western Balkans](#), Detektor.ba

142 [Putting BiH on the Moneyval grey list will block the opening of negotiations with the EU](#), Detektor.ba

143 [The focus shifted from the trial to work with terrorists and young people](#), Detektor.ba

It is important to distinguish between the radicalisation and terrorism. Radicalisation in itself is not a crime, while terrorism is.

We reported on deradicalisation processes in prisons.¹⁴⁴ Our reporting, the resulting TV show and the story sparked further debate about deradicalisation programs in prisons.¹⁴⁵ At that time, we quantified how much work was being done in prisons to deradicalize prisoners convicted of terrorism, whether Bosnian correctional institutions have enough sociologists and psychologists, as well as whether there was a danger that prisoners convicted of terrorism will radicalise other prisoners. We spoke with a convict for fighting in Syria. Our report determined that the lack of proper funding was the primary reason why those convicted of inciting or fighting in foreign terrorist organisations on the battlefields in Syria and Iraq, who were then in prisons in BiH, did not go through the deradicalisation process.

Later, we followed the story of Munib Ahmetpahić, who was sentenced to three years in prison for fighting in the war in Syria.¹⁴⁶ Many of our sources had first-hand information about Ahmetpahić and had worked as court experts and lawyers or who were otherwise experts who were indirectly involved in the judiciary.

Before the verdict was read to Ahmetpahić in the courtroom based on the plea agreement that he and his lawyer signed with the Prosecutor's Office of Bosnia and Herzegovina, he said in the courtroom that he repented and was aware of how much he had been manipulated.¹⁴⁷

"How naive it was on our part to make such a decision... I would advise the youth not to fall for such things. Whoever wants to fight for justice should fight in a legal way", Ahmetpahić said in the courtroom a few years ago.

Before going to the Syrian battlefield and fighting in the units associated with ISIL, Ahmetpahić was tried for organising a terrorist group, i.e. for acquiring funds and taking other actions that created the conditions for committing the criminal act of terrorism, but he was acquitted due to lack of evidence. In that case, only Mevlid Jašarević was sentenced to 15 years in prison for the terrorist attack on the United States Embassy in Sarajevo in October 2011.

Husein Bilal Bosnić was released from serving a seven-year prison sentence for public incitement to terrorist activities because his lectures inspired citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina to go to the Syrian battlefield, some of whom died there. We took the opportunity to determine whether he still has followers among whom he enjoys support and admiration, which turned out to be true.¹⁴⁸ Although a large number of experts, people who were close to Bosnić, Salafi lecturers and authorities from security institutions avoided talking about his release from prison, several welcome posters were pasted where he lives.

This topic, when some of the former members of ISIL have already served their sentences or will serve them, will be relevant for a long time, especially since there are convicts who have not yet been transferred to Bosnia and Herzegovina from Syria after ISIL was militarily defeated at the end of 2019 who are yet to serve their sentences.

144 [No Deradicalisation Schemes for Bosnian Terror Convicts](#), Detektor.ba

145 [Episode 86: Lack of prisons response to radicalization problem](#), Detektor.ba

146 [In Bosnia's First 'Deradicalised' Syria Fighter, Limited Lessons](#), Detektor.ba

147 [Bosnia Court Jails Syria Fighter for Three Years](#), Detektor.ba

148 [After Terror Sentence, Islamic Evangelist Released to a Much-Changed Bosnia](#), Detektor.ba

Through our stories and reports, we tried to determine how the Islamic community in Bosnia and Herzegovina fought against radicalisation and extremism by giving deadlines for the closing of parajamats,¹⁴⁹ but also about those places whose residents claimed to live separately in what they call “Islamic life”.¹⁵⁰ So we went to those places to give the locals the right to respond to the narratives circulating about them.

Reporting on the way society works with returnees to local communities is not a topic that is often in the focus of daily news, but it is important in reporting on terrorism and extremism, which is why we have devoted our attention to them over time.

After ISIL was militarily defeated in Syria, we began to follow the steps taken by the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina regarding the deportation of terrorism suspects, as well as women and children who lived and are living in camps controlled by Kurdish forces or units of the Syrian Defence Forces, and where they were waiting for a final decision on whether they would be returned to their homelands.¹⁵¹

At the end of December 2019, a group of seven men, six women and 12 children arrived from Syria in an organised manner after the fall of the so-called Islamic State, while dozens of women and children from Bosnia and Herzegovina remained in the camps in Syria.¹⁵² The men were prosecuted in the following months while the authorities faced the challenges of how to identify the children of our citizens who were born in Syria and how to care for returnees to BiH.¹⁵³

We continued to monitor the return of BiH citizens in the following years as the rest are still in the camps, except for the first group that arrived by plane in December 2019, which is why we are often in contact with their family members. Although initially the coronavirus pandemic delayed their return,¹⁵⁴ later it was concluded that there was not enough political will,¹⁵⁵ which is why especially children in the camps are exposed to additional radicalisation caused by the conditions in which they live and stay.¹⁵⁶

The claim that there is a lack of political will is supported by the activities undertaken by members of their families at peaceful protest gatherings, all in order to draw the attention of the state authorities to the fact that the conditions in which they are staying in the Syrian camps are very bad, and there was no information about their possible return.¹⁵⁷ The

149 [Bočinja and Ošve: The blessings and stagnation of Salafis \(VIDEO\)](#), Detektor.ba

150 [Bosnian Salafi Village Bemoans Terror Tag](#), Detektor.ba

151 [Bosnia Plans Captured ISIS Fighters' Return from Syria](#), Detektor.ba

152 [Families calling for the return of women and children from camps in Syria](#), Detektor.ba

153 [The processing of female returnees from ISIL is a sensitive issue for Bosnia and Herzegovina](#), Detektor.ba

154 [Virus Keeps Bosnian Families of ISIS Fighters in Syrian Camps](#), Detektor.ba

155 [Appointment of the Coordination Team for the return of BiH citizens from Syria and Iraq tomorrow at the session of the Council of Ministers](#), Detektor.ba

156 [Delaying the return of children from Syrian camps exposes them to further radicalisation](#), Detektor.ba

157 [Families protesting for the return of women and children from Syrian camps](#), Detektor.ba

families could not find out or gain anything more at the meetings with the representatives of the institutions.¹⁵⁸

In addition to written reports, BIRN BiH also films video broadcasts on terrorism, so you can watch shows about radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism on our YouTube channel.¹⁵⁹

Reports on the security situation are also a good basis for journalists for further work because they identify potentially dangerous groups, which leaves enough room for further research and monitoring of the phenomenon.¹⁶⁰ One of the earlier reports indicated that ethnic and national extremism is visibly present in BiH with a negative impact on the security environment.

“Among the bearers of this kind of radicalism, several movements from Ravna Gora have been distinguished. Through their activities, they deny the legitimacy of the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, present negative comments and oppose the Euro-Atlantic integration processes of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Also, they strive to achieve close cooperation with certain right-wing organisations, both in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in neighbouring countries. During public appearances, they incite intolerance among the peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and express emphatically radical views,” the same report states.

BIRN BiH’s research on the Ravna Gora associations in BiH showed that their prominent members were tried for war crimes and that security agencies had warned that these movements were spreading extremist messages.¹⁶¹

The right wing

Experts have announced that in the coming period, right-wing terrorism could become the predominant type of terrorism in the world. Given that Bosnia and Herzegovina has followed trends in that area until now, it can be expected that right-wing terrorism will exist in our country as well.

While focused on the threat of jihadist terrorism, many countries have neglected the threat of right-wing organisations. A large number of Western European countries have already started paying more attention to growing right-wing extremism.

However, due to the sluggishness of the state government and the reluctance of Republika Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina is behind other countries in recognising the dangers of extreme right-wing extremism in strategic documents, which has provided a sufficient basis for journalistic work on this topic.¹⁶²

158 [Cikotić: “It is tricky to forecast this year’s return of citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina from Syria”](#), Detektor.ba

159 [TV Justice Episode 110: Prevention remains the biggest challenge ahead of the new counter-terrorism strategy](#), Detektor.ba

160 [What you need to know about the latest report on the state of security in BiH](#), Detektor.ba

161 [Serb Chetniks’ Links to War Criminals and Extremists Uncovered](#), Detektor.ba

162 [Bosnian Counter-Terrorism Strategy Delayed by Dispute over ‘Right-Wing’](#), Detektor.ba

Ravna Gora associations in BiH have long been declared right-wing by security experts and journalists, and unless they are prohibited from doing so,¹⁶³ journalists can report from their gatherings.¹⁶⁴

One of our investigations exposed the role of officials of the Ujedinjena Srpska (United Srpska) political party in Prijedor in the founding and financing of the “Samopoštovanje” (Self-respect) organisation championing right-wing views, which wants to limit the celebration of the White Ribbon Day in this city. This organisation glorifies war criminals, supports the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and shares an address with this ruling party in Republika Srpska.¹⁶⁵ It was precisely two small right-wing conservative organisations in Prijedor that were previously most responsible for preventing a peaceful walk during the commemoration of the last anniversary of the crimes against Bosniaks in this city, as shown by our analysis of their posts on social networks in which they deny the crimes established in judgments.¹⁶⁶

When publishing such an analysis, BIRN BiH uses data from the archive of trials that it has been following for many years, as well as judicially determined facts about the incidents and their methodology, always putting victims and families first and focusing on how the events affected them.

The entity of Republika Srpska celebrates January 9th as its commemoration day which the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina declared an unconstitutional holiday. Despite this fact, the authorities in the RS continue to celebrate and commemorate January 9th, with right-wing organisations from BiH and Serbia joining them.¹⁶⁷

Earlier we also wrote about a group of pro-Russian Cossacks that calls itself an army, and



January 9th

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“How far-right organizations celebrated January 9th”,
TV Justice

163 [In the presence of condemned members of the Ravna Gora movement in Višegrad, a tribute was paid to Draža Mihailović](#), Detektor.ba

164 [A new gathering after the invitation to the Ravna Gora members in Višegrad on Christmas Eve without the presence of journalists](#), Detektor.ba

165 [In Bosnia's Prijedor, Party in Power Spawns Right-Wing War Crimes Deniers](#), Detektor.ba

166 [How Right-Wingers Thwarted a War Crime Commemoration in Bosnia](#), Detektor.ba

167 [How far-right organisations celebrated 9 January](#), Detektor.ba

which in the Balkan countries gathers veterans of the wars in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Donbass region of Ukraine.¹⁶⁸ The founding ceremony of the Balkan Cossack Army was attended by at least two citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina who are suspected of fighting in Ukraine, and we investigated how the group, whose central organisation in the home country is chaired by the Russian president himself, operates in the Balkans.

The best way to uncover the organisation, methods of recruitment, and plans to register the movement was shown by our research on the Bosnian Movement of National Pride (BPNP),¹⁶⁹ which has been promoting neo-Nazi ideas of anti-Semitism, homophobia and racism on its website for more than a decade, along with Bosnian nationalism, but the organisation managed to avoid responsibility and keep the identity of its members from the public.

Through our investigative work, we were able to uncover groups whose members have been previously convicted or publicly express right-wing views, and which are engaged in humanitarian work.¹⁷⁰ On their social network profiles they emphasised that they help the most vulnerable residents, but their past and, often, promoting right-wing symbols or pro-Russian attitudes separate them from other humanitarian organisations.¹⁷¹

Soon the leader of the unregistered humanitarian organisation “Sveti Georgije Lončari” was charged with two other people for inflicting grievous bodily harm,¹⁷² and later convicted after pleading guilty.¹⁷³

Members of the organisation soon ended up in court for the misdemeanour of wearing of banned uniforms during the celebration of the “Day of Republika Srpska” but their sentences were ultimately suspended.¹⁷⁴

In Europe and the United States, biker clubs are often associated with right-wing organisations, and this is also the case in BiH and its surrounding countries. Another investigation revealed that the Motorcycle Club “MC Srbi” from Serbia, whose members wear skulls on their vests as used by Nazi forces and have stylised swastikas tattooed, formally registered the association in Doboј.¹⁷⁵ Earlier, we managed to discover that the same symbols are used by the members of the club in Prijedor.¹⁷⁶

We also reported on the activities of right-wing groups and organisations during the coronavirus pandemic, when leaflets were distributed at least twice, which promoted a

168 [Under Cossack Banner, Russian Ties with Balkan Fighters Strengthened](#), Detektor.ba

169 [Bosnian Far-Right Movement Weds Bosniak Nationalism, Neo-Nazism](#), Detektor.ba

170 [Black-Clad ‘Humanitarians’ Promote Pro-Russian Agenda in Bosnia](#), Detektor.ba

171 [TV Justice Episode 124: Humanitarian work as a means to promote right-wing groups](#), Detektor.ba

172 [Leader of the pro-Russian organisation “Sveti Georgije” accused of causing serious bodily injury](#), Detektor.ba

173 [After pleading guilty to attack, Srđan Letić sentenced to six months in prison](#), Detektor.ba

174 [Proceedings against members of the pro-Russian organisation “Sveti Georgije” for wearing uniforms suspended](#), Detektor.ba

175 [Serb Biker Club with Neo-Nazi Insignia Registered in Bosnia’s Doboј](#), Detektor.ba

176 [Ultra-Right Groups Show Their Face in Bosnian Town](#), Detektor.ba

platform known for spreading extreme right-wing and sometimes directly neo-Nazi ideas by spreading false narratives about vaccination and the pandemic.¹⁷⁷

Hate crimes

Crimes that are committed out of hatred often do not receive special attention in media reports, except for the occasional sensational article or headline.

The OSCE mission in BiH has been monitoring cases reported to the competent authorities almost since its inception, but estimates that in reality there are up to four times more than those they manage to record. The reason is that citizens simply do not report them.¹⁷⁸

What is also problematic about these cases is that they are not always qualified as hate crimes. In their work, journalists uncovered why this is the case and whether citizens choose not to report them out of fear, ignorance, or a lack of trust in the institutions.

BIRN BiH journalists, citing the Law on Free Access to Information, sent inquiries to all courts, prosecutor's offices, and police departments to dissect the practice of prosecuting hate crimes over a period of ten years through data research.

First of all, it was necessary to study all the laws – the state, entity, and Brčko District criminal codes – about these crimes in order to formulate the questions to the courts, prosecutor's offices and police authorities as clearly as possible.

The investigation for which editor Džana Brkanić and journalist Lamija Grebo received the second award of the European Union (EU) for investigative journalism¹⁷⁹ revealed that over the past ten years acts related to hatred are unevenly processed and recorded, and perpetrators often receive suspended sentences..

In addition to preparation and inquiries, the investigation itself lasted several months due to extensive documentation and its analysis. In particular, the issue of transparency of these institutions was raised, considering incomplete answers to inquiries or avoidance of answers. At the time when the journalists collected evidence and documents from institutions, there was no hate crime indicator in the CMS system for case management in courts and prosecutor's offices, which changed after the publication of this research and its promotion to the public.

During the research, the journalists spoke with members of the Roma and LGBTIQ+ communities, who are often exposed to attacks and hate crimes.

Their field work resulted in two stories about the suffering of returnees in the area of Doboј and Srebrenica, where the crimes - even after 25 years - have not been brought to justice. Going to the field also made it possible to enrich the content with multimedia.

Mihnet Okić was at the head of a march of about 400 people on 29 April 1996 when they encountered an armed ambush. A few months after the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement, they went on a tour of Sjenina near Doboј, from where they fled during the

177 [Far-Right Exploiting Pandemic to Spread Hate, in the Balkans Too](#), Detektor.ba

178 [Problematic non-reporting of hate crimes](#), Detektor.ba

179 [Suspended sentences do not prevent spread of hatred](#), Detektor.ba

war. For Eid, they planned to visit cemeteries and destroyed houses, accompanied by international peacekeeping troops of IFOR. But, according to Okić, near the village of Kapetanovići, the column was attacked by mortars, machine guns and snipers.

Okić immediately agreed to be interviewed by the journalists and filmed. The three women we spoke to at the time did not want their picture or video to be published in the media. They agreed to talk to us in their homes and to be audio-recorded, as well as to have their names published in the research. Even though many years have passed since the crime, they do not want to expose themselves further in public due to fear for their own safety and that of their family.

The journalists published the information they agreed on. The non-publication of their images in no way detracted from the research and the way this example contributed to raising awareness of hate crimes.

To date, no one has been held accountable for this crime that killed several people.

Similarly, no one was held accountable for the death of Pasha Mustafić near Srebrenica in 2005. The Zvornik Police Administration, which is in charge of the police station in Srebrenica, told the journalists that they had forwarded this case to the District Public Prosecutor's Office in Bijeljina. Paša's son, Safet Mustafić, gave a statement to the prosecutor's office in Bijeljina, but no one informed him about the progress of the investigation.

The District Prosecutor's Office in Bijeljina stated that, according to the official records, they do not have any "information on any individual with the name Mustafić Paša".

"I trusted that they would do their job professionally, and then, as a citizen of this country, I had the opportunity to see other murders that happened to returnees (...) then a conviction took root in my head that it would never be investigated," Mustafić said and added that, despite everything, he believes in the laws and judiciary of this country.

Dervo Sejdić, president of the Roma information centre "Kali Sara," said that no one has accurate records of hate crimes committed against members of the Roma community. He confirmed that people are afraid to report them, but that they also do not report because of the "low-quality approach to such cases by investigative authorities."

"People decide not to report such cases because they usually end up being qualified as a disturbance of public order and peace in which the Roma participated on the one hand, and 'whoever' on the other, who fought over something. They never engage in an investigation to prove it, even though in some cases the attacked Roma claim that it is (...) a hate crime, they are not understood as such, no investigations are conducted in that direction at all," said Sejdić to the journalists whose research revealed that punitive action is infrequent and ineffective.



"I trusted that they would do their job professionally, and then, as a citizen of this country, I had the opportunity to see other murders that happened to returnees (...) then a conviction took root in my head that it would never be investigated."

Safet Mustafić

It is a journalist's duty to report such stories and question why institutions are not doing their job. Through projects, journalists can create different databases on data that is officially missing. Additionally, these stories can be told through a variety of formats, not just investigations. Analyses, reports, news, TV specials, documentary shows and films give more opportunities for stories to reach the general public, as well as those who should solve these cases.

Over the course of one year, more than 120 cases of hate speech, discriminatory speech, denial of genocide, , and even glorification of convicted war criminals and incidents were recorded in the "Mapiranje mržnje" (Hate Mapping) database. News, analyse, research and videos are part of this database, as well as a map of BiH with marked incidents.

Based on the data from this database, journalists conducted research that showed that the president of Republika Srpska, Milorad Dodik, was the politician with the most statements that could encourage the spread of hatred during 2022.¹⁸⁰ Despite numerous reports and investigations, not a single indictment was ever brought against Dodik for these crimes. He is currently being tried in the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina for disobeying the decisions of the High Representative.¹⁸¹

Victims of hate crimes are disappointed with the police and the judiciary, so BIRN BiH analysed the attitude and reaction of the authorities to the attacks in the TV Justice show, which is broadcast once a month on numerous TV stations in our country.¹⁸²

In addition to numerous reports on attacks on returnees, BIRN BiH paid special attention to the issues of processing murders of women motivated by hatred. After the murder of Nizama Hećimović in Gradačac, the Bosnian public began to talk more about hate murders of women. While murders of women committed by men around the world are increasingly prosecuted as hate crimes, this is still not the practice in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In a television show aimed primarily at a younger audience, BIRN BiH also analysed the institution's cooperation with META, the owner of Facebook and Instagram, where a live recording of the murder of a woman was broadcast and removed only after several hours.

Threats and hatred are often present on social networks and the Internet, which is necessary to point out as threats from the online sphere are often realised in real life.

During 2022, protest marches were held in several cities of Bosnia and Herzegovina due to low sentences for murderers, where they demanded the introduction of a new criminal offence of femicide in order to increase the sentences. Some experts believe that such a legal solution would make it even more difficult to prove femicide.¹⁸³

We also followed the trial in the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina after which, by the decision of the Third Instance Council, Dušan Sladojević, Slavko Aleksić and Risto Lečić were sentenced to five months in prison each for inciting hatred in the area of Višegrad and its surroundings in March 2019.¹⁸⁴

180 [Milorad Dodik single biggest source of hateful narratives in BiH](#), Detektor.ba

181 [Milorad Dodik's trial begins](#), Detektor.ba

182 [Victims of hate crimes disappointed by the reactions of the police and the judiciary in the last 12 months](#), Detektor.ba

183 [Can hate murders of women be more severely punished in Bosnia and Herzegovina](#), Detektor.ba

184 [Bosnia Upholds Serb Chetniks' Hate Speech Convictions](#), Detektor.ba

The appellate panel issued a second-instance verdict¹⁸⁵ which found that Sladojević, Aleksić and Lečić, with their activities at the gathering of Ravna Gora members in Višegrad, glorified the Chetnik movement and Draža Mihailović, and with songs expressing threats and violence, committed the criminal offence of “inciting national, racial and religious hatred, discord and intolerance.”

This judgement was pronounced after the first instance ruling¹⁸⁶ in which the three accused were acquitted. According to the Appellate Council, the accused acted with intent and were aware that they could incite national hatred and threaten the common life of the constituent peoples and others in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

“The fact that there was no incident does not mean that the residents of Višegrad were not disturbed,” said judge Azra Miletić in the second instance ruling.

Since then, Detektor journalists regularly go to Ravna Gora gatherings in order to monitor the possible spread of hatred or point out other criminal acts.

Another trial that attracted the attention of the public was the trial of Fatmir Alispahić, who was acquitted of inciting national, religious and racial hatred, discord and intolerance in the texts he published on the Antimigrant.ba portal.¹⁸⁷

He was accused publishing texts and videos full of statements which incite and spread hatred towards migrants and between the constituent peoples of BiH on his website Antimigrant.ba over the course of 2019 and 2020. The experts with whom BIRN BiH spoke expressed concern about the possible consequences of this acquittal, given the fact it concluded that Alispahić’s claims were “within the scope of freedom of thought and speech.”¹⁸⁸

Among the many cases that upset the victims of the war and their families was the case of Drago Tendžerić, who – raising three fingers – took a photo next to the sign on the



Antimigrant.ba

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185 [Bosnia Convicts Serb Chetniks of Inciting Ethnic Hatred](#), Detektor.ba

186 [Bosnia Acquits Serb Chetniks of Inciting Ethnic Hatred](#), Detektor.ba

187 [Fatmir Alispahić acquitted of charges of inciting hatred](#), Detektor.ba

188 [Experts concerned about possible impact of Alispahić verdict on hate speech against migrants](#), Detektor.ba

way to the mass grave site “Lanište 1” near Ključ, where the remains of victims from Biljani were found.

In Biljani near Ključ¹⁸⁹, according to the judgements of the Hague Tribunal, around 200 people were killed on 10 July, 1992 by members of the army and police who had previously been captured and taken from their homes. Among the victims were women, elderly, and a four-month-old baby.

The Municipal Court in Sanski Most confirmed the indictment against Tendžerić for inciting ethnic, racial and religious hatred, discord and intolerance.¹⁹⁰ The journalists of BIRN BiH previously wrote about the accused that he also showed tattoos of the Chetnik leader Draža Mihailović and Duke Momčilo Đujić in the photo, which upset the victims.¹⁹¹

In the post-war society, after some of the displaced persons returned to their former homes, they were and still are exposed to hate-related attacks. These cases, as noted, often occur before or during religious holidays,¹⁹² anniversaries of crimes, in election years, but are not necessarily tied to specific dates. BIRN BiH has repeatedly reported on cases of attacks on returnees, but it did not stop there. Journalists continuously ask the institutions for information about what was done and whether these cases ultimately received a judicial epilogue.

It is especially important to raise the issue when institutions do not do their work at all or in a timely manner, and how this affects the returnee community.

We also wrote about the case of Senad Sejfić, who was attacked in his car in front of the mosque in Kamenica. We pointed out that the Bijeljina District Public Prosecutor’s Office and the Zvornik Police Station did not shed light on the incident and punish the perpetrators for a long time, which gave him and other returnees an additional sense of insecurity.¹⁹³

Because of this continuous reporting, survivors of attacks often contact journalists, believing that they will help them shed light on their case. A proof of the problematic nature of qualifying this type of crime was the case that BIRN BiH wrote about when Bahrudin Gušo, a returnee to Višegrad, was attacked. The attack on him was classified as grievous bodily harm.¹⁹⁴

Osman Mehanović was attacked by a group of juveniles in Bratunac, but nine months later a case was opened against him due to the injuries of those who attacked him.¹⁹⁵ By staying in contact with the attacked Mehanović, BIRN BiH also obtained information about this case.

189 [For 30 years, soldiers and police officers avoided responsibility for the murders in Biljani](#), Detektor.ba

190 [Confirmed indictment against Tendžerić, who posed with three fingers at the mass grave marker “Lanište 1”](#), Detektor.ba

191 [Provocations and insults instead of justice for the survivors of Biljani](#), Detektor.ba

192 [Three people punished for offensive song on Orthodox Christmas in Doboj; Invitation to Ravna Gora members to gather on Christmas Eve once again upset the returnees in Višegrad](#), Detektor.ba

193 [Slow response to prosecution of attack on Senad Sejfić in Kamenica discourages returnees](#), Detektor.ba

194 [Beating of returnees in Višegrad qualified as serious bodily injury](#), Detektor.ba

195 [The prosecution still has no answer about the investigation into the attack in Bratunac](#), Detektor.ba

An attack on a minor in Osmac near Zvornik also attracted the attention of the public. Fourteen-year-old Ajdin Jusić was questioned, without his father or lawyer present, by police officers in the local police station who then proceeded to beat him.¹⁹⁶ Jusić's story is one of four stories about police brutality in an episode of TV Justice¹⁹⁷ investigated by journalists.

While this handbook was being written, the police officers who were accused of attacking Jusić were waiting for the trial to begin.¹⁹⁸

We reported when the Association of Genocide Victims and Witnesses requested that the State Prosecutor's Office take over the cases of murders of returnees that occurred after the war and for which no one has yet been held accountable.¹⁹⁹ We also reported on High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council adopting conclusions according to which attacks on returnees should be processed as a priority.²⁰⁰

The anxiety of the returnees, as well as the rest of the public, is not necessarily caused by direct attacks, but also by offensive graffiti, banners, and statements by politicians or convicted war criminals. The journalist's task is to talk to the people who are affected by this and to indicate how serious a problem it is in society. This informs the application of the law and helps prevent additional crime.

Hague convict Dario Kordić, who was released early from serving his sentence for crimes committed in Ahmići and central Bosnia, stated that he would "do it all over again", causing anxiety and fear among the residents of this village where more than 100 civilians were killed in April 1993. At the time, in Ahmići, they said that they see justice in the reaction of the state judiciary, by preventing of such statements and in the return of Kordić to serve the rest of his sentence.²⁰¹

Statements by politicians such as Milorad Dodik and acts of incitement cause additional



Kordić

Hague convict Dario Kordić, who was released early from serving his sentence for crimes committed in Ahmići and central Bosnia, stated that he would "do it all over again", causing **anxiety and fear among the residents** of this village where more than 100 civilians were killed in April 1993.

"Residents of Ahmići in fear after Dario Kordić's statement", BIRN

196 [Internal punishments do not prevent police violence and misconduct](#), Detektor.ba

197 [TV Justice, Episode 156: Four stories of police brutality](#), Detektor.ba

198 [Police officers who beat minor in Osmaci deny guilt](#), Detektor.ba

199 [BiH Prosecutor's Office asked to solve the murders of returnees](#), Detektor.ba

200 [HJPC supported proposals for priority processing of attacks on returnees](#), Detektor.ba

201 [Residents of Ahmići in fear after Dario Kordić's statement "that he would do it all over again"](#), Detektor.ba

anxiety and insecurity among returnees.²⁰² It is important to write about it because anxiety is one of the primary goals of such speech.

At the beginning of this year, graffiti glorifying the Ustasha movement and the so-called Herceg-Bosna, a parastatal organization whose leadership was sentenced to prison by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, were written on the “Sarajka” burek restaurant in Neum and the buildings next to it during the night.²⁰³

We also reported on fascist symbols graffitied on the Partisan Memorial Cemetery in Mostar. The Association of Anti-Fascists and Fighters of the National Liberation War in BiH (SABNOR BiH) said that they consider it to be an attack on the state, as well as that they do not trust the local security authorities.²⁰⁴

In the summer of 2022, this cemetery was vandalised again. Two months after over 700 memorial plaques were damaged, BIRN BiH journalists were told by SABNOR that there had been no progress in the search for the perpetrators. The prosecutor’s office stated that a police report had been received against an unknown perpetrator or perpetrators, and an order was passed to launch an investigation.²⁰⁵

The destruction of electrical distribution boxes and the theft of cables from the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in Mostar is part of a series of attacks on religious buildings.²⁰⁶

On the 30th anniversary of the start of the war, BIRN BiH journalists spoke with various journalists, editors and media directors who reported on the events in the spring of 1992. We compared the hateful statements before the start of the war with those today and analysed their effect on everyday life.²⁰⁷

Former war journalists and editors noticed similarities with today’s hate speech, which is most often used by politicians, but also by ordinary citizens, and recalled how hateful narratives contributed to the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina.²⁰⁸

A series of investigations by BIRN BiH indicates that various right-wing organisations and sports fan groups spread hate speech.

The investigation,²⁰⁹ carried out based on court documents of the 16 Ravna Gora associations, revealed that prominent members were tried for war crimes, while one of the leaders was a policeman, despite security agencies warning that the Ravna Gora movement was spreading extremist messages. For his research, assistant editor Haris Rovčanin won the second international “Fetisov” award for 2021 in the category for outstanding contribution

202 [How inflammatory messages and fabricated calls for conscription increased fear among citizens](#), Detektor.ba

203 [Offensive inscriptions on the “Sarajka” burek restaurant in Neum](#), Detektor.ba

204 [Graffiti removed from the Partisan cemetery in Mostar](#), Detektor.ba

205 [Association of Anti-Fascists claims there is no progress in investigation of destruction of the Partisan Cemetery, and the Prosecutor’s Office claims all measures being taken](#), Detektor.ba

206 [Orthodox Christians in Mostar outraged by looting that prevented bells of the Cathedral from ringing](#), Detektor.ba

207 [TV Justice Episode 136: Bosnian Journalists Recall Escalating Ethnic Hatred as War Began](#), Detektor.ba

208 [Politics and hatred – 30 years of consequences through reporters’ lenses](#), Detektor.ba

209 [Serb Chetniks’ Links to War Criminals and Extremists Uncovered](#), Detektor.ba

to peace.²¹⁰ This investigation is part of TV Justice episode 136: “Politics and hatred - 30 years of consequences through the lenses of journalists” - the series for which Rovčanin was awarded.

Another investigation revealed how the “Totenkopf”, a stylized skull symbol, which was used by Nazi units in the Second World War and which was banned at UEFA matches, appeared on the stands in Bijeljina. In the photos from the stands, the faces of “Radnik” fans are blurred, but this research revealed the identities of members with tattooed Nazi symbols.²¹¹

The “Totenkopf”, was used by the infamous Nazi SS divisions during some of the most atrocious crimes of the Second World War. This symbol was displayed prominently in the stands of the Bijeljina stadium at least five times during 2022.

Because of the hatred it represents, the “Totenkopf” was banned at matches organised by the European Football Association (UEFA), but the “Radnik” Football Club was not penalised despite its continued presence.

Journalists first noticed the flag with a white skull on a blue background during a futsal tournament in July 2022; since then, this symbol has often appeared on the stands of the stadium in Bijeljina.

The fan group “Incident” from Bijeljina posted this flag several times on their social media. In some photos where the faces are blacked out, a tattoo with the “Totenkopf” can be seen on the leg of one fan.

In addition to the “Totenkopf”, one fan visible in the images had a swastika tattooed on his chest.

In the TV Justice programme, we explained symbols utilised by ultra-right groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina so that citizens could better recognize far right narratives which are being introduced in sport and their connection to the spread of hatred in society. Our program also advised citizens how they should react if they notice these symbols or individuals in their community.²¹²

We also investigated some of the members of the Bosnian Movement of National Pride (BPNP), which has promoted the neo-Nazi ideology of anti-Semitism, homophobia and racism on its website for more than a decade, in parallel with Bosnian nationalism.



“Incident”

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210 [BIRN BiH Journalist Wins Fetisov International Award](#), Detektor.ba

211 [In Bosnian Town, Serb Football Fans Embrace Neo-Nazi Symbols](#), Detektor.ba

212 [TV Justice, Episode 119: Ultra-Right Groups Show Their Face in Bosnia](#), Detektor.ba

When a swastika was drawn on the death certificate of Želimir Altarac Čičak in 2021, it was the latest in a series of events that deeply disturbed the Jewish community in Sarajevo. Members of this minority group in the capital said that they feel safe, but that they are worried about messages of hate and that the rise of anti-Semitism in the world could also happen in Bosnia and Herzegovina.²¹³

The State Prosecutor's Office accused Toni Bašić of repeatedly inciting terrorist activities, anti-Semitism, racism, nationalism, as well as making threats to the LGBT population via the Internet during 2020. Bašić published messages such as: "Kill every Jew with gas", "Go on the path of genocide", etc.

Although the offence was initially qualified as an act of terrorism, it was requalified as the criminal offence of "inciting national and religious hatred, discord and intolerance."

Based on the plea agreement, Bašić was given a suspended sentence of two years, not to be implemented unless he commits another criminal offence within three years.²¹⁴

In December 2021, two threats were written on the door of a Sarajevo Catholic family under a Christmas wreath: "I'm here, Catholics, to cross you over" and "Do you want me to shoot you with a Kalashnikov, I have it?". In addition to reporting on the act itself, BIRN BiH also covered controversial statements made by then mayor Benjamina Karić.²¹⁵

The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Sarajevo Canton stated that the person who wrote the threatening messages was identified and subsequently placed in the "Jagomir" Psychiatric Hospital in Sarajevo for treatment.

Through the National Reports on Islamophobia, we also monitor the state of Islamophobic rhetoric on social networks, which provide a form for incitement and hatred.²¹⁶

We also wrote about the "Crime of Atheism" forum and how the name of this form offended the Atheist minority in BiH. At that time, the organisers and lecturer of the "Crime of Atheism" forum believed that they were within the limits of free speech, while those to whom it was directed, the official religious community and experts, believed that the name of the lecture marginalises a minority group and directs hatred towards its members.²¹⁷



"Crime of Atheism"

The organisers and lecturer of the "Crime of Atheism" forum believed that they were within the **limits of free speech**, while those to whom it was directed, the official religious community and experts, believed that the name of the lecture **marginalises a minority group and directs hatred** towards its members.

213 [Swastika on a death certificate, a warning of right-wing influence on young people](#), Detektor.ba

214 [Toni Bašić given a conditional sentence for inciting nationalist hatred](#), Detektor.ba

215 [Authorities must condemn threats to Catholic family instead of seeking justification](#), Detektor.ba

216 [Social networks the main source of Islamophobic rhetoric on the Internet: Report; Islamophobic rhetoric on the rise in 2021: Report](#), Detektor.ba

217 ["The crime of atheism:" How the name of a forum offended a minority group](#), Detektor.ba

BIRN BiH also continuously reports on attacks on the LGBTIQ+ community in BiH. The documentary “Four Walls”²¹⁸ by Džana Brkanić discusses the consequences of attacks on members of the LGBTIQ community in Belgrade and Banja Luka and the intimidation they face in Sarajevo. The film presents the views of the LGBTIQ community in BiH and Serbia. This group is often dehumanised due to increasingly frequent hate speech, threats and attacks on this community by various right-wing groups, hooligans, politicians, and society.

The film premiered on May 17th 2023, on the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia, after which the panellists discussed the position of members of the LGBTIQ community who are regularly exposed to hate speech, threats, and physical attacks.²¹⁹

Activists and journalists Vanja Stokić and Ajdin Kamber, who were attacked in Banja Luka during filming, are also featured in the film.

In March 2023, members of the Organising Committee of the BiH Pride Parade and activists were attacked in Banja Luka. At the press conference, Mirza Halilčević said that, after the event was banned, it was planned that part of the participants would meet informally in the premises of Transparency International BiH.

“It was meant to be and was a secret location. It was not a public gathering and no one from the community was invited. The police knew the address. (...) Around 18:20, the police took the members out of the Transparency premises to a small plateau, to the area in front of the building, and told us that we were not safe there, not even in our accommodations, to return to Sarajevo. A good part of the people was not from Sarajevo, we had colleagues from Banja Luka”, said Halilčević, a member of the Organising Committee.”

Then they were attacked by a group of about 30 masked men who injured three people. At the press conference, it was repeatedly pointed out that the attack happened in full view of the police.

“We had been exposed, served to them. (...) The attackers shouted, among other things, that we should be killed. What is interesting is that the police then gathered with a dozen cars, after which we were transported to the police station where we spent five or six hours. (...) We were evacuated from Banja Luka to Sarajevo with the help of the Ministry of Human Rights, together with the Directorate for the Coordination of Police Bodies”, he described.²²⁰

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Mirza Halilčević, a member
of the Organising Committee
BiH Pride Parade

218 [Documentary Four walls](#), Detektor.ba

219 [Premiere of the film “Four Walls” by BIRN BiH](#), Detektor.ba

220 [BiH Pride Parade: the LGBT community targeted in the Republika Srpska](#), Detektor.ba

BIRN BiH previously wrote that 13 non-governmental organisations of Republika Srpska and the city authorities of Banja Luka, who referred to contradictions with traditional and Christian values, requested to cancel the event.²²¹

This attack caused numerous reactions, but a few weeks later, a clearer picture emerged. Details of the the disinformation campaign that preceded the attack were discovered, the failures of the Banja Luka police, and the details of the night of the attack all became clearer.

In the “Detektor Magazin” programme, journalists took a close look at the role played by political officials in launching a hate campaign against the LGBTIQ community and how disinformation about the event in Banja Luka occupied the media and led to attacks which the victims consider a hate crime.²²²

In the years since, BIRN BiH has continued to monitor the spread of dehumanising messages about the LGBTIQ community, both in BiH, the Balkans, and other nations plagued by Russian influence.

In May 2022, the LGBTIQ community in BiH welcomed the first verdict for discrimination as a victory for its members. Although it is still not legally binding, this judgement represents a glimmer of hope for the people we spoke to.²²³

Two years after the then cantonal representative Samra Čosović-Hajdarević wrote on her Facebook profile that LGBT people should be isolated and removed from society, the court in Sarajevo concluded that, as a prominent politician, she had discriminated against this group.

The role of journalists is not only to report, it is also to engage with activism. BIRN BiH journalists support the Pride Parade by walking the streets of Sarajevo every year, the executive director also participated as an ally in the campaign of the Fourth Pride Parade in 2023.

In addition to this, BIRN BiH journalists and editors provide training to students and colleagues from other media outlets on reporting about different types of hate: racism, anti-Roma, anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, anti-Christian, as well as gender-based crimes and crimes against minority communities like the LGBTIQ.

Genocide and crime denial and glorification of convicted war criminals

Until the amendments to the state’s Criminal Code imposed by then High Representative Valentin Inzko in the summer of 2021,²²⁴ genocide denial and the glorification of convicted war criminals was neither prohibited nor punishable in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Such narratives were, and despite new laws, are most often used by politicians. Now genocide denial is made illegal by the same law that refers to inciting racial, national and religious hatred or intolerance.

221 [Banja Luka activists supported BiH pride parade event after the call for a ban](#), Detektor.ba

222 [Detektor – Magazin: How the actions of the Banja Luka police and misinformation endangered LGBT activists](#), Detektor.ba

223 [First verdict for discrimination against LGBT people as a glimmer of hope](#), Detektor.ba

224 [Bosnia’s High Representative Imposes Genocide Denial Ban](#), Detektor.ba

We reported on discrimination in BiH even before the law was adopted, analysing what was stopping the judicial process. However, the adoption of a law is not the end of this problem. On the contrary, it opened up a number of new topics for the media. The role of journalists is to monitor the implementation of a law, critique how it functions, and investigate how its implementation can be improved.

For years, prosecutors in the Federation have been reluctant to use the part of the Criminal Code that prohibits genocide denial. This practice likely will help speed up the implementation of amendments to the Law at the state level, which now prohibit denial of crimes established by court verdicts, experts said in an analysis published in July 2021.²²⁵

At the beginning of this year, the Cantonal Prosecutor's Office in Sarajevo charged Hamdija Kocić with insulting the victims of genocide and glorifying Željko Ražnatović Arkan under this law.²²⁶

According to the indictment, released on July 11th, 2023 Kocić's behaviour incited national and religious hatred. Kocić planned an inflammatory public protest the same day as the burial of genocide victims.

Kocić is accused of singing songs glorifying Arkan and his "Tigers" in addition to insulting the victims of the genocide in Srebrenica and harassing citizens.

In May, after consideration of the plea agreement, Kocić was sentenced to a conditional sentence of one year, with a three-year probationary period.²²⁷

The public expects the highest quality of prosecution when the state addresses hate crimes.

According to the amendments to the state law, whoever publicly incites to violence or hatred against a group of persons or a member of such a group defined by reference to race, colour, religion, descent or national or ethnic origin, shall be punished by imprisonment for a term between three months and three years. The law expressly forbids the public condemnation and gross trivialization of genocide, crimes against humanity, or war crimes. The penalty for such an act, when directed against a group of persons or a member of such a group defined by reference to race, colour, religion, descent or national or ethnic origin and the conduct is carried out in a manner likely to incite to violence or hatred against said group is imprisonment for a term between six months and five years.

According to these amendments, whoever performs public dissemination or distribution of propaganda, pictures or other material intended to incite hatred or deny genocide, shall be punished by imprisonment for a term not less than one year.

The act of recognizing, giving an award, constructing a memorial, producing any kind of memento, or awarding any privilege or similar to a person sentenced by a final judgement for genocide, crimes against humanity or a war crime shall be punished by imprisonment for a term not less than three years.

According to these amendments, the same punishment applies to the naming of a public object such as a street, square, park, bridge, an institution, building, municipality or a city or similar, or registers a brand, after or under a name of a person sentenced by a final

225 [Lack of practice challenges prosecution of denial of genocide and other crimes](#), Detektor.ba

226 [Possible detention of the accused for insulting the victims of genocide at the next hearing](#), Detektor.ba

227 [Suspended sentence for insulting genocide victims](#), Detektor.ba

judgement for genocide, crimes against humanity or a war crime, as well as to whoever glorifies a person sentenced by a final judgement for genocide, crimes against humanity or a war crime.

Knowing the law was important for journalists to be able to carry out research.

BIRN BiH journalists have been following cases of genocide denial for years, and they have paid special attention to the implementation of the amended law, through numerous analyses and studies in the period that followed. BIRN BiH still actively follows the trials for this criminal offence, but this was preceded by extensive advocacy, both by civil society organisations and the media.

To some extent, denial has become normalised in BiH, but our task as journalists is to warn against those who propagate these damaging narratives and to educate the public that such a phenomenon is not acceptable and that it should be reported. Many media organisations saw that the public needed help in this, so we also reported on the manual of the organisations forumZFD and the Network for Building Peace. In that manual, legal experts Lejla Gačanica and Dejan Lučka simplified the legal norms for citizens so they can report cases of genocide denial or the glorification of convicted war criminals more easily and thoroughly.²²⁸

The manual²²⁹ contains detailed explanations of legal solutions, explanations of all elements of criminal offences and the standards that need to be met in order to prove an offence has occurred. The manual also includes thorough explanations of how to file a criminal complaint, as well as an example of a criminal complaint.

Years before the amendments to the Law, numerous domestic and foreign organisations drew attention to the issue of genocide denial and other crimes, as well as victims' associations, especially in areas where they are a national minority. Initially after the imposition of the Law, the denial of crimes on social networks and in the media decreased.²³⁰ BIRN BiH analysed this extensively and has followed it for the more than two and a half years that passed until the first indictment was filed and upheld.²³¹

The Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina confirmed in April 2024 the first indictment against Vojin Pavlović for inciting national, racial, and religious hatred, discord and intolerance due to the glorification of a person convicted of war crimes.

The indictment against Vojin Pavlović was brought because on 10 March, in the town of Bratunac, where some Bosniaks who had been expelled during the war returned, he put up a banner with the image of the former commander of the Army of Republika Srpska (VRS) Ratko Mladić – who was sentenced to life imprisonment in The Hague for the genocide in Srebrenica and other war crimes.²³²

228 [Three things to know if you want to report war crimes denial](#), Detektor.ba

229 [Submitting a written criminal complaint for the criminal acts of approving, denying, grossly undermining and attempting to justify the crime of genocide, crime against humanity or war crime](#), Lejla Gačanica and Dejan Lučka, Forum Ziviler Friedensdienst e.V. and Network for Building Peace, Sarajevo 2022.

230 [Genocide denial in the media and on Twitter decreased after Inzko's decision](#), Detektor.ba

231 [Confirmed indictment against Vojin Pavlović for glorifying a person convicted of war crimes](#), Detektor.ba

232 [Three things to know about the first accused of glorifying a war criminal](#), Detektor.ba

According to the indictment, the banner read: “Happy birthday, may you have a long and healthy life.”

The prosecutors stated in the indictment that with this act, Pavlović glorified a person who was convicted of genocide, and thus “caused fear and anxiety among the majority of residents in the area who saw the banner placed in the centre of the city, and especially among the returnee population to the surrounding villages in the area of the Bratunac Municipality.”

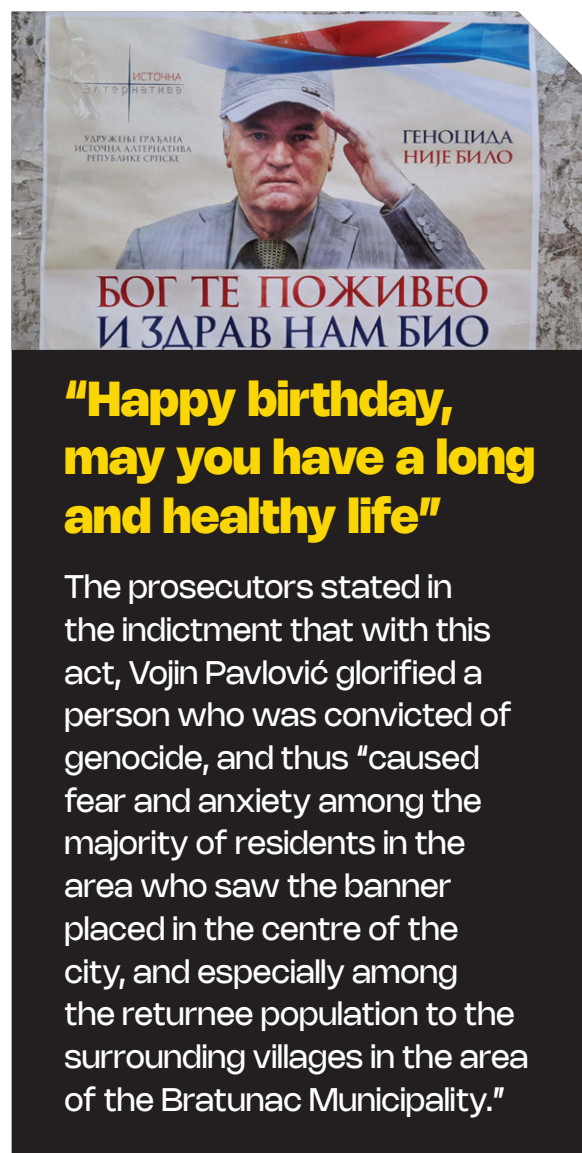
Pavlović’s trial began in the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina.²³³ During his trial, he was also accused under the same law of approving and attempting to justify the genocide in Srebrenica.²³⁴ While initially separate, the proceedings were later merged into one.

Amendments to the Law encouraged citizens to file reports against those they suspected to be denying crimes or glorifying convicted war criminals, however, there were no indictments.

Journalists wanted to show why these crimes are still not prosecuted, and they turned to the prosecutor’s office and legal experts. They also spoke to those who are most affected by the issue.²³⁵

While some citizens reported such cases under their full names, others decided to report them anonymously. Even then, it was very important for journalists to be cautious of how they engaged with those who felt fear and anxiety. In areas where there are national minorities, it is not always easy to find people who will speak to the media without fear. For these reasons, journalists will always protect the identity of those whom request it and keep in mind that the interviewees must continue their daily lives and fulfil their daily obligations even after the story is published.

As important as it is to point out the cases when the Law is violated, it is also important to create a safe environment for the interviewees so that they are not subject to reprisals because of their appearance in public. Even in cases where they want to speak publicly about a certain problem, journalists should still take into account all the circumstances and the situation and assess whether there could be consequences that would threaten the security of the person they are speaking to, and make an informed decision about whether or not to publish an individual’s name.



“Happy birthday, may you have a long and healthy life”

The prosecutors stated in the indictment that with this act, Vojin Pavlović glorified a person who was convicted of genocide, and thus “caused fear and anxiety among the majority of residents in the area who saw the banner placed in the centre of the city, and especially among the returnee population to the surrounding villages in the area of the Bratunac Municipality.”

233 [Bosnia Tries Serb Nationalist for Glorifying Ratko Mladic](#), Detektor.ba

234 [Confirmed indictment against Vojin Pavlović for approving genocide](#), Detektor.ba

235 [Bosnia’s Genocide Denial Ban Curbs Violations, But No Prosecutions Yet](#), Detektor.ba

At the end of July 2021, Radovan Kovačević defended his boss Milorad Dodik's decision to launch a petition, after the former High Representative forbade genocide denial.

"Just so that there would be no dilemma, I am Radovan Kovačević, I respect all the victims of Srebrenica, but I say clearly: 'Genocide did not happen in Srebrenica,'" said Dodik's adviser in the BiH Presidency at the time in a statement to the media.

Ekrija Ramić from Bratunac decided to react. As someone whose immediate and extended family members were killed during the genocide in Srebrenica and earlier during the war, he says he felt hurt and upset. He adds that as a boy he witnessed his father's shooting in 1992.

"You feel helpless. You feel the mockery, ridicule of something that no normal person would say like that," said Ramić at the time.

He reported Kovačević to the State Prosecutor's Office.

"I thought he broke the law and wanted to report him. That is also my civic duty," Ramić explained to journalists at the time. For him, there was no doubt whether he should talk to the press or not.

Pursuant to the Law on Freedom of Access to Information, BIRN BiH requested from the Prosecutor's Office orders by which it was decided that investigations would not be conducted in certain cases. It analysed those decisions with legal expert Lejla Gačanica, and in a study published in February 2023, they discovered how prosecutors made decisions and developed practice, even though they did not file any charges a year and a half after the ban went into effect.²³⁶

Since the ban on denial of crimes was imposed in July 2021, until the end of 2022, state prosecutors have decided not to conduct 27 investigations into the denial of genocide, other war crimes and the glorification of convicted war criminals. They rejected a series of reports related to the denial of genocide in comments on media reports, as well as posts on social networks.

In a significant number of cases, prosecutors did not carry out investigations because they could not determine the identity of the perpetrators. This most often was the case when individuals made anonymous comments on social networks or articles, but in one case the police failed to identify a larger group of citizens who carried a flag with the image of a convicted war criminal on the street.

At the time, the chief state prosecutor Milanko Kajganić explained that the legal provision is broadly formulated and that proving the consequences causes the most problems in their work.

“

"You feel helpless. You feel the mockery, ridicule of something that no normal person would say like that. I thought he broke the law and wanted to report him. That is also my civic duty".

Ekrija Ramić, on the report against Radovan Kovačević to the State Prosecutor's Office

236 [Bosnia's Genocide Denial Law: Why Prosecutors Haven't Charged Anyone](#), Detektor.ba

“In cases of the denial of these other acts concerning international humanitarian law, it is necessary to prove the consequences. Until now, we have not had cases in which we have succeeded in this,” he said at the time and added that there is not enough analysis of court practice from the countries of the European Union that would help with this.

There are various reasons for not proceeding with these cases, as explained by the Prosecutor’s Office – from the fact that they are entering unknown territory because there is no similar legal practice and not wanting to jeopardise freedom of speech, to the fact that state prosecutors do not have enough knowledge or analyses of European practice to work on such cases.

This gave journalists an opportunity to examine how much European judicial practice can help in the prosecution of these crimes, and they once again turned to the experts.²³⁷ Journalists often use comparisons with other countries when investigating their topics, which is why cooperation with colleagues from other countries is becoming more frequent every year.

Experts, including retired judges of the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, explained that European practice can really help in the prosecution of this crime.

Once again, civil society organisations contributed to the improvement of punishment, in cooperation with legal experts, and through the presentation of the practice of punishment in other European countries, which provides clear examples of how to overcome the problems faced by domestic prosecutors.

This is how legal expert Dejan Lučka’s manual “Denial, glorification and approval of war crimes in the light of court practice and international mechanisms for the protection of human rights,” was developed.²³⁸

It explained to journalists that, when the right balance is struck between hate speech and freedom of expression, the latter often prevails in the legal practice in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is not always optimal.

Freedom of expression is precisely the reason why the Prosecutor’s Office issued several orders not to conduct investigations into allegations of denial of genocide and other crimes, as well as glorification of convicted war criminals, as revealed by BIRN BiH in its research. For the purposes of this research, as well as many others, journalists relied on the Law on Free Access to Information in order to obtain the requested documents from institutions.

While this could not be done in some cases, which was seen through the documents submitted to BIRN BiH, the Prosecutor’s Office had no problem establishing the identity of the person who insulted the children killed in Vitez in 1993 on Facebook, and soon accused Samir Nukić. His²³⁹ trial has begun in the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which Detektor journalists regularly follow.

237 [How European practice can help domestic prosecutors prosecute war crimes denial](#), Detektor.ba

238 [Denial, glorification and approval of war crimes in the light of court practice and international mechanisms for the protection of human rights](#), Dejan Lučka, Forum Ziviler Friedensdienst e.V., TRIAL International and the Network for Building Peace, Sarajevo 2022.

239 [Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina confirms indictment for insulting victims of war from Vitez](#), Detektor.ba

One of the ways BIRN BiH journalists reported on the denial of genocide and other crimes was through the “Mapiranje mržnje” (Hate Mapping) database on hate speech, discriminatory speech, denial of genocide and other war crimes expressed by officials or public figures in the media or on social networks, and incidents in which hatred is provoked or war crimes are denied.²⁴⁰ This database attracted the attention of other media who often used it in their work, increasing the visibility of the work of BIRN journalists. Few entries from the Database resulted in indictments.

In the development of the database and its methodology, BIRN BiH collaborated with other experts and professors, using their expertise to supplement journalistic skills. In addition to news, the database also contains photos and videos.

On 23 May, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Resolution on the genocide in Srebrenica,²⁴¹ according to which 11 July will be marked as the International Day of Reflection and Commemoration of the 1995 Genocide in Srebrenica.

Before its adoption, BIRN BiH analysed the draft and explained to the public that one of the goals of the Resolution is the unreserved condemnation of any denial of the genocide in Srebrenica.²⁴² Court-established facts about the genocide were brought to the front, and the need to condemn all acts that glorify those convicted of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, including those responsible for the genocide in Srebrenica, was emphasised. Such actions in the Resolution are prescribed in order to prevent the repetition of genocide and revisionism, i.e. a new and wrong interpretation of the facts about the genocide. Unfortunately, the adoption of the resolution led to repeated denials and numerous misinformation.

For Bosnia and Herzegovina, denial knows no bounds, and journalists have discovered numerous groups and individuals from other countries – such as Serbia or distant Russia – as well as media that contribute to the spread of these messages. As a weapon to combat disinformation and denial and a way to point out the problem, journalists use fact-checking analyses in which they contrast deniers and what they said with the conclusions of domestic and foreign judgements.²⁴³

Once again going beyond the framework of classical journalism, BIRN BiH hosts numerous conferences, panels and events in which this topic is discussed in an attempt to contribute to solving the problem with the help of the professional public.²⁴⁴ Quite often, new topics

RESOLUTION ON THE GENOCIDE IN SREBRENICA

11 July

On 23 May 2024, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Resolution on the genocide in Srebrenica, according to which 11 July will be marked as the **International Day of Reflection and Commemoration of the 1995 Genocide in Srebrenica**.

240 [Mapping Hate Database](#), Detektor.ba

241 [UN General Assembly adopts resolution on genocide in Srebrenica](#), Detektor.ba

242 [What you need to know about the UN resolution on the genocide in Srebrenica](#), Detektor.ba

243 [Detektor Fact check: Dodik's parliamentary denial of facts about genocide in Srebrenica](#), Detektor.ba

244 [Impunity for Genocide Denial Spurs Youth Pop Culture Trend Online](#), Detektor.ba

and materials for work emerge in gatherings like this, as well as opportunities to speak with those whose knowledge will be used in some of our shows, analyses or new meetings.

Numerous organisations and institutions produce comprehensive reports on denial, often with a huge number of pages, which journalists adapt for their readership.²⁴⁵

PTSD and consequences of the war in BiH

During many years of reporting on war crimes, BIRN BiH journalists spoke with hundreds of victims and their families. Considering the sensitivity of the topic itself and the re-traumatisation that these interlocutors experience almost every time they discuss the events of the war, journalists used to have to give up interviews because they estimated that the conversation, no matter how well they were trained for it, could harm the interlocutors in some way. It should be kept in mind that journalists are not trained in mental health counselling, nor can they diagnose symptoms, but often the interlocutors themselves say that they suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Prompted by numerous interviews, the journalists decided to pay special attention to the needs and difficulties of people with PTSD in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as to what the state and society's response is.

Stigma, shame and living with PTSD

On the special page "PTSD in BiH"²⁴⁶ published one year after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, journalists showed public analyses, reports, videos²⁴⁷ and illustrations about what it means to have PTSD in BiH and how it affects everyday life. Journalists spoke with those who suffer from PTSD, doctors and other experts, but also sought answers from institutions in order to raise awareness of another marginalised group in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The wars in Ukraine and Palestine deeply affected individuals who had already gone experienced war first-hand. So how did people with PTSD experience cope with contemporary wars? It was a question that journalists set about answering.

When the coronavirus pandemic made life stand still in the spring of 2020, for most people it seemed it was the end of the world as they knew it. For PTSD sufferers, everything reminded them of the onset of the conflict nearly 30 years ago.

Enes Dedić, with whom journalists spoke in Tuzla, was brought back to 1992 by the empty streets and closed shops.

245 [What you need to know about the latest report of the Srebrenica Memorial Centre on genocide denial](#), Detektor.ba

246 [PTSD in BiH](#), Detektor.ba

247 Video footage, Detektor.ba:

[PTSD in BiH](#)

[PTSD in BiH: Old traumas - new triggers](#)

[PTSD in BiH: Consequences](#)

[PTSD in BiH: Help](#)

[PTSD in BiH: Transfers of trauma](#)

“Two years later, the Russian invasion of Ukraine happened. It hit us so hard. It was the same as here back in 1992. Starting in 1991 and 1992, we could see shops slowly running out of goods. That is how it all started in the city of Tuzla and the whole of Bosnia and Herzegovina,” Enes said.

He followed all the news and watched reports from Ukraine, but not for long, as it brought back images of what he had been through during the war.

For Borislav Mlinarević, it was images from Ukraine and loud sounds that reminded him of his wartime experiences.

“I shudder, I get scared, that is inevitable. It cannot be helped,” Borislav described.

Irritability is not uncommon in people with PTSD.

“We who have trauma from the war, injuries and PTSD, we’re like that. We’re emotional. We don’t need much. A token of attention, a passer-by greeting you or smiling at you, having coffee together, talking to each other,” Enes said.

In late 2022, journalists talked to Zlatko Ljubić, a pensioner from Tuzla who suffers from PTSD, and told his story.

The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina had been over for months, but Zlatko Ljubić was still hearing the sound of shelling.

Lying in bed in his apartment, he was sure he could hear shells being fired and flying overhead. Several times he jumped out of bed and got onto the floor to protect himself. One time he sprained his ankle and ended up wearing a cast.

“That’s when I noticed something was wrong,” he recalls.

His friends also started noticing the changes. While he worked in tourism after demobilisation from the army, they were used to seeing him smiling and being chatty.

“I started retiring into myself a bit. I felt some sort of anxiety,” Zlatko says.

For him, these were the first symptoms he saw clearly, after he had already ignored the insomnia and sweating. He thought that he just couldn’t sleep or that the apartment was too hot.

He talked less and less with others, so people started asking him what was wrong with him and if he was angry. Then, with the support of his wife, he decided to seek medical help. He ended up in hospital treatment, where he was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress syndrome.

Now he believes that becoming a military company commander as a very young man at the beginning of the war contributed to this. He had a sense of personal responsibility for about the hundred people under his command.

“I was afraid, I had no previous war experience. Everything we learned, we learned as it went along and I was trying not to make any mistakes,” Zlatko says.

Nearly two and a half decades after the war, with therapy and support, he learned how to deal with the trauma. But then came the pandemic, followed by the war in Ukraine. A great agitation started in him again. He says that the pandemic did not affect him that much and that he protected himself from virus. But the new war in

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“It upsets me and I can’t, I just can’t. I feel uneasy, as if I were back there on mount Majevisa. And I have stopped watching news from Ukraine.”

Zlatko Ljubić

Europe hit him much harder. He would turn off the TV when the broadcasts from Ukraine started. Today, he doesn't watch the news at all.

"It upsets me and I can't, I just can't. I feel uneasy, as if I were back there on mount Majevica. And I have stopped watching news from Ukraine.," Zlatko says.

He often talks about this with his former comrades at group therapy sessions at the Retirement Centre in Tuzla. These kinds of gatherings are the only places where they talk together with the doctor completely openly about the mental health issues that makes life difficult for them.

As they tell their stories, it's clear that hundreds more with PTSD symptoms remain out of the treatment system, due to shame or a lack of resources.

Anyone can develop this anxiety disorder and in any period of life, after witnessing or experiencing a life-threatening event. It is not necessarily limited to war experiences, but it most often affects war veterans. Many journalists also suffer from PTSD, especially those experienced the war personally or reported from war zones.

It is also important that our texts and reports offer information on where to turn for help.

Uneven practice of institutional assistance

Those who suffer from PTSD live in every city in BiH visited by journalists, but the practice of support is uneven and systemic assistance is absent. They usually gather in associations once a week and talk, but they also have doctors they work with. For others, the doctor has to come from another place.

For former comrades, one meeting a week means a lot, where they often talk about the economic crisis and how constant price increases revive memories of the war and the post-war period. They have the feeling that society ignores their problems.

"All the doors are closed, there is only one wall. Here, the only place where among these colleagues we can present, everything can be said and you can knock on the door at any time. You can see for yourself, everything is expensive. We have no support from our government at all," said one of the members of the association.

All point primarily to the lack of assistance from the state level, but also to the stigma that accompanies them in society, and the shame that may be why many of them do not want to seek help.

Most of them are struggling to find jobs for themselves or their children. One man is disappointed because his two sons left the country, he fought for to live in Germany. Today, they feel that they are stigmatised and that no one but their doctor understands them.

"What we have, what we carry inside us, is ours and our problem, but these groups serve us to get it out of ourselves and understand each other, appreciate and respect each other," says one of them as the room is filling with cigarette smoke.

Group workshops help them cope with the illness, which they consider to be a psychological injury caused by the war.

The support and understanding of family is something that everyone emphasises as an essential part of coping with their illness. Outside their families, they have a hard time getting any support from others, said Borislav Mlinarević from Ljubuški.

“Many people don’t believe us. Most people are still sinking deeper, as they see we can’t get much help. The state isn’t really helping us”, he said.

Borislav, who first had two strokes and then developed epilepsy, says that PTSD sufferers have to deal with a lack of understanding and even ridicule.

“People know that we meet there for coffee before our sessions and they watch us a bit mockingly, they look at us as weirdos. ‘Those people with PTSD are meeting up again, they are gathering. There, look at them.’ That is how it is, we have to live with that,” he told reporters.

Social stigma also appears when they try to find a job. Employers reject on them when they see PTSD written in their medical reports, especially if you have to work in shifts, the associations explained to journalists.

Due to lack of staffing and money and poor commitment by politicians, BiH is experiencing difficulties in adjusting its system of support to mental health to new trauma triggers, such as the pandemic or the biggest war in Europe in the past 80 years.

In addition, BIRN BiH’s analysis showed that over the course of nearly 30 years since the end of the war, Bosnia and Herzegovina has not set up special centres for post-traumatic stress syndrome sufferers, nor does it have clear and uniform data on the exact number of sufferers and their needs, expecting nongovernmental organisations to complete a substantial portion of field work with sporadic financing without clearly developed strategies.

Dozens of inquiries and interviews by BIRN BiH journalists revealed the issue of uneven funding.

While in some areas of war legacy, such as demining or search for the missing, Bosnia and Herzegovina has established specialised bodies which are now sharing their experiences and knowledge with their colleagues in Ukraine and other countries, the state has never founded an institution or agency specialised in helping and researching PTSD as a significant consequence of traumatic wartime experiences.

In the state budget, PTSD is barely mentioned as an item, and then they refer to several thousand BAM of support to nongovernmental organisations dealing with sufferers. Cantons allocate a bit more money, but those amounts range up to several dozen thousand BAM, while direct work with sufferers is most often being transferred to nongovernmental organisations such as veteran associations.

The Ministry of Veterans of Posavina Canton says they allocate money for PTSD sufferers through support to associations, adding that the exact amount allocated for PTSD sufferers is unknown.

Responses to queries, which BIRN BiH sent to dozen institutions that might allocate money for PTSD sufferers, as well as budget analyses, show that budget allocations are small and differ from area to area.

In the past three years, the Ministry for Veterans’ Affairs of Herzegovina-Neretva Canton has allocated BAM 48,000 per individual requests referring to treatment costs and state of social need, and another BAM 77,704 for grants to relevant PTSD associations.

By contrast, the Mental Health Centre, which is a part of the Health Centre in Travnik, says that they have never received financial resources specifically intended for treatment of PTSD sufferers.

The data collected by BIRN BiH demonstrate that cantons allocate a thousand or up to several thousand BAM per year as support to associations, as is the case in the Western Herzegovina Canton where they set aside BAM 1,800 to support the work of the Association of War Veterans Treated for PTSD.

Just like in the Federation, in Republika Srpska the money is channelled to associations.

A special problem is the lack of data, which again makes it difficult to monitor trends and the number of sufferers. That's why journalistic research and databases are a good starting point for serious studies on this issue.

Out of the ten ministries for veterans' affairs and health, which BIRN BiH has contacted, the majority have answered that they do not keep statistics on the number of PTSD sufferers, because they either have no legal obligation or they lack resources.

Since the onset of the pandemic and Ukrainian war, trends at the cantonal level have differed.

One of the reasons for not knowing the exact number of PTSD patients in BiH is because people fail to report it and seek medical assistance, most often for fear of being negatively labelled.

"A great number of people have never reported it for sure. They are running away, denying the problems they encountered," says Goran Čerkez, assistant minister for public health with the Federal Health Ministry.

He cites stigma as the main reason, but also says that it exists in other countries too in relation to mental health. He mentioned estimations that every seventh person in Bosnia and Herzegovina suffers from PTSD, irrespective of specific traumas causing it. Although some pharmacies individually report the amount of drugs prescribed mental illnesses, there is no accurate comprehensive data on this at the state level.

According to neuro-psychiatrist Amra Delić, the results of a research on prevalence of PTSD in general population in BiH indicate the presence of PTSD symptoms in about 30 percent of respondents even twenty years after the war.

"The obstacles due to which traumatised persons fail to seek professional help are either lack of knowledge or insufficient awareness that their symptoms are linked to a traumatic experience, as well as concern that they will be stigmatised due to a psychiatric diagnosis. At the same time, it should be stressed that post-traumatic stress disorder is a normal reaction to an abnormal situation," explained Delić.

PTSD is a disease that can affect practically anyone who goes through a traumatic experience that falls outside their usual experiences. What is particularly specific for PTSD are forced images and thoughts, meaning recollections of painful experiences with which sufferers are struggling constantly.



"The obstacles due to which traumatised persons fail to seek professional help are either lack of knowledge or insufficient awareness that their symptoms are linked to a traumatic experience, as well as concern that they will be stigmatised due to a psychiatric diagnosis. At the same time, it should be stressed that post-traumatic stress disorder is a normal reaction to an abnormal situation."

Amra Delić,
Neuropsychiatrist

Considering the intensity of the war and estimated number of individuals suffering from PTSD, it seems that explorations of its influence on the society and individuals in Bosnia and Herzegovina are less frequent than expected. Some of them that can be found through online search were prepared by nongovernmental organisations and experts outside the official system with sporadic financing from the budget. As a country that had come out of the war, Bosnia and Herzegovina invested considerable resources and sought international help to establish the Missing Persons Institute and BHMAC agency specialised in demining. With all the difficulties those organisations were facing, they helped BiH speed up the process of finding the missing persons and demining. Experts from those institutions help other countries develop specialised institutions of that type.

But, despite PTSD being yet another considerable legacy of the war, BiH has never created national strategy for helping sufferers and exploring how the disorder affects Bosnian society and its economy.

Not a single institution that has responded to BIRN BiH's query said that they had developed a strategy specifically intended for PTSD.

Besides social problems facing those diagnosed with PTSD, a great portion of them cannot achieve the disability status due to legal and date limitations.

Under the Federal Law on Fundamental Rights of Veterans, in order to determine the disability percentage, the circumstances under which disabled war veterans got bodily injuries due to psychosomatic damage and disruption and the manifestation of the injuries prior to December 23rd 1997 are taken into consideration. That means that, after that timeframe individuals diagnosed with PTSD cannot file requests for help on grounds of their mental illnesses.

"Manifestation of the disease past the said deadline is irrelevant for achieving the rights according to the existing laws," the Service for War Veterans and Disabled Persons' Protection and Protection of Civilian Victims of War of the Brčko District Government explained.

According to the Law on Rights of War Veterans, Disabled Veterans and Families of Fallen Soldiers of Republika Srpska, as of 2012 it has not been possible to achieve the status and rights on grounds of this disease.

In a BiH report on progress in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration referring to an increase in equality of women from 2019, it is stated that the issue of persons suffering from PTSD is not properly treated legally and socially, has a great influence on families.

Transgenerational transfer of trauma

In addition to the fact that BIRN BiH journalists - through interviews with sufferers and experts and institutions - tried to bring the public closer to what the life of people with PTSD looks like and their position and relationship in society, they also wrote about the transgenerational transfer of trauma.

Mirela Osmanović does not remember the war, but she is convinced that PTSD has made a mark on her life. She was born two years after the Srebrenica genocide in which her two brothers, who she never met, were killed. She belongs to a generation of young and educated people who are aware of how the horrors of Srebrenica affected their mental health.

She is now much more aware of the extent to which she has been shaped by transgenerational trauma, the term used for the complex phenomenon of the transference of trauma between generations.

Although she was born in Sarajevo in 1997 where she has lived, her entire life, her Srebrenica background is part of her identity. Her childhood was unusually quiet and her family did not even listen to any music for a long time. Her parents refused to be cheerful and considered loud laughter to be wrong.

Her mother has never told her what actually happened on the day when her sons Ahmedin and Velid, 15 and 17, were taken from her arms. Osmanović only knows them from a few remaining photographs that have never been put on open display at their home.

These days she is trying to understand how her mother feels.

“She says she spends the whole night somewhere. She is somewhere with someone the whole time. When she goes out in front of our house in Srebrenica, she sees everything differently, she absolutely does not see the yard as I see it, she sees something else. She sees her children, she sees something else absolutely,” Mirela said.

When people tell her that she looks like her younger brother, she often wonders what her mother thinks when looking at her, if she reminds her of her son, and if that makes her happy or sad.

“Although I did not experience [the trauma] myself, it has definitely affected me indirectly,” she added.

Psychologist Marko Romić listed some of the many problems that the families of the sufferers are facing.

“Due to being non-functional, that person cannot be a good husband. He cannot be a good father either. So, that person has failed in a certain way. Such persons often start seeking a cure in a wrong way, which sometimes turns into addiction or damaged relations due to aggression,” Romić explained.

As a state-affiliated doctor working with PTSD patients on a daily basis, Romić believes that domestic institutions don’t have sufficient capacities to cope with the problem.

“I think we don’t have sufficient resources, meaning primarily human experts who are sufficiently motivated and qualified to deal with that,” he added.

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“She [mother] says she spends the whole night somewhere. She is somewhere with someone the whole time. When she goes out in front of our house in Srebrenica, she sees everything differently, she absolutely does not see the yard as I see it, she sees something else. She sees her children, she sees something else absolutely.”

Mirela Osmanović

Follow up: A year later, the same problems

With these exhaustive analyses, BIRN BiH wanted to raise public awareness of fellow citizens struggling with PTSD, but also to encourage those who may be facing this syndrome to seek help despite institutional shortcomings.

A year later, we contacted our interlocutors again to check if anything might have changed.²⁴⁸

Then the war pictures and video footage of wounded and killed civilians and children from Gaza awakened old and new traumas for this forgotten population without systemic state support.

We again went to Tuzla and Ljubuški to talk to them.

When the war in Ukraine started, Borislav - while regretting all the innocent victims - tried to completely isolate himself from everything due to his PTSD. Earlier, he shared that after two strokes, he also developed epilepsy. He says the news is hard to avoid - collapsing buildings, crying children, and people covered in blood are all around him. The first topic when he goes out to town is the war.

"And then it all culminates, it culminates. It happens to me, I watch some video clips from CNN, from some other media, and I see people down in Gaza who have been hit by rockets, carrying wounded children, people covered in blood," says Borislav who sometimes loses consciousness from distress.

"But when I somehow regain consciousness, I see that my throat is tight, my stomach is churning, my hands are clenched, some of my dreams are coming back," he describes and explains how all this affects his everyday life.

They told us that the problems they were facing remained the same, but that another war in the world - whose images they were exposed to - and continuous tensions in the country were triggering new traumas with which they had to fight.

Nothing has changed for PTSD sufferers in a year, and Borislav and Zlatan laughed at such a question.

"For sure, nothing is better. It may have changed only for the worse," Zlatan laughed.²⁴⁹

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"And then it all culminates, it culminates. It happens to me, I watch some video clips from CNN, from some other media, and I see people down in Gaza who have been hit by rockets, carrying wounded children, people covered in blood. But when I somehow regain consciousness, I see that my throat is tight, my stomach is churning, my hands are clenched, some of my dreams are coming back."

Borislav Mlinarević

248 [PTSD in BiH a year later: New traumas, same problems](#), Detektor.ba

249 [Pictures from Gaza awaken old traumas for PTSD victims in BiH](#), Detektor.ba

He explained how arguments between politicians and deniers affect those who struggle with PTSD, and thinks that in general the picture in society has not changed either.

Borislav noted that in the last year, nothing has changed in the attitude of the state authorities towards PTSD sufferers. His association still has exceptionally good cooperation and understanding from the cantonal and municipal authorities.

“In the very top of the state, it remained as it was before. There are promises, but it remains only on promises, unfortunately,” he said.

Borislav believes that society still does not completely understand what exactly PTSD is.

“A lot of people say that they see themselves in it if they do something that they shouldn’t, outside of some norms, some framework. They say I have PTSD, but in fact they do not even know what PTSD means - that it’s not doing stupid things, making a mess around town, drunkenness. It’s not PTSD, it’s some other disease, but it’s not PTSD,” he stressed to BIRN journalists.

Psychotherapist and director of the “Wings of Hope” Foundation, Marija Maja Šarić, explained that news from current battlefields not only leads to the triggering of old traumas, but also causes the emergence of new ones for patients.

“How much human suffering can one human being process *live*, without having processed their own suffering yet? And this helplessness is not just a trigger, but the creation of new traumas as well,” she said.

Šarić says that Ukraine was especially difficult for those who suffer from PTSD, especially for people from Sarajevo, because of pictures where parts of Kyiv resemble Sarajevo’s settlement of Grbavica. Pictures from the war in Palestine, are even worse.

“They feel helpless when they look at these pictures because they know what people are going through from their own experience. They can connect with it, but they can’t do anything. And that’s terrible. It reminds them that war - anywhere at any time - can start again,” she added.

Journalists also discussed mental health with the citizens of Ukraine, during the team’s visit to this country, which was invaded by Russia. Also in Georgia, they spoke with a professor from Russia who believes she and her family have PTSD from the police brutality they experienced in their country, after she was blacklisted for giving lessons to foreigners and writing a children’s book about feminism.

In order for the voices of marginalised groups, including the PTSD population, to be heard, journalists must be a platform that will enable them to do so, with utmost respect for their privacy, truth and professional code.

In reports, if possible, it is desirable to refer readers to authorities and non-governmental organisations that can help in cases of PTSD.

Conclusion

The manual you have read certainly does not represent, nor can it represent, the accumulation of knowledge and experience of the BIRN BiH newsroom. BIRN BiH has been working on systematic reporting on war crimes and transitional justice for over 20 years. We hope our manual has provided you with enough information to interest you in reading more about these topics, as well as using some of the standards in your own reporting or research.

If you want to learn more about the principles of transitional justice from a theoretical and practical perspective, we recommend that you read more about the content on the website of the [International Centre for Transitional Justice \(ICTJ\)](#) or the [UN Human Rights Mechanism](#).

The BIRN BiH team has also developed training methodologies for certain segments of its reporting, which you may find useful. We recommend the Handbook for reporting on missing persons, which we made with the International Red Cross in BiH, as well as guides for sensitised reporting on [extremism](#), terrorism, and [people on the move](#).

If you need any information on these topics, the BIRN BiH team is at your disposal. You can contact us on urednik@birnnetwork.org.

About BIRN BiH

The Balkan Investigative Reporting Network Bosnia and Herzegovina (BIRN BiH) is a media non-governmental organisation based in Sarajevo, which specialises in monitoring and reporting on war crimes trials, corruption, and terrorism.

Since its formation in 2004, BIRN BiH has been informing the public about the prosecution of war crimes at the state and local courts in BiH, as well as the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY/ICTY), and later the Mechanism for International Criminal Courts (IMCC).

Tens of thousands of reports from hearings, statements of witnesses to crimes, surviving victims and family members of the missing are stored on the *Detektor.ba* website in various journalistic, audio and video formats. This rich archive material, which also contains analyses by relevant experts in the field of transitional justice from the country, region and the world, is available, with the support of donors, free of charge to all researchers, journalists and students who want to learn more about the past war. After BIRN's research on the non-prosecution of those responsible for war crimes, the State Prosecutor's Office filed several indictments, which is also the greatest satisfaction for the dedicated professional newsroom.

In 2015, BIRN BiH started a project dedicated to monitoring and reporting on cases of organised crime, corruption and terrorism. Since then, a number of analyses, researches and documentaries have been published on corruption scandals, unprocessed criminal offences and departures to foreign battlefields, for which international organisations [awarded BIRN's team](#).

BIRN BiH journalists also point to the spread of extremist and right-wing groups in the region, revealing trends that spill over into BiH as well, and warning of the negative consequences of narratives used by far-right movements. In this way, journalists and editors of BIRN are recognised by the public as experts in the field of extremism and are a frequent source of information on this topic and foreign influences in BiH, especially on everything that Russia is doing after the start of the invasion of Ukraine, as well as on other topics in the media.

In addition to guest appearances and the publication of around 25,000 articles on these three segments, BIRN BiH also produces two monthly shows that it distributes to TV stations in BiH- [TV Justice](#) and Detektor Magazin.

Through various projects, BIRN has been supported in the creation of several documentaries. "[I miss you...](#)" is a documentary about the suffering and reality faced by the family members of the missing. The second film, entitled "[Silent Scream](#)", talks about the traumas that victims of sexual abuse still feel, more than twenty years after the end of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Like the others, the documentary film "[Underground](#)", about the war hospital built in Olovo where hundreds of lives were saved and about 500 babies were born, is available for free on BIRN BiH's *YouTube* channel. The list also includes the one devoted to human rights, a documentary called "[Journalism is not a crime](#)", which starts a debate about attacks on journalists and the non-prosecution of these acts. In the summer of 2024, the latest documentary film "Samir Mehić Bowie - Letters from Srebrenica" was released, which talks about the genocide committed in July 1995.

In addition, through research work, the public was given access to several databases - on terrorism, hatred, official cars and mass graves.

So far, BIRN BiH has cooperated with a large number of victims' associations and various non-governmental organisations. One of the largest projects, carried out with the Srebrenica Memorial Centre, "[Lives behind the Fields of Death](#)" preserved the statements of the surviving victims of the genocide, and the "[Months of the Siege](#)" subpage shows the daily life of the citizens of Sarajevo during the war and reminds of those who did not see its end.

Before one of the most significant verdicts against the former general of the Republika Srpska Army, BIRN BiH also published a photo story showing the places where the crimes were committed. You can view the photo story "Crime Scenes" [here](#).

In February 2022, in Potočari, in the premises and in cooperation with the Srebrenica Memorial Centre, we opened the Memorial Room "Lives behind the Fields of Death" - the result of two years of work on documenting hundreds of testimonies of surviving victims of genocide. After over 15 years of existence and reporting on war crimes trials, it was the first time that BIRN BiH prepared a special museum content.

Working independently and through various collaborations, BIRN BiH has so far published several publications, available [here](#).

BIRN BiH provides training to journalists and students on professional reporting on court processes and missing persons, investigative journalism and other topics, thereby supporting the development of media and non-governmental organisations, with maximum respect for human rights.

[The editorial staff of BIRN BiH grows year by year](#), and along with it, with the support of donors, new projects dedicated to transitional justice, the rule of law, extremism and the fight for human rights.



Balkan Investigative Reporting Network of Bosnia and Herzegovina
(BIRN BiH)