

8. Bosnia and Herzegovina

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INTRODUCTION: INDEPENDENCE, WAR AND CONTESTED HISTORY

The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), its history and its people, have often been oversimplified or misconstrued by commentators and analysts both within and outside the country. This status of BiH which, in some ways, remains the same to the present day, leads to contested results, in the context of a kind of internationally imposed transformation with often unintended consequences. In this chapter we describe aspects of the country's current social, economic and political situation and its impact on social policy, and reflect critically on the interactions between international and local actors. The chapter is based, first and foremost, on our own experiences of working in the NGO sector in BiH from 1993 onwards. It represents our first attempt to critically reflect on our experiences without the pressure of promoting so-called 'successes' and/or supporting social policy changes which have little chance of being implemented.

In the process of the disintegration of Yugoslavia, after the multi-party elections in 1990, and a referendum, conducted between 28 February and 1 March 1992, the citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina voted to become an independent and sovereign country within its historical borders. On 20 May 1992, through Resolution 755 of the United Nations Security Council, Bosnia-Herzegovina was internationally recognized as an independent state, although by this time war had already begun. Almost 15 years later, it is still difficult to produce a critical analysis of recent BiH history in the context of its effect on life today. The figures available on war damage are varied, hard to properly reference and often tailored to various political purposes. Many figures do not refer to their sources but, rather, rely on figures quoted in international community surveys. The citizens of BiH were affected by the war through mass killing, mass destruction of property, torture inflicted in concentration camps on civilians and combatants, systematic sexual assaults on women, and ethnic cleansing resulting in massive

population displacement. Estimates of the number killed range from a conservative 100 000 to as high as 300 000. More than 10 000 people were killed in the capital, Sarajevo, alone and one-sixth of the city's population was injured during the three-year siege from 1992 to 1995. At least 16 000 children were killed and some 35 000 children were injured.

The pre-war population of BiH was approximately 4.4 million. Of this population, over 1 million people fled the country during the war, some 650 000 of whom were children. Since the signing of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina (GFAP, popularly known as the Dayton Peace Agreement) in December 1995, more than 1 million civilians returned, mainly to areas where they are now ethnic minorities (Wilkinson, 2005), in the context of the creation of two or, de facto, three ethnicized entities. According to United Nations High Commission for Refugees data (UNHCR, 2006), at the end of 2005, 182 700 people remained internally displaced. Accurate figures on the current population of BiH are unavailable in the absence of a post-war census.

Economic, social and other infrastructural capacities were destroyed, including businesses, industry, schools, hospitals, and social care institutions, but the main physical capacity affected was housing. In the Federation of BiH (one of the two post-GFAP entities), over 70 per cent of the housing stock was heavily damaged or destroyed (Kljajić, 1999). Periodic violence still occurs in BiH, primarily directed against those attempting to return to their pre-war communities, through the destruction of rebuilt homes and assaults and even murders of returnees. Nowadays, the violence usually takes less apparent forms. Notwithstanding isolated civil initiatives on 'dealing with the past', attempts are often made to stifle any public debate about the violence that happened during the war,¹ as the only way to 'move forward'.

The Dayton Peace Agreement also outlined a new map of Bosnia and Herzegovina in terms of constituent peoples and entities. The country is both 'divided and joined' into the Federation of BiH (of Bosniaks/Bosnian Muslims and Croats) and Republika Srpska (the Serbian Republic or RS), as detailed on the map in Figure 8.1. Many feel that this division of the country legitimizes ethnic cleansing, since it reinforces the 'ethnic supremacy' of certain ethnic groups in certain parts of the country. Indeed, the divisions remain much stronger than any unity even in the context of international attempts to build a central state and to promote a path to eventual EU membership. Recently, leading politicians in RS raised the stakes by suggesting, in the aftermath of Montenegro's independence and talks on the final status of Kosovo, that RS should have the right to have a referendum on secession from BiH.

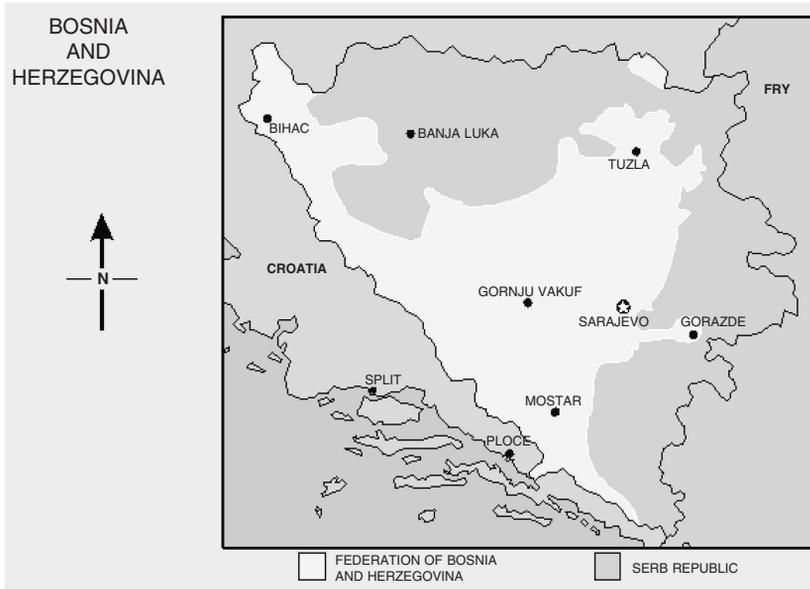


Figure 8.1 Map of BiH, outlining the two entities

THE CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SITUATION

Bosnia and Herzegovina has multiple layers of government. At the national level, a weak central government is composed of representatives of all three major 'ethnic' groups (Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats). Each entity also has an elected prime minister and entity-level legislatures that have important responsibilities with respect to social policy, education and health care. The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) is further divided into ten administrative units called cantons. Each of these cantons has its own legislature and ministries, including those responsible for social protection services. In Republika Srpska, no such intermediate layer of government exists, with the entity having a centralized government structure with a comparable municipal layer of government. There is also a District of Brčko, a small town about which agreement could not be reached at Dayton which, along the US model, also has its own governmental bodies. Hence, country-level social policy reform requires engagement with 13 ministries responsible for decision-making and legislation.

At national level, only representatives of each of the three major ethnic groups can occupy public office. For example, one cannot become president of the tripartite BiH Presidency if one identifies oneself as a citizen of Bosnia and Herzegovina or as a member of any ethnic minority other than Bosniak, Serb or Croat. The political scene remains dominated by nationalist parties that tend to integrate ethnicity and politics, and to some extent religion, although such practices are criticized by a relatively small group of anti-nationalist intellectuals. There is little or no real alternative for political representation for those who identify themselves as citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The power and the influence of the international community remains high, and is particularly evidenced through the Office of the High Representative, who has the powers to impose decisions that advance the Dayton Peace Agreement. These powers include the ability to dismiss any elected or appointed officials deemed to be working against the provisions of the GFAP, restructure major institutions, and pass laws and regulations by decree, so that Bosnia still resembles an 'international protectorate' (ICG, 1998: 7). Bosnia and Herzegovina still has a large international military presence now changed from a NATO-led Stabilization Force (SFOR), to an EU-led force, numbering some 7000 troops. In addition, it has been estimated that, in the late 1990s, some 10 000 civilian ex-patriots lived in the country, employed by the international governmental and non-governmental organizations from all over the world.

Poverty in BiH remains pervasive with more than half the population lacking the resources to secure even basic necessities. The 'Living in BiH Wave 4' report (FOS, BHAS and RSIS, 2005) established that 35.7 per cent of households in BiH were in poverty defined as two-thirds of median income or a poverty threshold of KM 250 per month (approximately EUR125). Age, employment status, marital status, number of children and level of education were all found to be associated with levels of poverty over the four years. At the time of the survey, 30 per cent of working-age households in BiH had no one in paid employment. Households in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) continue to be generally better off in terms of mean household income from all sources, mainly due to higher levels of employment-based income in FBiH compared to RS.

The depressed economy in BiH is only partly offset by the presence of a large ex-patriot community, chiefly in large urban centres, such as Sarajevo. This huge presence created an artificial economy, with tens of thousands of BiH citizens employed by international organizations, and with thousands of businesses created to provide goods and services to the international community, particularly in Sarajevo.

On the macroeconomic level, BiH is under intense pressure from international financial institutions and donors to undergo an economic transition similar to that implemented in the other post-communist communities. Although there is still much country-level resistance to this process, it is clear that the country has little choice but to adopt the majority of the proposed economic reforms. In December 1998, the Peace Implementation Council met in Madrid to discuss the peace process in BiH. The council made recommendations with respect to the rule of law, democratization, security issues and refugee returns, among other matters, also calling for 'strict conditionality' in the allocation of donors' funds, as deemed appropriate by the Economic Task Force to the OHR.²

To its credit, the council also emphasized the need for adequate social protection and a strategy to fight poverty in BiH. Nevertheless, in the same breath, it also urged the privatization of health-care systems, and advocated the transfer of public services to private enterprises.

THE ADMINISTRATION OF SOCIAL WELFARE IN POST-DAYTON BiH

Since its main goal was to secure a permanent ceasefire in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is unsurprising that the Dayton Peace Agreement paid little attention to social policy (Stubbs, 2001). According to the BiH Constitution (which is part of the Dayton Peace Agreement), none of the social policy responsibilities were afforded to the country-level institutions (Stubbs, 2001). For example, Article III/3 of the Constitution states that 'all governmental functions and responsibilities that are not explicitly afforded to the BiH institutions are considered to be the functions and the responsibilities of the entity-level governments'. Hence, the Peace Agreement allow for two separate social policies and welfare state regimes to exist in BiH (*ibid.*).

Nowadays, virtually all social functions of the state are split into two politically denominated para-state systems. On the one side, Republika Srpska is a centralized state within a state, possessing only two layers of government: central and municipal. Given also the largely ethnically homogeneous population (as a result of ethnic cleansing during the war), the decision-making and funding process is much easier to accomplish in this entity. On the other hand, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina was created as a composite entity, composed of ten cantons, with either Bosniak or Croat majority, including two ethnically mixed cantons with 'special regimes'. Again, for political reasons, responsibility for most areas of governance was devolved to the lower levels, including cantons.

Ministries on the federal level mostly serve as co-ordination or oversight bodies. The federal parliament legislates so-called 'umbrella' laws, which outline general principles and frameworks within which the cantonal assemblies are supposed to pass their own specific laws and regulations. As funds for social welfare come from cantonal budgets, realization of social welfare mostly depends on the economic strength of individual cantons. In practice this means that the federal bodies lack effective means for co-ordination and supervision of social welfare efforts.

In respect to the pension system, there is no cantonal provision of pensions and related benefits. Instead, there are two entity pension and disability funds (PIO/MIO funds). Owing to the relatively stronger economic performance of the federation of BiH, pensions and disability benefits in this entity are larger compared to the RS. Pensions are paid based on the retirees' place of residence, not on the location of the company where they have earned their pension. This has led to a peculiar situation where the majority of Bosniak returnees to RS remain formally registered residents of the federation in order to claim higher benefits. On the other side, pensioners in RS who have earned their pensions in companies located within the present territory of the federation have initiated several class lawsuits to have their pensions paid by the Federal Pension Fund. If realized, these claims would lead to significant overall reduction in federation pensions.

The pension system in both entities is largely retained from the former Yugoslavia, based on the pay-as-you-go scheme. The inherent instability of funding in such a scheme was offset in the former republic funds through large-scale investment into real estate, notably hotels and old people's homes, which provided both additional income for the funds and a savings opportunity through the placement of old people without family care into long-stay institutions owned by the fund in exchange for their pension monies. However, physical destruction and criminal 'privatization' of these establishments, together with the collapse of the economy and the currency, meant that both pension funds at the end of the war started with empty budgets. Their current performance is dependent exclusively on the monthly realization of benefits through mandatory deductions from taxpayers' salaries. All attempts at reforming the pension system by introducing, for example, a three-tier system, as in neighbouring Croatia, have failed, due to political blockages and worries that the introduction of even partly voluntary schemes would lead to the collapse of the PIO/MIO budgets.

Formal social welfare provision is still primarily implemented through local Centres for Social Work (CSWs) and traditional long-stay institutions for children and adults, following the former Yugoslav tradition. Centres for Social Work cover large geographical areas, sometimes up to 50 000 people,

as well as diverse practice – from social security provision to counselling services. The latter were rather neglected in the light of pressing demands for cash payments due to the decrease in living standards.

Data for 2005 indicate that social and child welfare in BiH is implemented through: 101 CSWs, 40 Social and Child Welfare Offices, two cantonal CSWs and a Sub-Department for Social Welfare of the Brčko District (Save the Children UK, 2005). These services employ 534 professional and 622 administrative and other staff (a total of 1156 employed). Over half of the CSWs (62 per cent) do not employ the number of staff proposed in the legislative framework for their operation (Hadžibegić, 1999). It is relevant to note that, in FBiH, an additional 74 staff was employed over a period of two years (2002–2004). However, these were mainly administrative, rather than professional staff.

The BiH Council of Ministers identified various difficulties in the implementation of the reform of social welfare (BiH Council of Ministers, 2004: 145–6). Primarily, there is an increase in the needs of the population, paralleled with the creation of new service-user categories (due to the post-war socio-economic problems). There is also a lack of up-to-date and complete databases on service users. Secondly, there is a lack of resources (from trained staff to adequate work space) and monitoring instruments for social welfare implementation. Thirdly, resource constraints are further exacerbated by normative and accountability difficulties.

THE NGO SECTOR AND SOCIAL WELFARE IN BiH: A PERIODIZATION

The War Period (1991–95)

The first humanitarian mission in BiH began on 7 July 1992. It was entitled ‘World to Sarajevo’ (Kljajić, 1999). From that point on, various aspects of support for the BiH population were both left to and taken over by foreign non-governmental organizations. In the context marked by the emergency nature of international intervention, remnants of the social sector in the country at the time were bypassed or ignored by the international community with linguistic and cultural barriers operating alongside dominant modes of operation of these organizations. One effect of this circumvention of the public sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina, was the consequential stimulation of a civil sector there. However, rather than being a true civil society, what emerged was almost akin to a parallel private business sector with NGO status as new organizations were established to absorb donor funds.

Bosnian social-sector professionals found themselves both unable to communicate with international aid agencies and incapable of adopting the style of work these organizations brought with them. Consequently, many of these organizations had to recruit and rely upon the service of local staff, whose only qualification frequently appeared to be their fluency in English or other relevant languages. Such freshly minted welfare 'professionals' were certainly ignorant of the profession, but their elevated status as moneyed and influential workers for foreigners made them unwilling to seek advice from those who did know about social welfare but who did not speak the new jargon of international social development. As one commentator noted:

The best and the brightest Bosnians, especially those who know English, are now working for International Organizations and INGOs as staff, drivers, interpreters, rather than in the BiH society itself or for local NGOs, most of whom cannot afford to pay the very high salaries that their international counterparts pay. Another impact is generational: older, more experienced and educated Bosnians who don't know English are left out, creating not only a knowledge gap for INGOs, but also resentment. (Gagnon, 2002: 223)

Lendvai and Stubbs (forthcoming) note that transnational policies can be seen as translation rather than transfer. The two-way learning, which would help the transfer process, was inhibited by the fact that the majority of INGOs and their consultants often lacked contextualization, or an understanding of BiH society and the history of political and power structures (Gagnon, 2002). It could be said, therefore, that the social sector in BiH was during the war hijacked by an army of translators. There remain huge problems in defining and translating terms that describe these imported policies and practices, such as 'policy', 'care management', 'care planning', 'assessment', 'stakeholders', 'service users'. In many documents, newly coined terms consist of clumsy and descriptive translations, or these terms are left in their original form (mainly in English).³ What lies beneath these terms – particularly from the standpoint of service users – rarely indicates a shift in actual practical experiences.

Those few social-service professionals who found employment with international aid agencies, failed to lobby for an aid effort which would actually take into consideration the pre-existing tradition, experience and knowledge accumulated in the previous decades by the public social sector in the Bosnia and Herzegovina. All this contributed to the fact that the humanitarian relief effort was implemented through a parallel ad hoc social-service network run by international organizations with the support of locally recruited personnel, most of whom not only lacked adequate expertise, but were plagued by their overriding dependence on the agenda and the will of their international employers.

The Immediate Post-war Period (1995–98)

Immediately after the war, governmental bodies were reluctant to commit their scarce resources for welfare. At the time, most of the (meagre) entity budgets were spent on the funding of the respective armies and the payment of benefits to war veterans. The number of foreign organizations increased and donor agendas multiplied and became more complex. At times, especially in the period immediately after the war ended, it seemed like the intervention was driven by the same laws which govern the fashion industry. First, the topics and themes of interventions were set based on topics which were at times perceived as ‘trendy’ – from psychosocial support in the mid-1990s, through prostitution and trafficking in the late 1990s, to Roma issues later. This is due to the fact that INGOs depend for funding on institutions and organizations that themselves have specific interests and perceptions, unrelated to the needs of BiH citizens (Gagnon, 2002).

The negative effect that occurs when donors drive the process was most clearly expressed by a USAID officer in charge of NGO relations. While he praised the humanitarian international NGOs such as Catholic Relief, the International Rescue Committee and Mercy Corps for their work during the war and for providing invaluable information during the immediate post-war period, he declared that their time was now over. USAID would be shifting its funding, he said, to international NGOs that have experience elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe and that work specifically on ‘democracy assistance’. (Ibid.: 224)

Secondly, major supranational and non-governmental actors were more concerned with branding their investments than co-ordinating them with other existing stakeholders. Last, but not least, each of these trends was present for only a season or two, making it difficult to demonstrate impact on communities on the ground.

As an example, in August 1996, the World Bank launched the War Victims Rehabilitation Project to address ‘the most urgent needs in physical and psychosocial rehabilitation’ (HealthNet International and SweBiH, 2000). One component of the project foresaw the establishment of 38 new Community Based Rehabilitation Centres in the Federation of BiH. This was actually a fairly good initiative, since the idea was to promote community-based mental health care and family medicine as an alternative to rebuilding classic psychiatric facilities. At the same time, the World Health Organization published their strategy papers, developed in close co-operation with the health authorities in both entities (ibid.). The European Community Humanitarian Office offered financial and technical support for the establishment of some Community Mental Health Centres and financed an INGO, HealthNet International (HNI) to support the

reform efforts through training of practitioners to work in these Centres. This built on the prior support of Médecins Sans Frontières (a sister organization of the HNI). There were also other NGO initiatives in the same field, from Queens University (Canada), SweBiH (Swedish Psychiatric, Social and Rehabilitation Project for Bosnia-Herzegovina – a Swedish psychosocial rehabilitation initiative), an EC-funded postgraduate course, activities carried out by the Harvard Trauma Centre in the central Bosnian Canton, just to name a few. Co-operation between these INGOs and the BiH government was unusually good, with joint planning for all of the initiatives, despite the need of each INGO to ‘brand’ their ‘portion’ of the investment. However, in early 2002, the funding for further initiatives to support mental health reforms ended. From 2002, the new Community Health Centres received little or no support from INGOs and donor agencies. HealthNet International became a kind of a local NGO, but with no institutional memory of the commitment to support the development of grassroots, community-based services. By 2003, the organization was implementing a project that aimed to support and build the skills of staff working in residential social welfare services for children, since this was the theme which was receiving funding attention at the time.

The Emphasis on Strategies: (I)NGO-initiated Social Policy Reforms (1999–Onwards)

The late 1990s/early 2000s were marked by a sea-change in the world of international intervention in BiH. Half a decade after the war was over, donor money started to dry up due to donor fatigue and the feeling that there were other, more pressing, crises in the world. Figures from the Office for South East Europe of the European Commission and the World Bank (2005) indicate that in the period between 2003 and 2005 grants by various supranational and international organizations decreased from EUR261.6 million in 2003 to EUR170.74 million in 2005. In the same period, loans extended to BiH went up from EUR75.89 million in 2003 to EUR180.17 million in 2005. This resulted in the scaling down of the majority of internationally run operations in the country, with the large international aid organizations gradually pulling out of the country. These organizations have high running costs, due to their high salaries and other overhead costs associated with aid operations. Since their original mandates remained largely unfulfilled, many of these organizations resorted to face-saving exercises – transfers of at least part of their mandates and the majority of their activities to locally registered NGOs. This at least had a cost-saving effect, since the local staff of these NGOs were frequently competent enough and willing to carry out the same

amount of activities at a fraction of costs required by their international counterparts.

That said, these local NGOs were practically in the same shape as they were at the inception phase during the war or its immediate aftermath. They were still largely staffed by the same people whose original expertise sometimes consisted solely of the ability to speak English, and which still, after all those years, nurtured the same amount of suspicion and distrust when it came to local authorities and public social-sector professionals in the country.

It was a common belief at the time among public social-sector professionals that internationals intended to abolish the existing public sector and build a new welfare system from scratch. This was mainly due to the Western attitudes towards the contexts they encountered; these can best be described as colonialist, due to the overall lack of knowledge of histories and cultures of BiH. Završek and Flaker describe the renewed 'western imperialisation, which supports the conviction that it is necessary to demolish everything that existed, build it anew and then, somehow from within the previous unsatisfactory and unprofessional situation, to produce something suitable' (quoted in Stubbs, 1997: 19–28). Having barely survived the wartime invasion of the army of translators, one cannot blame local public sector professionals for being apprehensive about the impending changes. The following quote from a Romanian scholar could just as easily have been from BiH: 'Throughout history, for Romanians it was a survival strategy to agree officially with the authorities and unofficially develop one's own agenda.' (Dümling, 2004: 275).

'The authorities' in this case were the donor agencies and other supranational and international bodies. Some NGOs that did manage to accumulate experience in different policies and practices attempted to bridge the gap between the international and local public sector spheres, by applying for and implementing foreign-funded restructuring reform programmes. In social welfare, the Independent Bureau of Humanitarian Issues (IBHI) implemented two major projects of this kind. The first was initiated and funded in 1999, by the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and was called the Support to Social Sector Project (SSSP). Building on the accumulated experiences of this project, a second phase began in 2001. Almost simultaneously (2002–2005), the UK government's DFID supported a very similar project, also implemented by IBHI, but with considerable involvement of the UK consultancy company, Birks Sinclair & Associates. The similarity is largely due to the fact that the project documents for both projects were written by the same (international) consultant. The goal of the programme was to 'strengthen the social policy regime in BiH at the central and local levels' and to 'promote an effective and efficient social policy at all levels,

which is fiscally sustainable, demonstrates social innovation and contributes to the reduction of poverty, inequality and social exclusion' through:

- the strengthening of the municipal and cantonal social policy management and social service delivery; and
- the fostering and enablement of Community-Level Partnerships and Community Action Projects between the civil society actors in four pilot areas. (Birks Sinclair et al., unpublished)

These, as well as many other reform projects, were implemented in so-called 'pilot' municipalities – a selection of three to five municipalities in different parts of BiH. It transpires that the main idea behind the creation of these projects was the so called bottom-up approach of using the accumulated knowledge (not necessarily from the project only) in implementation of pilot approaches in local communities to prepare a set of recommendations, and later policies, which could be fed through to competent authorities in both entities in BiH. Different means of transferring these experiences upward were devised, most of which were constituted in the form of ad hoc bodies with mixed membership, including representatives of municipalities where the project was being implemented, as well as from competent cantonal, entity and state bodies. The projects were grandly conceived with the ultimate objective being the restructuring of welfare regimes in BiH along the lines of modern welfare theory.

The so-called mixed model of social welfare became a kind of mantra to be repeated endlessly by the persons represented in the meetings sponsored by these projects. For those involved in the implementation of the projects, the participation in project activities carried with it a handsome reward. At the local level, grant schemes were devised, whereby local partners would implement small-scale projects in accordance with the established priorities and the principles set forth in the project document. At higher levels, different entity and state officials were involved in writing, or at least signing, different studies, recommendations, policy papers and so on. The carrot-and-stick approach which determined the structure of these two projects promised to make a significant impact in the area of the social sector reform in BiH. Continuing funding by the international donor was made conditional on the achievement of a set of objectives. With all the participants in the process being more than handsomely rewarded for their support and involvement in the project effort, one could justifiably expect that piloting of new structures in the social sector in BiH would ultimately lead to the initiation and successful completion of locally owned welfare system reform.

The experiences accumulated during the implementation, as well as the evaluation of these and similar projects, however, highlight the following concerns:

- The use of the term 'pilot' when referring to the sites where these and other projects were initiated indicates a commitment to roll out the programme once a project is successfully piloted. In this, as well as many other cases, the roll out did not happen (Vesna Bošnjak, personal communication). Even in Western countries the use of pilots to promote policy change does not guarantee that best practices will be promoted widely. In a review of governmental pilots carried out by the UK Cabinet Office (2003), the author notes that, in the US: 'As always, it is difficult to quantify the overall extent to which these sorts of policy trials have influenced the US social policy over the years, whether at the state or federal level. Certainly, the persistence with which randomised policy trials continue to be embraced suggests that they are a highly valued and well-integrated policy aid'.
- Reform through projects is difficult to implement due to the short life of project cycles. On average, a project cycle in BiH lasts only a year (FOS, BHAS and RSIS, 2005; ICVA, 2002).
- The state per se was never made a part of the whole pilot reform exercise. The donor governments and their local implementing partners, after signing formal agreements with the state authorities, recruited representatives of key government ministries and institutions in an individual capacity, through their participation in informal, ad hoc, project bodies. Here they paid lip service to the implementation of project goals, while continuing their everyday work in the government. Project activities brought handsome rewards, but did not create obligations for state agencies or these individuals.

Evaluations of these projects frequently mention that their results were clear, appropriate for the BiH context, and worthy of follow up, but were inevitably very vague when it came to noting the practical achievements of the project. The evaluation of the Finish government aid effort in post-war Bosnia lists their social sector restructuring projects as weakest in terms of the actual impact on the welfare regime they were support to reform (SIPU International, 2004). Similarly, the evaluation of the DFID-sponsored project relied on a self-evaluation by the projects' British implementers (Birks Sinclair). Hence, it failed to note the practical results and left actual evaluation to an impact assessment at a later date which had limited scope to offer critique.

THE MEDIUM-TERM DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR BiH

The main effect of social policy reform projects in BiH, besides their genuine influence on reforming the mindsets and, to some extent, structures at the local community level, seems to be that a number of lessons learned found their way into measures and recommendations drafted into the Medium-Term Development Strategy (MTDS) for Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2004–2007. This MTDS was adopted by the BiH Council of Ministers together with the entity governments in February 2004, initially as the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper or PRSP. In accordance with the BiH Constitution, its implementation was accepted by the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH in March of the same year (EPPU, 2004: 2), but also by the respective entity parliaments. In the MTDS, social welfare is recognized as ‘a growing function and form of social policy in transitional conditions’ (BiH Council of Ministers, 2004: 145). The so-called ‘social sector’ is one of 12 priority sectors identified within the strategy (*ibid.*).⁴

The MTDS aims to implement market principles in social welfare and to promote the development of alternative forms of social care (BiH Council of Ministers, 2004: 147). The document does not include a clear elaboration of these declarative concepts, although it indicates a significant transformation of the funding, organization, provision and auditing in BiH social welfare. A brief elaboration includes a readiness to promote co-operation with the non-governmental sector, promotion of voluntary work, initiation of a legal framework that will enable governmental and non-governmental organizations to become equal partners in the social welfare system, as well as the initiation of tax benefits to promote corporate social responsibility (*ibid.*).

The Action Plan, which represented the key component of the MTDS, spelt out which ministry was in charge of preparation and implementation of each policy, but did not elaborate further. Within these ministries, no clear idea existed on how the task was to be implemented, nor were any instructions prepared by the government(s) on how to proceed with it. Even a brief critical review of the Action Plan indicates a strong pattern of thinking typical of the supranational organizations that were to fund the reform (the World Bank, for instance), as well as a lack of actual understanding by the involved representatives of the governmental and non-governmental organizations about exactly what measures are necessary to initiate and implement the reform. For example, within a proposed measure to transform the financial and operational structure of Centres for Social Work towards a project-based funding framework, a time frame of only half a year was proposed, with responsibility outlined only as belonging to the relevant entity ministries in charge of social welfare.

Having criticized the international community throughout this text, it must eventually be recognized that, in spite of all misgivings, BiH has, through the support of the international community, incrementally developed a strong decision-making and professional lobby for legislative and practice commitments for community-based approaches in both health and social care. Without such support, from funding to training, it is highly unlikely that there would now be a pool of grassroots practitioners – and even some user initiatives – that are strongly committed to, and actually practice, inclusive education, organize community-based housing for people with long-term mental health problems, or foster care for children without parental care.

But what do all these efforts mean for people who use services? The services one receives still largely depend on where one lives. In one of the poorer cantons in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a war-disabled veteran with a head injury and mental health problems may only receive from his local Centre for Social Work KM12⁵ (approximately EUR6) per month to support his family of four, while in the richer cantons (for example, Sarajevo Canton) the amount is approximately ten times as large. If a young family is struggling to care for their child, the state is still more likely to place that child in residential care – especially if there is a big facility nearby that they need to fill, than to provide the service user with the funding to cope during the time of crisis. As a struggling young parent, you may simply require assistance in facilitating access to potential employers, but social workers in the Centres for Social Work frequently lack skills or vision for such problem-solving approaches. At the moment, the best one may hope for is to be offered a symbolic cash handout or psychological counselling to cope with crisis.

WHERE NEXT?

In January 2006, a Social Policy Conference was organized by DFID, the World Bank, the EC Delegation in BiH, IBHI and the ministries in charge of social policy at entity level. At the conference, the resident representative of the World Bank, Dirk Reineremann stated 'We want reforms and we want them now!' as part of a somewhat predictable 'there is no alternative' argument. Kasza states that:

Foreign models are not always borrowed; they are sometimes imposed by force. When this happens, a country may end up with policies that do not reflect the thinking or values of its policy actors, yet these policies may endure thanks to the vested interest that tend to develop around welfare programmes and the inertia that sometimes afflicts big, complex policies in any field. (Kasza, 2002: 280).

This does not mean that imposed policies are bad or neglect the needs of service users. Quite the contrary. Dümpling (2004: 273–4) offers a relevant comment in regard to the Romanian experiences with similar initiatives, but which is easily applicable to the current reform context in BiH.

Some (projects and initiatives) certainly have a positive impact on the local communities and the destiny of individuals. However, they do not necessarily promote social change considering the Romanian society as a whole . . . The projects hardly start with people themselves, but are conditioned by Western grant guidelines, as if economic and social change can be imported within two or three years. (Dümpling, 2004: 273–4)

Most relevantly, the mid-term framework for substantial reforms can also be contested. Kasza (2002) also notes that the ‘changes’ and ‘reforms’ in social policy, as well as other policy realms, reflect complex contributions of different stakeholders to the policy-making process over a 50- or even 100-year period. ‘After decades of modification and tinkering, today’s policies are the cumulative work of different governments and sometimes different forms of government, and they represent responses to a variety of historical circumstances. As a result, few policies we analyse today are likely to reflect any one set of practical concerns or values’ (ibid.: 273).

This issue is relevant in two ways – local decision-makers should have the most responsibility, and any influence of supranational actors should be met by a qualified response from their local counterparts, taking into consideration the needs and interests of the citizens they represent, which is far from the case in BiH. Secondly, if BiH decision-makers would work according to the needs of citizens and for the kinds of public policies required in this country, rather than for personal gain or the benefit of neighbouring countries due to nationalist interests, then long-term strategies and plans would not be as difficult to implement, as the experience of current short- to mid-term initiatives and strategies suggests.

NOTES

1. For example, after the opening of the renovated Old Bridge in Mostar (bombed by Croat forces during the war) in mid-2004, a new tourist guide was issued. In the guide, one can find out all about who built the bridge, when and why. One can also find out when it was renovated and opened. One cannot, however, find out why the bridge needed renovation in the first place. All this takes place, while a big cross still stands erected on a mountain overlooking Mostar, at the point from which the Croatian tanks bombed the town during the war in the early 1990s.
2. From www.oscebih.org/documents/19-eng.pdf.
3. For benefit of readers with some knowledge of South-Slavic languages, some examples include: human development – *humani razvoj*; millennium goals – *milenijski golovi*. One

particularly amusing example is the Project Document for Finnish government funded Support to Social Sector Project (SSSP), where a local translator assumed that 'Social' stands for 'Societal', hence translating the entire 40+ pages document as if it was the project dealing with reform of BiH society.

4. Including education, health, agriculture, forestry, water management, ecology, infrastructure, energy, industry, anti-mine activities and the information technology sector.
5. KM – Convertible Mark, the BiH currency (1 euro = 1.95KM).

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