

Empowering democracy: Nurturing Bosnia and Herzegovina's civic engagement through the Proactive Citizens project

With a special emphasis on socially disadvantaged citizens and the organisations that support them, this Swiss-funded initiative aims to give the voiceless a greater say in public policy

"Citizens are at the heart of Swiss support to Bosnia and Herzegovina. The needs of young people, the inclusion of those left behind and gender equality are some of the most important issues. With the PRAGG project we are supporting citizens to express their concerns and take initiative. We also support civil society organisations to establish stronger links with citizens, including socially excluded groups. Switzerland is committed to support Bosnia and Herzegovina in fostering a more just, socially inclusive, prosperous, digital, and green society,"

Siroco Messerli, Director of Cooperation at the Embassy of Switzerland in Bosnia and Herzegovina.



The civil sector plays a significant role in strengthening democracy. It contributes to the solution of social needs by providing the opportunity for citizens to nominate and initiate the solution of certain problems and jointly approach decision makers. In this way, citizens should seek improvements and influence public policies and practices that affect their lives and be initiators of change in society.

Despite the important role of civil society organisations (CSOs) in Bosnia and Herzegovina, they face a number of challenges. A key one is a lack of trust in the government and political institutions as well as the absence or weak functioning of institutional cooperation mechanisms between governmental and non-governmental bodies, which can limit citizen engagement and make it difficult for CSOs to effectively advocate for change.

Additionally, many CSOs struggle with limited resources and funding, making it hard to sustain their operations over time. By overcoming these challenges and taking advantage of these opportunities, civil society in Bosnia and Herzegovina can continue to play an important role in promoting social change and strengthening democracy.

With a particular emphasis on socially excluded groups, PRAGG will support CSOs, not-for-profit media, and governmental authorities working with women, the youth, the elderly, Roma, persons with disabilities, and LGBTIQ+ individuals.



A special focus on the disenfranchised

Funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the Proactive Citizens project (Proaktivni građani i građanke or PRAGG for short) aims at more active participation of citizens, especially the socially excluded, in the advocacy and creation of public policies through engagement in CSOs. At the same time, PRAGG will support CSOs to represent the voice of citizens and demand reforms through participation in democratic processes, thus contributing to social change in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

NIRAS is implementing the project in a consortium with HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation, in partnership with two local organisations: the Centres for Civic Initiatives and the Institute for Youth Development.

Running for approximately six years, in addition to improving civic engagement and participation in public policy development, PRAGG will focus on improving the operating environment for CSOs and foster stronger cooperation across organisations. The project will target the entire territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but place a specific focus on 35 municipalities during its first phase. The project team will work closely with local governments, not-for-profit media, and CSOs to identify and address key issues facing socially excluded groups in these municipalities. By working at the local level, the project aims to create sustainable and impactful change that can be replicated and scaled up over time.