

POLICY BRIEF

Involvement of interest groups in development of public policies in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the process of EU accession

Policy problem

Interest groups are not adequately involved in development of public policies in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Government institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina at all levels are obliged by law to organise public consultations when drafting and adopting new legislation, and in principle – they should consult the public when creating policies in a broader sense.

However, there is a notable lack of a proactive approach on the side of institutions to involve interest groups in the process of drafting important documents.

Even when the wider public is consulted, it is more of a formality than substantive engagement for the purpose of receiving feedback.

Background

Bosnia and Herzegovina's policy making process is largely driven by public institutions, and it lacks a coordinated response from the interest groups.

A legal framework exists, but it is incomplete and inconsistently applied.

More often than not, interest groups and external stakeholders are left out of the early stages of the policy-making process until a compromise solution is already prepared by decision-makers.

Limited participation and inclusion in policy making, specifically for marginalized groups, civil society, youth and business community, poses a challenge in Bosnia and Herzegovina's public administration reform.

We address the problem of weak and insufficient participation in policy-making processes from the perspective of each of those interest groups.



Key findings

We analysed the practices of engagement of key stakeholder groups in the process of public consultations, focusing on several groups that represent different perspectives in that process.

Although other stakeholders have a role and their specific interests in the process of creating and making policy decisions, we chose to discuss the inclusion of main perspectives which are important for democratic development and creation of a more inclusive society.

Marginalized groups

There is no clear definition on what constitutes a marginalised group, the definition and scope of this term vary from country to country.

The main issues of involving marginalized groups in the policy making processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina are poorly defined process of public consultations and insufficient vertical and horizontal communication at all government levels.

Marginalized groups find the process even more challenging, because of a complex system of decision-making.

Civil society

The civil society organisations have a major role to play in the EU accession process, through a range of tools at their disposal, like distribution of information, public campaigns, informal educational programs, analysis, control and evaluation of the effects of certain laws, etc.

Two factors affect the social inclusion of citizens – the poor economic situation and unemployment.

Civil society could be more successful, for example, in their efforts to eradicate the social exclusion of citizens only through harmonized action, focusing on increasing the accountability of local authorities and providing support to categories of citizens who are most affected by the problem of exclusion.

Even though there are documents in place that regulate this process fairly well, their effects are not so visible in practice.

In our view and based on our research, CSOs are not adequately involved in the consultation process.



Youth

Key challenges in Bosnia and Herzegovina, for young people, have been identified:

1. Young people do not have access to quality career counselling services that would help them acquire career management skills;
2. Lack of coordination and cooperation among key stakeholders prevents young people from easily identifying which support services are available to them.
3. Young people have limited access to credible career information.
4. The quality of internships performed by young people is not guaranteed.

Among young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, aged 15 to 30, only 1% participates in youth representative bodies, 5% in youth organizations and 6% in political parties.

Only 13% of young people are expressing interest in politics and 19% express sufficient knowledge of politics.

The youth issues at the national level are under the jurisdiction of the Commission for Coordination of Youth Issues in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the newly established Section for youth and mobility at the Bosnia and Herzegovina Ministry of Civil Affairs.

Business Community

One of the main goals is to create a more favourable business environment and attract foreign investment.

The key factors that have long been recognized as an obstacle to foreign investment in Bosnia and Herzegovina are:

- › political instability,
- › corruption,
- › complicated and inefficient bureaucracy, etc.

It was pointed out, by many general managers of representative companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the negative demographic trends as one of the significant obstacles to the arrival of investors.

The total number of inhabitants is constantly declining, especially young and highly educated people are leaving Bosnia and Herzegovina (brain drain), and all this is affecting the reduction of the domestic market that an investor can count on.



Our recommendations

Public institutions should be obliged to proactively seek feedback from interest groups whenever drafting legal acts, strategic documents or other important documents, by:

- direct contact between public institutions and relevant interest groups with aim of receiving feedback in each phase of drafting legislation,
- one publicly available conference while drafting documents which concern the public, to discuss and propose changes,
- inclusion of three representatives in each working group which drafts documents which concern public.

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