



# FACT SHEET

## Strengthening LGBT Rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina

### The Challenge

In Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community continues to be a marginalized and nearly invisible group. Prejudice exists in both private and public spheres. Job loss, eviction, and social ostracism are just some of the risks that LGBT persons encounter when their sexual orientation is revealed. Recent years have seen a number of homophobic incidents, including hostile remarks about LGBT people by public figures, and acts of violence as well. Fear prevents LGBT citizens from reporting discrimination and hate crimes to the police. Incidents of violence are rarely reported in the local media. Many say that compared with the other social and economic challenges in BiH, gay rights are not a priority. We say human rights are always a priority.

### Our Programs

USAID stands at the forefront of the fight for full and equal rights for LGBT citizens in BiH. “We at USAID are listening, and it is our goal to help you make sure others listen, too,” Steve Majors, director of the USAID/BiH Program Office, told activists in Sarajevo. Progress on LGBT rights in BiH is often a matter of two steps forward and one step back, but USAID support ensures that citizens and advocates do not walk alone. Some of our programming is described below.

- Each year since 2013, USAID/BiH has **illuminated the U.S. Embassy in Sarajevo** in rainbow colors on May 17, International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia, as a bold all-night beacon for LGBT rights. In May 2015, we also **‘colored the Internet’** by having the main local news portals display our **‘Love=Love’** rainbow banner on their home pages for a week (see p2), and **organized a very visible reception** at which U.S. Ambassador to BiH Maureen Cormack spoke out for LGBT rights.



*U.S. Embassy in Sarajevo illuminated in rainbow colors as a bold, all-night beacon against homophobia. Photo: USAID/BiH*

“I want to be the U.S. Ambassador to a Bosnia and Herzegovina that says violence, discrimination and abuse against LGBT persons are no longer acceptable. A Bosnia and Herzegovina that respects the basic dignity of all people. A Bosnia and Herzegovina that does not allow its brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, friends and neighbors to suffer in fear, suffer in silence, or to suffer in the shame of who they are or who they love,” Amb. Cormack said.

- Partnered with USAID’s mission in Kosovo, the BiH mission provided \$22,470 to **co-finance a regional assessment**, “Mapping and Needs Assessment of the LGBT Community in Kosovo and BiH,” to identify groups and NGOs that promote LGBT rights and potential areas for future programming.
- USAID awarded local LGBT organization Sarajevo Open Center with a \$34,200 **grant to strengthen LGBT activism in three cities – Banja Luka, Mostar and Tuzla**. Through this activity, we **established a regional center in each city** to protect LGBT citizens and teach the public about LGBT rights ([see success story](#)). Prior to this, there were no formal LGBT organizations in any city outside Sarajevo. But these centers are more than safe havens from bigotry and hate. They organize intensive trainings throughout the year to teach local activists how to advance LGBT rights, particularly how to lobby and advocate in an environment like BiH, where there is a lack of will among politicians for implementing human rights laws and conventions.
- USAID provided a **\$25,000 grant to further support the regional center in Banja Luka, BUKA**, in its efforts to stop discrimination against LGBT people in the entity of Republika Srpska. The assistance ensures that the center can continue to provide a safe space for the LGBT community in Banja Luka and supports a six-month LGBT awareness media blitz on radio, TV, billboards and social media. It also supports BUKA efforts to close the loop on LGBT protection – involving the local police, government officials and the media – to ensure that responsibility for protecting LGBT persons and rights is not bounced from one institution to another.
- As a result of an internship through our media project, Mladen Lukic of Sarajevo decided to **tackle media coverage of the challenges facing the LGBT community in BiH** and bring LGBT rights into public conversation through his reporting. Lukic published a groundbreaking article on LGBT rights, “LGBT Community in BiH: No Right to Human Rights,” on a local online news portal. The article won him the distinguished “Srdjan Aleksic” award for journalists who report on marginalized groups in BiH ([see success story](#)).
- In Sarajevo, USAID works with partner Mediacentar to improve **implementation of the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination** to better protect the rights of marginalized groups in BiH, including those who are LGBT. Assistance will also improve capacities of local LGBT civil society organizations to raise citizen awareness and become agents of change in the fight against discrimination, especially in legal activism and advocacy.

