

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Synopsis of the Case Study

Coordinator: Philip Stabback

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1 Background To The Conflict

- The Balkans region, and particularly the central part that now comprises the country of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), has a long history of cultural diversity and richness, and of conflict and conquest. The population of BiH is comprised of three 'officially' recognised cultural groups or 'constituent peoples' – Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks – as well as 'others' that would include Jewish and Roma minorities.
- Following the disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and declarations of independence by its former constituent parts, a bitter three-sided war was fought in BiH from 1992 to 1995. The war caused widespread devastation across the country, including the destruction of numerous school buildings and significant interruption to the provision of educational services. Over half of the country's school buildings were destroyed and many others suffered serious damage. Millions of people were displaced, both within BiH and to other, mainly European, countries.
- It is estimated that 258,000 people representing 5.9% of the population were killed in the war, comprising disproportionately large numbers of civilians, especially children. Of the three constituent peoples, the Bosniak population was worst affected, accounting for well over 50% of casualties.
- The ethnic 'cleansing' of many areas of the country, the long siege of Sarajevo by Serb forces and other war-related events have left deep social, physical and psychological scars on BiH. The legacy of the conflict is a divided, even fragmented country whose leaders, in many cases, see education as a means of sustaining ideology and promoting politico-cultural identity, and who focus far more vigorously on differences than on similarities.
- The General Framework Agreement for Peace (GFA – also referred to as the 'Dayton Agreement') was signed in 1995. The implementation of civilian aspects of the peace settlement is supervised and monitored by the High Representative. The Office of the High Representative (OHR) exerts significant influence in all aspects of reconstruction, and the High Representative has broad powers to impose legislation as required.
- Other major organisations, including UNESCO, UNDP, UNICEF, the World Bank as well as various European organisations (most notably the European Union and the Council of Europe) have also been active in reconstruction activities. Bilateral donors have been active in rebuilding of all aspects of social and physical infrastructure and almost three hundred NGOs working in BiH list 'education and training' among their areas of interest.
- Immediately following the war, 60,000 NATO troops were deployed across BiH as a peace-keeping force, and approximately 12,000 remain today as a stabilisation force.

2 Background To The Education System

- Under the GFA, two 'entities' were established in BiH – the Republika Srpska (with a centralised administration), which is predominantly Serb, and the Federation of BiH consisting of ten cantons, each of which has constitutional responsibility for education. Some cantons are predominantly Bosniak, some are predominantly Croat and some are 'mixed' (Bosniak and Croat) (See map at Annexe). A separate District of Brcko was also created and is administered under international supervision. Consequently, there are thirteen individual education jurisdictions of three different types in the country, and no responsibility at state level.
- Early post war reconstruction in education concentrated on the rebuilding of infrastructure, particularly school buildings. However, since 1999, attention has increasingly been given to such matters as curriculum modernisation and harmonisation, and pedagogy.
- Children begin school at age 7 (6 in some Cantons). There are eight grades of elementary school, which form the compulsory years of schooling. Following elementary school, students are directed into further general secondary education of four years (conducted in 'gymnasias'), or into vocational or professional secondary schools for two, three or four years.
- Only 25% of secondary enrolments in BiH are in general education, well below European norms. The vocational and secondary school system was created to serve the 'controlled' or 'planned' labour market of the pre-war socialist system, and generally does not meet the workforce needs of a modern, free market economy.
- Curriculum
 - Since the war, three 'parallel' curricula (Bosniak, Croat and Serb) have been developed and are now taught in BiH.
 - Each curriculum consists of two broad categories of subjects – the 'National Group of Subjects' (Language and Literature, History, Geography, Music, Art and Nature and Society in some grades) and the other, 'non-contentious' subjects.
 - It is generally agreed that there is significant commonality (as much as 90-95%) in the 'non-contentious' subjects in the curriculum. Finding common content in the 'National Group of Subjects' causes continuing, ethnic-based disagreement.
 - Curriculum development is the responsibility of Pedagogical Institutes closely supervised by the Ministries of Education. Not all Ministries have Pedagogical Institutes.
 - Curriculum generally is old-fashioned, dominated by decontextualised information and lists of facts and with little recognition of skills, values and attitudes as desirable learning outcomes. Teachers rely heavily on lecture and didactics, and on single, state-endorsed and state-produced textbooks.
- Management and Administration
 - Education is generally poorly managed. Although expenditure as a % of GDP is relatively high, authorities frequently exceed their budgets and teachers' salaries, which are relatively low to begin with, are often months in arrears.
 - School Directors are often appointed as a result of their political party affiliations rather than expertise or experience.
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- Current major pressures on the education system in general and curriculum in particular include meeting the requirements for accession to the Council of Europe, increasing numbers of displaced children returning to their pre-war homes and increased pressure from the International Community for depoliticisation of education and for modernisation.

3. Rationales For Curriculum Policy Change

Evaluation of curriculum and curriculum policy-making

- A major weakness in the strategic approach to curriculum policy reform since the war has been the absence of an agreed and negotiated plan based on a systematic evaluation of the current curricula. Without such a plan, systematic and systemic improvement, especially in such a complex political and social environment as that of BiH, is very difficult. Nevertheless, a number of significant evaluations have been conducted, including:
 - Evaluation of curricula of the 'National Subjects' and subsequent Symposium (UNESCO and OHR) in 1999
 - SWOT Analysis (EC TAER Education Reform Project¹) in June 2001
 - Research Study (UNESCO) in February 2003
- These studies have consistently found that
 - Curriculum policy in BiH are excessively politicized
 - A higher level of consistency in curriculum policy is possible across the country if more responsibility is moved from politicians to experts or professionals
 - Curriculum is overloaded and focuses too much on the learning of lists of facts and assessment by the recitation of memorised facts
 - Curriculum design is rigid and inflexible, and there is little opportunity for school-based or local decision-making
 - There are no processes in place for consultation with parents, teachers or employers regarding curriculum change.

Rationales For Change

- *Rationale 1: To ensure flexibility in curriculum design*

The current curriculum design model in BiH is inflexible (a 'one size fits all' curriculum), based on the belief that every student should learn the same thing at the same time. This approach relies on uniformity as an indicator of quality. New curriculum needs to ensure that strengths and weaknesses of individual students and teachers as well as variations in local / regional conditions are recognised.
- *Rationale 2: To ensure that curriculum is relevant*

Current curriculum in BiH is unable to provide a relevant and contemporary set of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to students. The curriculum is characterised by a disproportionate concentration on information with little if any attention given to the application of that knowledge, the development of useful skill sets, and to outcomes in the affective domain. New curriculum should be relevant to

 - contemporary global society
 - contemporary society in Bosnia and Herzegovina
 - the desired free-market economy of Bosnia and Herzegovina
- *Rationale 3: To contribute to the elimination of cultural prejudices*

Current administrative and policy-making arrangements provide opportunities for authorities to go their own way. Given the ethnic dimension of the 1992-5 war and its vicious nature, it is perhaps not surprising that authorities would use their autonomy in education and curriculum to devise ways of promoting ethno-centric views. In BiH, each education authority is able to promote a culturally inappropriate curriculum that in the end is socially divisive, unregulated by any agreed framework of curriculum standards or 'rules'.

¹ European Commission – Technical Assistance to Education Reform (in BiH)

4.1 Mechanisms Of Policy Change

- There is currently no state level agency in BiH with responsibility for curriculum matters.
- Authority for curriculum remains with local Bosniak, Croat and Serb authorities at Canton level in the Federation and at Entity level in the RS. Curriculum policy-making therefore remains fractured, and the interests of BiH (such as building a cohesive society or the promotion of a shared set of national values) are not central to policy decisions. Despite pressure from the International Community, there have been no substantive changes in recent years to any of the three existing curricula.
- One structure for curriculum policy-making with the potential to solve some of the fundamental problems emerged from the research study recently conducted as part of this case study. This is proposed in the conclusions to that study, and would require the formation of a Curriculum Board with countrywide responsibility. This Board would be accountable to the Conference of Entity Ministers and be representative of Ministers, teachers, parents, employers and universities in such a way as to prevent obstruction by political interests. In the short term, the International Community could request representation with observer status. The Board's main functions would be to
 - develop and maintain a National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for BiH. The framework would contain a set of standards for curriculum in BiH, as well as a set of agreed outcomes for students at the end of elementary school and secondary school.
 - develop detailed criteria, based on these standards and outcomes, that need to be fulfilled for curriculum to be acceptable under the NCF
 - evaluate curricula proposed by education authorities for endorsement under the NCF against the requirements of the framework
 - provide advice to the Conference of Ministers of Education regarding final endorsement of proposed curricula
 - ensure that ongoing evaluation and revision of the NCF is undertaken.

4.2 Reorganisation And Restructuring Of School Knowledge: Challenges Posed By Sensitive Learning Content

- An Education Reform Strategy Paper has been endorsed by all Ministers of Education and by the Peace Implementation Council. This paper calls for
 - a 'harmonised' common core curriculum for implementation in the 2003-4 school year
 - a 'modernised' curriculum by 2010
- The primary purpose of 'harmonisation' is to ensure consistency across the country in the location of content in grades and subjects. This will increase opportunities for mobility facilitate the access to schooling of minority returnee children. The main intentions of 'modernisation' are to make the content of the curriculum more current and its design more flexible.
- The major challenges of these processes are:
 - The lack of substantive agreement on approaches to the 'National Group of Subjects' – how current differences in interpretation in, for example, history are to be resolved.
 - The lack of expertise in curriculum design and development, and the lack of familiarity among local curriculum developers with modern curriculum design.

5. Research And Evaluation

It is crucial that further research and evaluation is conducted on the following issues, and that this research and evaluation leads to clear strategies for improvement:

- **Responsibilities for curriculum development**
There is a critical need, within constitutional context of BiH, for new model of responsibilities for curriculum development and evaluation, and evidence of a need for state level responsibility through a curriculum agency or other mechanism.
- **The relevance and feasibility of the concept of a national curriculum framework**
At least three separate curricula operate in BiH, resulting in some degree of duplication of responsibilities and cost, as well as in some common and some unique content. There is a clear need for individual authorities and communities to retain some control and responsibility for curriculum, but, in the interests of students, an equally clear need for consistency of standards in curriculum design, curriculum content and student learning outcomes across the country.
- **The validity and desirability of the category of ‘national subjects’**
A number of culturally-sensitive subjects (including Language and Literature, History, Geography and Music) have been categorised as ‘national subjects’. Each of the three constituent peoples (to the exclusion of minority groups) retained or developed their own curricula in these subjects. Reforming these subjects through the ‘harmonisation’ or ‘modernisation’ processes, or within a ‘common core curriculum’ or within a ‘curriculum framework’ is an urgent priority.
- **Curriculum, social cohesion and the maintenance of peace**
Continuing ethnic tensions in the country, exacerbated by the existence of administrative structures that are ethnically constituted, require a curriculum response. The civic education project sponsored by CIVITAS has adopted a ‘single subject’ approach to the development of social cohesion and knowledge about democratic and peaceful society. An alternative or complementary strategy is through a thematic, multi-disciplined approach across the curriculum. This could be incorporated into the curriculum design standards of a National Curriculum Framework.
- **Standards, assessment and certification of student learning**
Within BiH, there is no common process or methodology for the measurement of student achievement, the establishment of standards or for the mutual recognition of certificates. Consequently, there is no reliable information on student achievement on which to base future curriculum development activities. It could be argued that a common contemporary standard in curriculum systems is the existence of proper processes for measuring and reporting student achievement. Governments have committed to ‘develop and implement a system of standardised assessment and certification of student achievement for the entire country’² by July 2006.

² [A Message to the People of Bosnia and Herzegovina: Education Reform](http://www.oscebih.org), available at www.oscebih.org, p.12

Annexe – Map of Bosnia and Herzegovina

