



# REPORT

on the **suffering of  
Roma** in the Podrinje  
region in the period  
1992–1995





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## ABBREVIATIONS

BiH	- Bosnia and Herzegovina
FPRY	- Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia
ICC	- International Criminal Court
ICTY	- International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia
ICTR	- International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda
INTERPOL	- International Criminal Police Organisation
CC	- Criminal Code
IHL	- International Humanitarian Law
OSCE	- Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
SIPA	- State Investigation and Protection Agency
SFRY	- Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
UN	- United Nations
ARS	- Army of the Republika Srpska
CPC	- Criminal Procedure Code

## Donor's Introductory Remarks

In 2025, Bosnia and Herzegovina marks 30 years since the end of war. The country, the region, and indeed the world are reflecting on the events of 1992 to 1995, remembering the suffering of individuals and communities, denouncing the atrocities that were committed, and collectively focussing on continued efforts towards dealing with the past for a more peaceful future. The experiences of the conflict are not contained in the past but are the context for understanding the challenges the country faces today. All communities in BiH suffered deeply, yet the crimes against the Roma community have been unresearched, undocumented, and unprosecuted. Achieving a truly inclusive and just peace is impeded if the truth of violations against all groups is not established and acknowledged. The British Government has commissioned this work, the first research of its kind, to understand the wartime suffering of the Roma community in Bosnia and Herzegovina, to address this lack of recognition and ensure all suffering is brought to light.

Drawing attention to the experience of Roma is central to establishing the full truth of the war in BiH. This is not a new conversation, but a demonstration that the conversation has been incomplete. This report focuses on events in 21 local communities from 1992-1995. It documents atrocities including torture, rape, murder, mass killings and forced displacement which were part of the pattern of ethnic cleansing that so horrifically defined war in BiH. None of the judgements of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, which dealt with the war crimes that took place, mentioned Roma as victims. Without recognition, Roma survivors and their families have been excluded from transitional justice processes, reparations, and other ways that groups who suffered in the war have made attempts to heal.

A key point emphasised through this research is the 'double silence' inflicted on the Roma community, in both peacetime and during war. To date, there has been no official confirmation that Roma shared with other targeted groups the fate of systematic persecution and violence, including sexual violence. Whereas, pre-war, Roma would often identify as the dominant local ethnic group to avoid stigmatisation and persecution, they were still identified and targeted. Today Roma are hidden among the victims of the war and their story has gone unspoken and unheard. Without this research, the experiences of Roma and the extent of suffering of Roma women would not only have been unknown but would have been in danger of being entirely erased from historical narrative.

This research has been conducted within a peacebuilding framework. It is the first report of its kind to address the lack of knowledge and understanding of Roma victims of war, unearthing evidence and facts that have not been previously recorded. The courage and strength of the Roma community in coming forward 30 years on must be commended and acknowledged. We are grateful to the community, especially Kali Sara who continue to advocate with principled dedication for Roma rights.

It is difficult to take steps forward in the dark. This report goes some way to illuminating that darkness. The individual stories of survivors and their families are the first steps towards the light. Memorialisation is about the past and the future. This report includes concrete recommendations to improve the lives of Roma living in BiH today.

**James Hamilton Harding**  
**Deputy Head of Mission**  
**British Embassy Sarajevo**



## Executive Summary

Atrocities against non-Serbs in the Podrinje region lasted from 1992 to 1995, within which timeframe the Srebrenica genocide was committed. The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, as well as domestic courts in Bosnia and Herzegovina, have repeatedly established that a campaign of ethnic cleansing was carried out in the Podrinje region in the period 1992–1995, aimed to “liberate” the territory from non-Serbs. As established by the court, a series of war crimes, crimes against humanity and other violations of international law were committed during that period.

In July 1995, genocide was committed against Bosniaks in Srebrenica – the gravest crime in Europe since World War II. This fact has been legally established in several judgments of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), including in the cases Krstić (IT-98-33), Popović (IT-05-88), and Tolimir (IT-05-88/2), as well as in judgments of the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In these judgments, the court found that units of the Army of the Republika Srpska committed mass murders, enforced deportations and other forms of crimes that cumulatively constitute genocide with the intent to destroy a protected group of Bosniaks.

What these judgments fail to address and leave in the sphere of social and legal invisibility is the fact that Roma were also among the victims of the horrific crimes in the Podrinje region. This report, the first of its kind, documents that Roma were subjected to killings, torture, rape, unlawful imprisonment, expulsion from their homes and deportations. Their communities – such as those in Srebrenica, Zvornik – Skočić and Skelani, Bratunac, Foča – experienced destruction that was not an exception in its scope and intensity, but part of the same pattern of ethnic cleansing.

In Srebrenica, Roma, along with Bosniaks and other non-Serbs, were imprisoned, tortured and executed. The testimonies collected in this report clearly indicate that Roma men were captured, lined up and taken to be executed, and their bodies were found in mass graves in Branjevo, Pilica and Kozluk. They also participated in the defence of the enclave as members of the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina – and many, like Bosniaks, were killed after the fall of the enclave in July 1995. The court documents do confirm that these killings happened in the context of genocide, however, Roma were not explicitly listed as members of the group against which genocide was committed.

Crimes against Roma in other municipalities of Podrinje follow the same logic of violence as those against Bosniaks. In Zvornik, Roma were tortured in camps, executed in groups, children and women raped, and their bodies thrown into mass graves. In Bijeljina, Roma were subjected to torture, sexual violence, and enforced disappearances. In Foča and Miljevina, their homes were destroyed, and all the survivors were expelled. In villages such as Šukovac, Zubčić, Pirić, and Nova Kasaba, Roma settlements were destroyed entirely, while the return of Roma is negligible or non-existent.

Within this violence structure, Roma women were double victims – as women and as members of a marginalised ethnic community. Although research has confirmed mass rapes of women during the war, the experiences of Roma women have been almost entirely erased from historical and political narratives. The rape of Roma girls and women is no less brutal or rare than that of women of other ethnic groups, but it is much less frequently acknowledged, documented or prosecuted.

Respondents to the study confirmed that Roma women were victims of multiple rapes, often in camps and detention facilities, where they were sexually abused and tortured. However, most women refuse to talk about their experiences – due to fear, stigma, isolation and distrust in institutions that have never acknowledged or protected them. The non-governmental sector did provide some support, however,

institutional measures specifically targeting Roma women as survivors of sexual violence are almost non-existent.

The lack of reparations, access to psychosocial support, legal aid and public recognition has led to Roma women living in a space of double silence – the silence of war and the silence of peace. Many live in close proximity to their rapists, without institutional protection, in deep poverty and without the ability to seek help, for fear of being stigmatised, having to pay court costs or being rejected by their families.

Roma women who have survived these forms of violence face specific consequences today, shaped by both war trauma and continued discrimination in peacetime. Many are victims of long-term psychological distress, chronic health problems and isolation. Distrust in institutions, fear of stigma and patriarchal expectations in the community mean that their stories continue to be avoided, hidden or minimised. This repeats the pattern of silence and exclusion that began during the war and continued in peacetime. Without acknowledging the suffering of Roma women as part of an overall policy of crimes against humanity, neither memorialisation nor transitional justice can be complete.

Demographic data confirm the scale of this systematic elimination. According to the 1991 census, there were 2,647 Roma living in Podrinje, but in 2013 that number fell to just 586 – a decrease of over 78%. Similarly, the number of Roma who declared Romani as their mother tongue in 2013 fell from 3,311 to just 443, indicating both cultural destruction and loss of collective identity, resulting from the war and post-war period.

As for quantitative data on Roma settled in the Podrinje region before and after the war, it is noteworthy that many Roma, both before and after the war, identified as members of the majority ethnic group, out of fear of discrimination. In other words, the report does not focus on quantitative data precisely because of this; it rather focuses on qualitative primary data that prove that during the war in Podrinje, Roma suffered precisely because they were Roma, as the perpetrators knew quite well that Roma lived in certain locations, and their violent entry into these settlements, looting, killing, rape, and expulsion were carried out specifically against Roma because they were Roma, regardless of how members of Roma communities officially declared themselves in the population censuses. Namely, regardless of whether some Roma declared themselves as Roma or as members of some other majority ethnic group, the focus is on the fact that the perpetrators systematically destroyed their settlements because they belong to Roma communities.

In light of criminal justice being one of the pillars of transitional justice, it is noteworthy that to date, only three final judgments have been rendered in cases that explicitly include Roma victims, while none of the judgments for the Srebrenica genocide mention Roma as victims, even though they perished of the same executions, camps, and death convoys.

The report, therefore, not only provides an overview of the crimes committed and the patterns of violence employed but also lays the foundation for concrete measures of public recognition – through memorials, educational content, museum exhibitions, days of remembrance and joint commemorations. Such measures have a multiple function: in addition to affirming the right to the truth, they represent a means of collective learning, social reparations and function as an institutional mechanism against revisionism and oblivion.

However, the report does not stop at the symbolic level. In line with the principles of transitional justice, it also points to the need for a broader societal response – one that includes other forms of support for Roma survivors of war. The research has shown that the needs of survivors are neglected in many ways: they are not recognised as civilian victims of war in the legislation, they rarely have access to reparations, they are marginalised in socio-economic and healthcare terms, and psychosocial support is almost non-existent. Their experiences are not recognised in research literature, educational materials, or public discourse.

This means that Roma victims of war live in a space of double silence today – the one that marked their persecution during the war, and the one that accompanies them in peace. This is why the research calls for institutional and social attention not to be limited to the past, but to be connected to the current living conditions of survivors and their families. Without this, memorialisation remains formal and guarantees of non-repetition – empty.

This publication aims to open a space for inclusive and just remembrance, but also for political and institutional action. The suffering of Roma in Podrinje is not a parallel or a separate story – it is a common wound of this society. Genuine dealing with the past does not begin with mere naming of the crimes, but with acknowledging all the victims. Among them are Roma – victims of the same war crimes and atrocities – whose stories have so far been erased, silenced or subordinated. It is time for them to be heard, remembered and acknowledged.

The research documented in this report clearly indicates that crimes committed against Roma during the armed conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina were not isolated incidents, but part of a broader pattern of violence and social exclusion. For this reason, responses to these human rights violations must be multidimensional: simultaneously focusing on documentation, education, institutional recognition, and the building of sustainable memorial policies. To this end, the following strategic measures are recommended:

- 1. Initiate systematic and ongoing research into crimes against Roma**
- 2. Develop a comprehensive and interactive map of war crimes against Roma**
- 3. Establish a public, thematic database on crimes against Roma**
- 4. Strengthen the capacities of the Roma community to actively participate in documentation**
- 5. Establish institutional cooperation between academic, judicial and civil actors**
- 6. Establish an institutional mechanism for documenting the suffering of marginalised groups**
- 7. Integrate the suffering of Roma into official memorialisation and education policies**
- 8. Enable access to reparations and protection of survivors' rights**

In the context of wartime rape and sexual abuse, Roma women were particularly vulnerable due to their ethnicity, but also their marginalised position in society. During the war, Roma women were exposed to systematic violence, rape, abuse and other forms of sexual violence, and their experiences were often ignored due to the ethnic-based focus on victims of the majority groups. After the war, their testimonies and experiences were omitted from historical, political and social narratives, which further contributed to their marginalisation. This position of Roma women is most visible in the sparse testimonies about their experiences during the war, and in their economic and social position, as well as limited access to psychosocial and legal support. In the fragmented society lacking adequate dealing with the past in BiH, justice for victims of sexual violence who are Roma women is exceedingly difficult to achieve. Furthermore, legal, social and cultural discrimination has further marginalised Roma, and especially Roma women who have suffered sexual abuse. Many women have not reported abuse for fear of stigmatisation, while many crimes remain unsolved.

This report is a form of introduction to this complex topic, and it seeks to raise awareness in BiH society about mass crimes committed against Roma, the largest BiH national minority, with a special focus on women and the sexual violence they suffered during the war. It thereby aims to create the necessary space for Roma women to speak out about these crimes and seek the help they desperately need. Research of this type is very scarce, because numerous reports and analyses on the topic of sexual violence fail to mention Roma women. Methodologically speaking, it was only possible to open this topic in an effort to create conditions for the voices of these victims to be heard and for their traumas and fight for justice to be acknowledged.

To open a broader dialogue on the suffering of Roma during the war, with a special focus on the sexual abuse of Roma women, it is necessary to continue with more detailed research and, drawing on the lessons learned from previous decades in working with victims of wartime rape, to create a safe environment of trust and ensure other conditions that would provide the opportunity for victims to talk about their traumas, if and when they feel they need to. In this light, the following **recommendations** have been formulated:

**Combat stigmatisation of victims.**

**Develop an awareness-raising programme and information campaigns in Roma communities.**

**Develop special programmes for Roma communities.**

**Conduct a thorough analysis of the situation on the ground regarding wartime rape of Roma women.**

Finally, unacknowledged crimes get repeated. Recognising victims and integrating them into institutional and collective memory is not only a question of morality, but also of the long-term stability of the state. This report and its recommendations are a call for political responsibility, scientific curiosity, and social courage. It is time for Roma, as victims of war crimes and systematic persecution, to be given their rightful place in the narrative of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina – not on the margins, but at the centre of the truth.



# Introduction

This report is the result of a joint initiative by the Srebrenica Memorial Centre and the Roma Association Kali Sara – Roma Information Centre, driven by the need to recognise and document the suffering of the Roma community in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the 1992–1995 war, with a particular focus on the Podrinje region. Although crimes against the civilian population in BiH have been the subject of many domestic and international court judgments, Roma victims have largely remained outside the scope of institutional attention, research, and public remembrance.

The research was designed and conducted within the framework of transitional justice, which encompasses victims' rights to truth, justice, reparation, and guarantees of non-recurrence. Based on this framework, the aim of the report is not only to document facts, but also to initiate the process of memorialising Roma victims as a mechanism of societal recognition and prevention of future violence. This report does not seek to replace the existing narratives about the suffering of other communities, but to complement them – confirming that Roma shared the fate of systematic persecution, destruction, and enforced silence.

Accordingly, the report offers recommendations for public remembrance policies, educational reforms, reparation programmes, and institutional support for Roma survivors. Memorialisation, as a form of symbolic and societal reparation, must be conceived as a sustainable, inclusive, and participatory process. At the same time, the report highlights the need for an integrated approach that includes legal, psychosocial, health, and economic support for Roma survivors, whose needs are often overlooked.

With this report, we seek to create space for institutional recognition of Roma as victims of the most severe forms of violence during the war in BiH, with particular focus on the Podrinje region. Only by acknowledging all victims can we speak of a just and sustainable transitional justice in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

# 1.

## Method of Data Collection and Processing

The report is based on a multi-layered process of collecting and analysing information on crimes committed against members of the Roma community in the Podrinje region during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992-1995). The research focused on documenting various forms of violence that meet the legal definitions of crimes against humanity under both international and domestic law.

The research drew on data from numerous sources, including documents from judicial institutions, reports by non-governmental and international organisations, records of victims and crime locations, as well as testimonies of survivors and community members. Particular emphasis was placed on the analysis of archival materials (court judgments, official notes, orders, records, etc.) related to wartime events in the municipalities of the Podrinje region.

Additional qualitative insight was provided through interviews with witnesses, individuals familiar with the local context, and survivors. These interviews were conducted in accordance with the principles of voluntariness, safety, and anonymity of respondents, with durations adapted to the sensitivity of the subject matter. Data were collected following predefined research guidelines, with special emphasis placed on personal experiences and perceptions regarding the course of events, the consequences of the crimes, and the institutional response – or lack thereof.

The collected material was analysed using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. Statistical data were used to provide a clear overview of the scope and spatial distribution of crimes, while narratives and testimonies enabled the reconstruction of the context and patterns of violence. A methodological comparison was also made with other cases of war crimes in Bosnia and Herzegovina, allowing for a deeper understanding of the position of Roma as a particularly marginalised and neglected community.

Given the historical invisibility of the Roma population in the context of war crimes, this report represents the first systematic and targeted attempt to map their victimisation. This lays the groundwork for further research, institutional responses, and processes of collective memory and transitional justice.

## 2.

# The Importance of Investigating and Prosecuting Crimes Against Humanity and Values Protected by International Law

Legal procedures related to the reporting, investigation, documentation, prosecution, and trial of perpetrators of crimes are governed by the Criminal Procedure Code of Bosnia and Herzegovina, while their legal definition and sanctions are set out in the Criminal Code of Bosnia and Herzegovina. These criminal offences are not subject to a statute of limitations. Article 19 of the BiH Criminal Code reads that *“criminal prosecution and execution of a sentence are not subject to the statute of limitations for criminal offences of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, or for other criminal offences that, pursuant to international law, are not subject to the statute of limitations.”* Provisions on immunity and privileges, established under special laws in Bosnia and Herzegovina, do not apply in proceedings for the most serious criminal offences, including genocide and crimes against humanity.

The investigation of violations of international humanitarian law entails the collection of factual and empirical data and evidence that ensures reliable, valid, and truthful knowledge about the crimes committed, with the aim of prosecuting them before the competent security and judicial authorities. To ensure the efficiency of both research and scientific study, regardless of the specific type of research, it must be conducted in accordance with scientific and professional rules and procedures. Achieving this requires the application of an appropriate research methodology, along with relevant and applicable methods.

### 3.

## Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina Before the 1990s

Before addressing Roma as a national minority, it is necessary to first reflect on the term and definition of national minority.

The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities does not stipulate a definition of “national minority.” Each member state is free to assess and define the groups to be covered by the Convention within its territory. Such a definition must be non-discriminatory, made in good faith, and consistent with the general principles of international law, including the principle of self-determination. According to the Law on Rights of National Minorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a national minority is defined as a part of the population-citizens of BiH that does not belong to any of the three constituent peoples and it includes people of the same or similar ethnic origin, same or similar tradition, customs, religion, language, culture, and spirituality, and close or related history and other characteristics.

Roma are a traditionally peaceful people, originating from the Punjab region of India. Following early signs of discrimination and persecution, they left India. In search of better living conditions and prosperity, they largely settled in Europe. No people has ever been as compelled to relocate so frequently as Roma, which is why the labels “wanderers/nomads/travellers” remain associated with them to this day. Some Roma groups – tribes from India, travelled to Europe across Asia, while others entered Europe via the Mediterranean. The presence of Roma in Europe was recorded in the Transylvania region (Romania) in 1416, and they are mentioned in the chronicle of the city of Forlì in 1422.

By the late 14<sup>th</sup> century, Roma had settled north of the Danube. The Roma in Transylvania were traditionally divided into two main groups: miners and “aurari”, or gold washers. It is possible that some of the gold washers seen by Benedikt Kuripešić in 1530 on a river near Jajce belonged to one of these groups.

The earliest reliable record of Roma in the territory of the former Yugoslavia is a legal document from Dubrovnik dated 1362, referring to a petition by two *Jedupci* (i.e., Egyptians, or Roma) named “Vlah” and “Vitanus.” According to this document, Roma were present in Herzegovina well before the arrival of the Ottomans.

### 3.1.

#### Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina before the Outbreak of War in the 1990s

Roma are officially mentioned in the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. There is no reliable scholarly evidence about what Roma were doing in Bosnia during the early years of Ottoman rule, but it is believed that some of them converted to Islam early on, given that they practised Buddhism while living in India. A law enacted in 1530 by Suleiman the Magnificent made a clear distinction between Muslim and non-Muslim Roma. The former were required to pay a tax of twenty-two aspers per family, while the latter had to pay twenty-five. Muslim Roma were also prohibited from living together with non-Muslim Roma. Suleiman the Magnificent granted them the right to settle and cultivate part of his pashalik in exchange for paying taxes.



Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina were also mentioned in 1574, when Sultan Selim II issued a firman granting tax relief to Roma working in mines. The firman refers to those working in an iron ore mine near Banja Luka and Roma working in the mines “beyond Novi Pazar”, likely referring to the mines in northern Kosovo.

According to Ottoman statistics, there were a total of 9,630 Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1865. Depending on the regions in which various Roma groups lived, they were identified by names such as: *Kale*, *Gitahno*, *Kalderaši*, *Manuši*, *Sinti*, and *Burgudžije*.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Roma are classified into four groups: *Kaloperi*, *Čergaši*, Roma originating from Kosovo, and *Arlije*, who are, according to some culturologists, part of the Gurbet group, as they speak the Gurbet Romani dialect. In addition to some minor linguistic differences among these groups, there are also cultural and customary-traditional distinctions, which will be discussed later.

According to the official 1991 census, 8,964 Roma lived in Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, Roma non-governmental organisations, of which there are around 70 in Bosnia and Herzegovina, argue that this number is much higher, estimating that between 85,000 and 100,000 Roma currently live in the country. It is very difficult to determine the actual number of Roma living in BiH today, just as it is difficult to know their population size prior to the outbreak of war during the 1990s.

This indicates that, up until 1991, Roma largely identified as Yugoslavs, Muslims, Serbs, Croats, or Others. The reason for this was fear of discrimination, which could have negatively affected the social prosperity of Roma.

However, this research project relies on the 1991 census. Before presenting the exact census data from 1991, which included the Roma population, it is necessary to present a few basic indications about Roma as the largest national minority in BiH. In order to successfully address the objective of this research, which is documenting the suffering of Roma in the Podrinje region during the war period 1992–1995, it is also essential to draw a comparison between the 1991 census and the 2013 census. Although the 2013 census was conducted long after the end of the war in BiH, it remains the only real and accurate indicator of the changes in the Roma population before and after the war.

## 3.2.

### Roma in the Podrinje Region before the Outbreak of the War

Podrinje is located in the eastern part of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which has been marked by various turbulent events throughout history. It stretches along the Drina River, from its source to its confluence with the Sava River. Before the war, the region encompassed ten municipalities (Foča, Goražde, Višegrad, Čajniče, Rudo, Bratunac, Srebrenica, Vlasenica, Zvornik, and Bijeljina). Following the end of the war and a new territorial organisation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, four additional municipalities are included: Foča FBiH, Novo Goražde, Milići, and Sapna.

Before the outbreak of the war, Roma lived in the Podrinje region. It is widely believed that their actual number was significantly higher than official statistics indicate. The reasons for this are numerous and varied, ranging from decades of stigmatisation and discrimination to the ongoing struggle for survival.

According to the 1991 census, the number of Roma living in the Podrinje region was as follows: Foča – 32; Goražde – 64; Bratunac – 154; Srebrenica – 161; Vlasenica – 221; Zvornik – 269; and Bijeljina – 1,746. These numbers significantly decreased as a result of wartime events.

### 3.3.

## Life of Roma Communities in the Podrinje Region

### 3.3.1. SOCIAL ASPECTS OF ROMA LIFE

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Roma are predominantly Muslims and are generally divided into four groups: *Kaloperi*, *Čergaši*, Roma originating from Kosovo, and *Arlije*.

The *Kaloperi* group is characterised primarily by a high level of integration into BiH society, regular education, employment in public companies, permanent residence, freedom of choice within the family, and freedom of choice regarding both education and marital partners.

The *Čergaši* group consists of Roma who speak the most linguistically “pure” form of their mother tongue. The Romani language is in constant use – within the family, the community, or in public life. Due to their lifestyle and frequent changes of residence, they were unable to attend school regularly, and as a result, most have a very limited level of education, and are often only able to write their name and surname. They engage in collecting secondary raw materials and begging, while a very small number are involved in repairing metal objects – primarily through tinning.

Roma from Kosovo began settling in Bosnia and Herzegovina after the World War II. In terms of their behaviour, traditions and customs, they are not significantly different from the *Čergaši* group. However, this population has never been seen begging on the streets in Bosnia and Herzegovina. They include their children in the family business from an early age, most often trade of clothing and household goods, such as curtains and carpets. They tend to settle in groups, usually as entire extended families – three, four, or more generations. The head of the family is the father or the eldest male, who makes all decisions on family matters.

### 3.3.2. CULTURAL ASPECTS OF ROMA LIFE

Depending on the regions in which they live, Roma are identified by names such as *Kale*, *Gitahno*, *Kalderaši*, *Manuši*, *Sinti*, *Burgudžije*. Throughout their history and the way of life they were often forced to lead, Roma have left very few written records by which one could reliably determine what is authentically Roma and what has been adopted from other majority population. The unwritten cultural motto “it is more important **to be** than **to have**” is associated with Roma wherever they may be and regardless of the God they pray to.

Cultural, traditional, and customary habits were passed down from generation to generation through verbal communication and practice. Many historians and culturologists consider this practice to be the main reason for the scarcity of written texts, even though it is known that the Vedas were written in Sanskrit, from which the Romani language originates. According to Prof. Dr Rajko Đurić, a Romani scholar, **Vedic literature** (which in Sanskrit means knowledge) is the general name for the oldest Indian texts, which are divided into four collections: the **Rigveda**, **Samaveda**, **Yajurveda**, and **Atharvaveda**. The texts in these collections originate from different historical periods. Some texts from the Rigveda, the oldest collection, come from the ancestral homeland of the Aryans (3000-2000 BC), while the Atharvaveda, the latest collection, contains texts dating from around the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC.

According to tradition, the authors of these texts were *rishis*, holy seers who, by using *soma* (a sacred drink), lived the divine words and many other instructions by which people were meant to live. These works also contain various chronological and geographical data, mentioning many peoples, tribes, events, and figures. In short, they are a significant historical source on the Aryans and some aspects of their lives. Some of that information is still preserved in the language, religion, and customs of Roma; it remains part of their collective memory and everyday life. There is also credible evidence that the epics **Mahabharata** and **Ramayana** partially contain elements of Romani culture and language. It should also be noted that

around 1500 BC, a thousand years after the fall of the Indus Valley civilisation, the Aryans penetrated from the northwest. From the first major cultural synthesis between the Aryans and Dravidians and their unification, Indians and Indian culture emerged, incorporating elements of both.

The most important holidays and celebrations among Roma are: 14 January – Vasilica or Romani New Year, 8 April – International Roma Day, 6 May – St. George's Day, 2 August – Elijah's Day, 2 August – *Samudaripen* or Roma Genocide Remembrance Day, 5 November – World Day of Romani Language.

### 3.4.

#### Challenges and Issues Faced by Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina defines three constituent peoples: Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs, as well as "Others", a category encompassing all citizens who do not belong to the constituent peoples. Accordingly, under the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Roma are included in the category of "Others". This designation deprives all citizens in the "Others" category, including Roma, of numerous political and other rights. The most striking example of this discrimination is that members of the Roma community cannot run for members of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina or members of the House of Peoples of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as these positions are reserved exclusively for members of the constituent peoples. This form of discrimination was confirmed by the decision of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of *Sejdić and Finci v. Bosnia and Herzegovina*.

One of the greatest challenges faced during this research project was the fact that a significant number of Roma did not identify themselves, nor do they currently identify themselves, as Roma. This is supported by the established fact that more people declared Romani as their mother tongue than the number of those who declared themselves as Roma. According to the 1991 census, 8,864 people identified as Roma, 178 as Muslim Roma, and three as Albanian Roma. At the same time, 10,422 people stated that Romani was their mother tongue, 26 declared Bosnian-Romani, and eight people declared Romani-Bosnian as their mother tongue.

Furthermore, Roma are the most numerous national minority both in Europe and in Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, they are also the most vulnerable group in society. According to all relevant indicators, Roma are in an extremely difficult social and economic position. Among the challenges and issues they face, the following areas of life and work are particularly prominent:

- education
- healthcare
- employment
- housing
- social protection
- low economic status – poverty, etc.

In this regard, the BiH Council of Ministers adopted the Roma Strategy in 2005, and subsequently, relevant action plans have been developed in accordance with this Strategy for the priority areas, namely education, housing, employment, and healthcare.

Education remains a pressing issue for the Roma population in Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to research conducted by the BiH Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees, the literacy rate stands at 68.9% for women aged 15–24, and 90.4% for men of the same age group.

The right to **education** is one of the most important, yet also one of the most endangered, human rights of the Roma national minority. The infringement of this right effectively prevents them from accessing all

other social and political functions that are crucial both for society and for their personal advancement. The right to education is closely linked to their economic and political status within society. As is well known, Roma have always been disadvantaged in this regard and have consistently found themselves at the bottom of the economic and social ladder in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Education – as stated in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights – shall be directed towards the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity. It shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups, and further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace. General Comment No. 13 of the Covenant outlines four essential elements that bind states in regard to the right to education: availability, access, acceptability, and adaptability. Based on the four fundamental elements of the right to education – availability, accessibility, acceptability, and adaptability – it becomes evident that Roma are among the most marginalised groups. An aggravating circumstance is also portrayed in the current conditions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, including a high unemployment rate, particularly among young people, an inadequate social protection system, and a low gross national income. An additional challenge lies in the presence of both passive and active discrimination against the Roma national minority, which significantly complicates the exercise of their right to education and its fundamental function. The authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, at all administrative levels, in cooperation with international institutions and organisations with missions and representative offices in BiH, as well as with Roma and other non-governmental organisations working on issues affecting the Roma population, have in recent years achieved significant and empirically verifiable results when it comes to meeting the educational needs of Roma. However, as many reports and other indicators show, a high percentage of Roma children still do not attend primary or secondary school, and very few are enrolled in higher education.

Employment of members of the Roma national minority in BiH is closely linked to the state and outcomes of education. Despite sporadic and occasional progress in this area, Roma remain the most unemployed national community in BiH. The reasons for this are multiple. First of all, the qualification structure of the Roma population in BiH is highly unfavourable. Furthermore, although there is no clear evidence of open or systematic discrimination against Roma in BiH, many employers are reluctant to hire them, particularly for more specialised or better-paid jobs. Moreover, Roma themselves own only a small number of businesses and shops, which limits their ability to employ many Roma. In general, progress in this area is unlikely without the application of positive discrimination principle, that is, actively giving preferential treatment to the Roma population in employment and more rigorously monitoring the behaviour of employers who hire Roma. The state authorities, for their part, through the competent education authorities and employment institutes/agencies, should support and finance necessary professional reskilling and/or upskilling aimed at acquiring new skills and qualifications suited to current conditions and labour market needs.

The majority of the Roma population in BiH today does not have even temporary, let alone permanent, housing solutions. In fact, this was also the case before the war in the former SFRY, which only partially relates to the pre-war nomadic lifestyle of certain groups and subgroups (e.g. *čergari*) of the Roma national minority in BiH. Therefore, this factor alone cannot account for the Roma population's lack of property ownership. The BiH Council of Ministers rejects claims that the Roma themselves were (or are) not interested in permanent housing solutions. Furthermore, many Roma have lived, and still live in inadequate housing, often built illegally and located in settlements with underdeveloped infrastructure. Many Roma had to leave their homes during the 1992-1995 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina from. Some of their property was usurped or destroyed, and they were among the last to have their property returned during the implementation of property laws. Also, they received the least donor or state funding for the reconstruction of their housing units. This is one of the main reasons why so many Roma still do not have adequate housing and lack future prospects. Therefore, the BiH Council of Ministers and other executive



bodies, primarily the entity and cantonal ministries and municipal departments for urban planning and property-legal affairs, consider it necessary to launch a strong “offensive” to provide housing for members of the Roma national minority.

The appropriate measure in this area is the legalisation of buildings built in the previous period without valid urban planning and legal documentation, that is, a radical reduction of costs in the process of legalising existing residential buildings, especially private homes, as well as the rehabilitation and humanisation of existing settlements that have the potential to “survive” and remain viable following monitoring and the application of minimum urban planning and infrastructural criteria and conditions. Equally important is the measure aimed at simplifying, shortening, and reducing the cost of the procedure for obtaining current urban planning, construction, and legal documentation for buildings yet to be constructed and intended exclusively for the Roma population – particularly through reducing land-use fees and charges for infrastructure connections. In doing so, authorities at all levels in BiH, particularly at the municipal level, will pay attention to the location and setting in which housing units for Roma are to be built, in order to prevent the Roma minority from being ghettoised or further discriminated against by the very choice of construction site. In other words, authorities will design and implement housing policies aimed at opening and facilitating the Roma’s integration path into BiH society, rather than further segregating and stigmatising them. The authorities in BiH must also ensure and implement mechanisms to mobilise financial resources from housing and similar funds that exist at the entity, cantonal, city, and municipal levels, both for direct investment in the construction of housing units intended for the accommodation of the Roma population, as a socially highly vulnerable category of citizens, and for encouraging individual housing construction by members of the Roma national minority.


According to all findings, in BiH, as is similarly the case in other countries of the region, the highest mortality rate is among Roma. At the same time, members of this national group have the lowest average life expectancy. The reasons for this are multiple, the most prominent being the inadequate healthcare available to Roma. The vast majority of the Roma population in BiH has no access to healthcare simply because they are not insured, and not necessarily because they are unemployed or lack any other form of subsidy or substitute for this right. Many do not even have a health insurance card (often because they were not registered in the birth registry, or due to some other reason), making it significantly more difficult for them to exercise this fundamental human right. Currently, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, this issue cannot be resolved in any other way except through the application of the principle of positive discrimination.

### **3.5.**

#### **Post-war Integration of Roma into Social, Cultural, and Other Aspects of Life in the Podrinje Region**

Today, the institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina must take concrete steps to fully integrate the Roma population into BiH society. Existing policies need to be implemented more efficiently in order to achieve the established goals in the areas of housing, employment, education, and healthcare. This also applies to the Podrinje region, where the number of Roma has visibly declined since the end of the war. It is necessary to motivate Roma to return to their pre-war places of residence in the Podrinje region by offering various incentives, such as employment opportunities, housing construction donation, etc., in accordance with the Roma action plans in BiH.

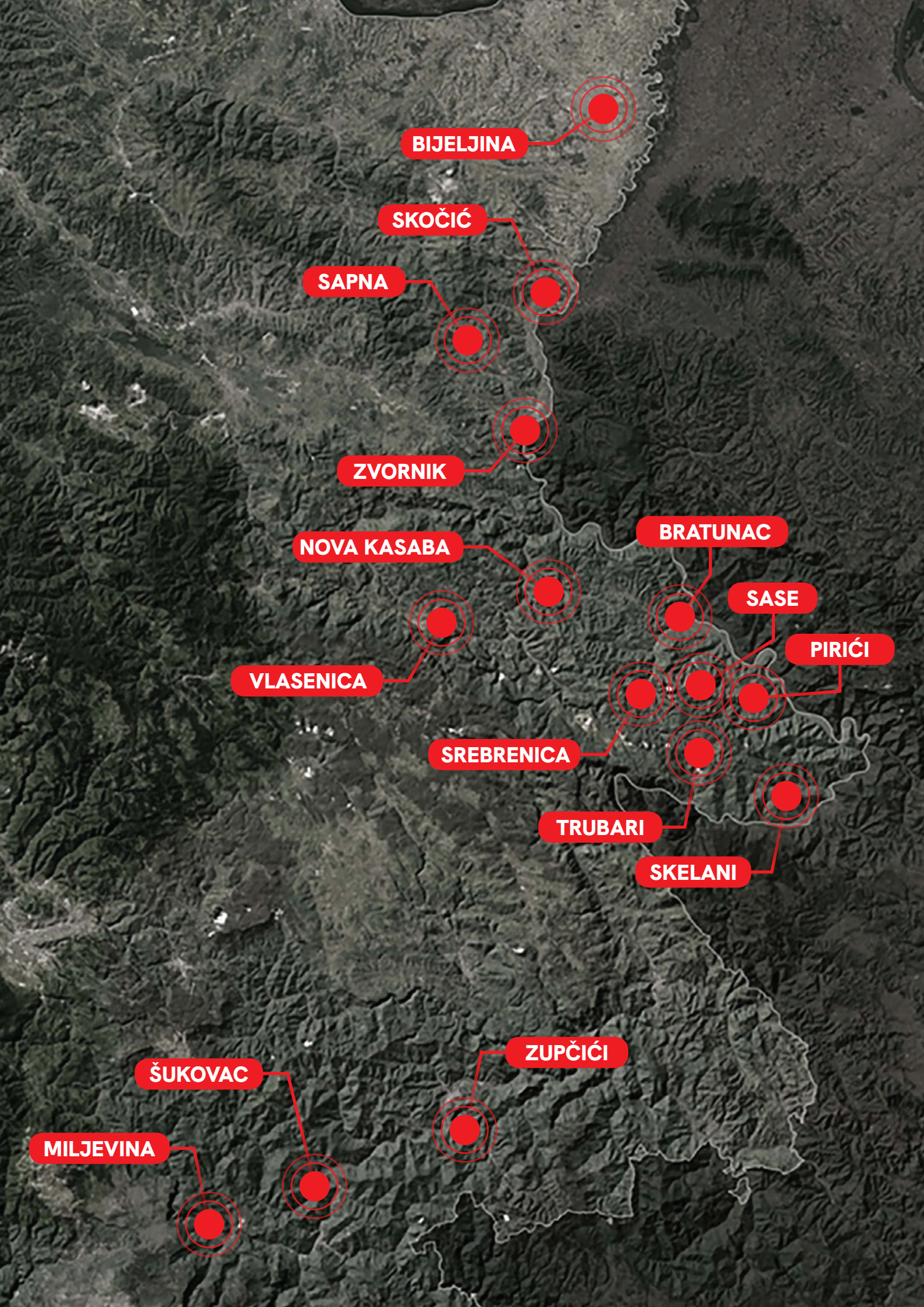




# **LOCATIONS**

**of Roma casualties  
in the Podrinje  
area during the  
period from 1992  
to 1995**





BIJELJINA

SKOČIĆ

SAPNA

ZVORNIK

NOVA KASABA

BRATUNAC

SASE

PIRIĆI

VLASENICA

SREBRENICA

TRUBARI

SKELANI

ŠUKOVAC

ZUPČIĆI

MILJEVINA



## 4.

# Results of the Research on the Suffering of Roma in the Podrinje Region in the Period 1992–1995

### 4.1.

#### Demographic Data

The data sources used were empirical, obtained through interview-based research. The respondents who participated in this research were analysed according to the following criteria:

##### a) Gender of Respondents

**Table 1.** Gender Structure of Respondents in the Research Sample

Gender	%
Male	72,00%
Female	28,00%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100,00%</b>

The sample is dominated by male respondents (72%) compared to female respondents (28%). This result reflects men's greater willingness to speak about the war.

##### b) Territorial Representation

**Table 2.** Territorial Representation of Respondents in the Research Sample

Territorial Representation	%
Foča	6,25%
Goražde	6,25%
Bratunac	12,50%
Srebrenica	12,50%
Vlasenica	6,25%
Milići	9,38%
Zvornik	21,87%
Sapna	12,50%
Bijeljina	12,50%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100,00%</b>

An analysis of the respondent sample shows that territorial representation is concentrated in four municipalities, with the highest percentage of respondents coming from the Municipality of Zvornik, accounting for 21.87% of the total number of respondents.

### c) Ethnic Affiliation of Respondents

**Table 3.** Ethnic Representation of Respondents in the Research Sample

Ethnic Affiliation of Respondents	%
Roma	62,50%
Non-Roma	37,50%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100,00%</b>

Table 3 shows that the ethnic representation in the respondent sample is predominantly Roma (62.5%).

**Table 4.** Ethnic Representation of Respondents in the Research Sample by Gender

Ethnic Affiliation of Respondents	%
Roma (male)	40,63%
Roma (female)	21,87%
Non-Roma (male)	31,25%
Non-Roma (female)	6,25%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100,00%</b>

Table 4 presents the ethnic representation of respondents by gender, clearly showing that the dominant category is “Roma (male)”, who make up 40.63% of the research sample. They are followed by non-Roma men (31.25%), Roma women (21.87%), and women who do not belong to the Roma ethnic group (6.25%).

## 4.2.

### Territorial Overview of the Suffering of Roma in the Podrinje Region in the Period 1992–1995

#### 4.2.1. THE SUFFERING OF ROMA IN FOČA

Foča is a municipality located in the southeastern part of Bosnia and Herzegovina, at the intersection of the M20 main road (Gacko – Foča – Goražde) and the M18 (Sarajevo – Foča – Nikšić). According to the 1991 census, the Municipality of Foča had 40,513 inhabitants, including 20,790 Bosniaks, 18,315 Serbs, and 94 Croats. There were 32 Roma inhabitants, or 0.08%. During the research, more people declared Romani as their mother tongue (37 people) than the number who identified as Roma.<sup>1</sup> There is no official data on Roma returnees to the Foča municipality. The same results were obtained during interviews conducted with members of the Roma population who lived in Foča before the war. The interviews confirmed that none of the Roma had returned to Foča, nor had their property been returned to them. According to the available data, Roma in the Municipality of Foča lived in two settlements: Šukovac and Miljevina.

##### 4.2.1.1. The Suffering of Roma in the Šukovac Settlement

Šukovac is a settlement located in the immediate vicinity of Foča, on the left bank of the Drina River. Before the war, the Roma community in Šukovac lived in their family homes. Although the exact number of Roma living in Šukovac in 1991 cannot be determined, one interviewee stated: “There were quite a few

*Roma in Šukovac... but I could not say exactly how many of us Roma lived in Foča at that time. They were all from the Seferović family."*

The Roma residents of Šukovac, like others, were expelled from the Foča region. One of the respondents describes it this way: *"We left our home in Foča before the war even started, during the rallies in 1992. We had to leave our home in Foča because all the Muslims were being expelled too. When we fled, we left everything behind. We only took our personal belongings. During the war, all the houses were destroyed, everything was flattened, not even the foundations remained."* Roma owned a blacksmith shop near the green market in Foča, and the son of the owner says: *"My father ran a blacksmith shop. It was near the green market in Foča... we had full ownership over the property. I never asked to get it back because I was afraid..."* *"Nothing was rebuilt, and no one ever offered to help us rebuild our houses."*

The collected data indicate that none of the Roma returned to the Foča region after the war, and their property was completely destroyed.

In addition to the destroyed property, one of the reasons they did not return to their pre-war place of residence was the fear for their own safety and the safety of their families.

#### **4.2.1.2. The Suffering of Roma in Miljevina**

Miljevina is a settlement located on the M18 main road, Foča – Sarajevo, 14 kilometres from Foča. Before the war, a Roma family lived in Miljevina. At the beginning of the war in 1992, the Roma family members remained in Miljevina and were not disturbed by the soldiers of the then JNA (Yugoslav People's Army) and Serbian militants. However, three months after the beginning of the war, one respondent stated: *"... one day, two Serbs arrived in a Lada car and ordered the men to get ready, to dress as they wished, and to go with them."* They took four men, three of whom, according to the respondent, were Muslims, and one, Ramo Ramović, the son of Vehbija and Arifa, was Roma. Ramo was executed together with the others.

This is corroborated by a statement from the District Public Prosecutor's Office in Trebinje. Namely, following an investigation, the District Public Prosecutor's Office in Trebinje raised an indictment on 19 September 2022 against Ilija Elez, also known as "Ico", for the criminal offence of War Crime Against the Civilian Population under Article 142, paragraph 1 of the Criminal Code of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, in conjunction with Article 22 of the same law. The indictment was confirmed by the District Court in Trebinje.

The indictment charges Ilija Elez with, together with another person who had since passed away, on an unspecified date between mid-April and approximately mid-June 1992, in the area of Mitrino vrelo, in Miljevina, Municipality of Foča, having arrived armed with an automatic rifle in a white "Lada Niva" vehicle in front of a house owned by R.H., where they conducted a search under threat of death, and unlawfully deprived of liberty the civilians R.A. (born 1928), M.H. (born 1955), and R.R. (born 1976), after which they drove them to the house owned by civilian H.H., whom they also unlawfully deprived of liberty, and then transported all four victims together to the location of Mitrino vrelo, where they executed them by gunfire.<sup>2</sup>

After some time, as the respondent states, an excavator arrived and he was ordered, along with several other people, to bury the murdered individuals in the Muslim cemetery. The respondent describes how the process unfolded: *"They told us to dig the ground, and we were afraid they might kill us there too, so we told them to dig the ground with the excavator, and when we see a body, we will take it out. That is how we proceeded, and we carried the bodies to the Muslim cemetery. I wrapped him (Ramo, ed.) separately in a blanket. After the war, he was transferred to Visoko and is now buried in Vlakovo."*

<sup>2</sup> Available at: <https://vsud-rs.pravosudje.ba/vstvfo/S/112/kategorije-vijesti/5292/5301/5303>, accessed on 1 April 2025 and available at: <https://detektor.ba/2023/04/14/elez-ilija-saznanja-o-ubistvima-civila-u-miljevini/>, accessed on 1 April 2025

After the execution of these individuals, available information indicates that persons of Roma ethnicity were held in detention in prefabricated barracks. They were imprisoned for three months in four such barracks. While confined there, according to a respondent's statement: *"There was yelling, and they were harassing the women... It happened every night, there was swearing... a little girl was raped... she was only 12 years old... I do not know who else among the women was raped, but we were listening to them crying every night, and the children were screaming."* After spending three months in these barracks, they were transported to Goražde along with other Bosniak civilians. There were a total of about 180 people in the convoy, including women and children. There are no Roma returnees in Miljevina today, and the site where the Roma family's barrack once stood is now occupied by a house owned by a person of Serb ethnicity.

#### 4.2.2. THE SUFFERING OF ROMA IN GORAŽDE

Goražde serves as the administrative and cultural centre of the Bosnian-Podrinje Canton. It is located on the banks of the Drina River, in the central part of its upper course.

According to the 1991 census, Goražde had a population of 37,573. The largest ethnic group were Muslims, now identified as Bosniaks, with 26,296 inhabitants, followed by Serbs with 9,843. There were 64 Roma, which made up 0.17% of the total population. Seventy-three people, or 0.19% of those who declared their linguistic affiliation, reported Romani as their mother tongue.

In Goražde, Roma lived in the suburban settlement of Zubčići, located approximately five kilometres from the city centre along the R448 road connecting Goražde and Čajniče.

Prior to the outbreak of the war, Roma fled toward Sarajevo, settling in the area of Butmir, which is why there were no Roma casualties during the war in Goražde itself. However, while they were in Butmir, members of the Seferović family were wounded. One Roma respondent stated: *"Hamdija's wife, Behara, was wounded in the stomach while she was pregnant, in Butmir near Sarajevo. Hamdija's father, whose*



**Roma cemetery,**  
Zubčić settlement,  
municipality Goražde



*name was Nazif, was also wounded by shrapnel in the arm and leg in Butmir. It was caused by a frangible bullet fired from the PAM submachine gun."*

All property in Zubčići was completely destroyed, and there are no Roma returnees to this settlement. This was confirmed by one of the Roma respondents, who stated: *"Currently, there are no Roma living in Zubčići; they now live in Podhranjen, in the Municipality of Goražde."* The only remaining trace of the Roma population in Zubčići today is the cemetery.

At present, ten Roma families with 32 underage children reside in the Goražde region. They are currently settled in Podhranjen and sustain themselves through social security benefits and waste collection.

#### **4.2.3. THE SUFFERING OF ROMA IN THE REGION OF VIŠEGRAD, RUDO AND ČAJNIČE**

During the course of the research, data on the composition of the population in the municipalities of Višegrad, Rudo and Čajniče were obtained from the FBiH Institute for Statistics. According to the 1991 census, there were no people of Roma ethnicity residing in these municipalities.<sup>3</sup>

#### **4.2.4. THE SUFFERING OF ROMA IN BRATUNAC**

Bratunac is a populated place and also the administrative centre of the municipality bearing the same name, located in northeastern Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to the 1991 census, the Bratunac region had 33,619 inhabitants. The majority were Muslims (Bosniaks), numbering 21,535, while there were 11,475 Serbs. The Roma population amounted to 154 persons, or 0.46% of the total population, with 68 individuals in Bratunac reporting that they spoke the Romani language, representing 0.20% of the total population.<sup>4</sup>

Bratunac is very specific when it comes to the Roma population. According to statements from respondents, a significant number of Roma live in the Bratunac region, but most prefer not to identify as Roma, but as Bosniaks. The reason for this is their affiliation with Islam.

During the research, it was conclusively established that Roma lived in the village of Pirići within the Bratunac region and that they were victims of wartime suffering.

##### **4.2.4.1. The Suffering of Roma in the Village of Pirići**

Pirići is a settlement in the Bratunac municipality. According to the 1991 census, it had 505 inhabitants, all of whom were Bosniaks.<sup>5</sup>

During the interview, one of the Bosniak respondents originally from Pirići stated: *"Before the war, I lived in the village of Pirići, Municipality of Bratunac. Besides Bosniaks, the Roma population also lived in Pirići. The Musić and Ferhatović families lived there with their relatives: Ćamil, Vehbija, Ramiz, Hasan, Ragib, Rahman, who passed away, Zoran, Omer, who moved to Bijeljina, Šefkija, who now lives in Germany, and Fadil... maybe around 40 inhabitants in total."*

Roma from Pirići actively participated in the defence of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is supported by the fact that they even gave their lives for this purpose, as evidenced by relevant documentation.

On the memorial in Pirići, Roma are listed among the people killed in the area:

Musić (Šaban) Fadil, born in 1960, killed in 1993;

Musić (Fadil) Azem, born in 1977, killed in 1993. Fadil and Azem were father and son, and both died from a tank shell;

Musić (Hakija) Ćamil, born in 1958, killed in June 1992;

3 Source: FBiH Institute for Statistics.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

**Memorial to the  
victims of war,**  
village of Pirići,  
municipality  
Bratunac



Musić (Hakija) Ragib, born in 1967, killed in 1995, buried at the Memorial Centre in Potočari;

Ferhatović (Sabrija) Džemal, known as “Zoran”, born in 1975, killed in 1995 and buried at the Memorial Centre in Potočari;

Ferhatović (Belija) Miralem, born in 1911, remained in Srebrenica in 1995, after which all traces of him were lost, and he is still officially listed as missing and as a civilian victim of war.

Roma from this region have never returned to Pirići, nor have they visited the village even 30 years after expulsion. Many remain displaced and live all over the world. Interviews were conducted with people who currently reside in the Sapna and Tuzla regions.

The first respondent emphasized: *“The civilians fled to Srebrenica when this region fell into the hands of the Army of the Republika Srpska on 6 April 1993. The Roma houses were completely destroyed, and only overgrown walls remain. The village no longer exists at all. Nothing has ever been rebuilt, nor has anyone requested reconstruction.”*

The second respondent, a Roma woman, stated the following: *“Before the war, I lived in the village of Pirići, Municipality of Bratunac. When the war started, the Serbian army came. They were shooting. We fled through the forests and managed to escape to Srebrenica. I have never been back to Pirići after the war, and I do not know what happened to our houses, they were probably destroyed. I know that in 1992 or 1993, Fadil Musić and his son Azem were killed – they died when a shell exploded in Pirići. After the fall of Srebrenica, my son-in-law Ragib Musić, son of Hakija, was killed. His body was found in a mass grave, I think in Kamenica, in 2007. My brother, Džemal Ferhatović, was also killed. He was in a group with my son-in-law, heading from Srebrenica towards free territory. My father, Miralem Ferhatović, was also killed. He still has not been found or identified. We gave blood sample for identification purposes and we are still searching for him.”*

The next respondent stated: *“We lived before the war in the village of Pirići, Municipality of Bratunac. We lived there until 1992, as I was told. During the war, we were expelled and lived in Srebrenica. We*

stayed there until 1995, when Srebrenica fell under the control of the Army of the Republika Srpska... My father's name was Ragib Musić, son of Hakija, and he was killed after the fall of Srebrenica in 1995. His body was found in a mass grave, I believe in Kamenica, in 2007. My sister and I gave blood samples, and that is how he was identified. My uncle was found in 2018. He was in the group with my father, leaving Srebrenica. His name was Džemal Ferhatović. My grandfather, Miralem Ferhatović, was also killed. He has still not been found or identified. We gave blood samples for his identification as well. My father and uncle were buried at the Memorial Centre in Potočari."

The fourth respondent stated: "Before the war, I lived in the village of Pirići, Municipality of Bratunac. My father and brother were killed during the war. My father's name was Fadil, and my brother's name was Azem... They were members of the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina... They were killed together on the frontline near Pirići, but I do not remember the exact year. I was very young at the time. The army buried them... Even today, I do not know where my father and brother were buried... There were many Roma families in Pirići before the war, but I do not know exactly how many. My family had its own house, and we lived there - my father, brother, mother, and I. My father was not employed. We lived by farming the land and struggled to survive, but we lived honestly. As for our house in Pirići, it was destroyed, like all the other houses. There were probably around 20 Roma houses in Pirići, including Musić, Ferhatović, and Omerović families... We were expelled from Pirići during the war and fled to Srebrenica, and later, after the fall of Srebrenica, we were transported with other people by trucks and buses and arrived in Tuzla."

The database kept by the Missing Persons Institute of BiH contains records of the following persons of Roma ethnicity originating from the village of Pirići, Municipality of Bratunac: Ferhatović (Sabrija) Džemal - date of birth: 12 November 1973; place of birth: Sremska Mitrovica; identified through nuclear DNA; Municipality of disappearance: Bratunac; place of disappearance: Kravica; date of disappearance: 13 July 1995. Musić (Hakija) Ragib - date of birth: 21 January 1967; place of birth: Pirići; identified through nuclear DNA; Municipality of disappearance: Srebrenica; place of disappearance: Potočari; date of disappearance: 11 July 1995.

#### 4.2.5. THE SUFFERING OF ROMA IN SREBRENICA

Srebrenica is a town in northeastern Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to the pre-war 1991 census, it had a population of 36,666, of which 27,572 were Muslims (Bosniaks) and 8,315 were Serbs. At that time, there were 161 Roma residing in Srebrenica, representing 0.44% of the total population.<sup>6</sup> Roma were victims of all forms and methods of crimes committed during the war, including the gravest of crimes - genocide. As a result of the war, Roma were almost entirely ethnically cleansed from the Municipality of Srebrenica, and their return in the post-war period has been nearly negligible.

During the research, several key locations where Roma suffered were mapped. These include Srebrenica, Skelani, Trubari, and Sase. In addition, Roma were expelled from the villages of Pišnje and Posulice, where there were several Roma houses and family households.

##### 4.2.5.1. The Suffering of Roma in Srebrenica

One of the Roma respondents stated: "Before the war, I lived well with my family - my father had a good job, so we lived comfortably. I travelled all over Yugoslavia and Turkey. We lived in our own household, in a privately-owned house in Srebrenica. Simply, life was good... we had vehicles and were really well-off, as they say... Before the war, no one cared who was who, or what people were... I did not know who was a Serb, a Muslim, or a Croat. We all attended each other's celebrations and events. I remember we would all go to the spring - the small Guber in Kiselica - and gather there every year... Roma lived in the Kazani settlement. At the beginning of the war in 1992, Arkan's men came to our settlement because they

6 Source: FBiH Institute for Statistics.



**Settlement of  
Kazani**, municipality  
of Srebrenica



**Cemetery**, settlement of Kazani, municipality of Srebrenica

*knew Roma lived there, and they were looking for weapons. As a kid, I was watching, and then one of Arkan's men called me over. I approached, and he asked me if I had any weapons. They lined us up – me, my uncles, my cousins, and our Muslim neighbours. There were about 15 of us. Then Ostoja, the chief of police, a Serb, arrived, pulled out his badge, and told them that Gypsies live here and that we did not have any weapons. Then they fired two bursts from their guns and left."*

*"We were lined up: me, Nurdin Hakić, son of Hajra, Fahrudin Hakić, Vejsil Hakuć, Nurdin Hakuć, son of Hamdija, Pele Lelić, Fikret Bajrić, and others. None of them survived the genocide in 1995, except for Pele."*

The collected data also indicate that Roma were members of the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina during the war and actively participated in the defence of Srebrenica until July 1995. One of the

Roma respondents stated: *“I was a member of the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina from the very beginning until the end of the war, and I was a patriot in the defence of the country the entire time.”*

The research has revealed that individuals of Roma ethnicity, alongside Bosniaks, were victims of the genocide committed in and around Srebrenica in July 1995, and were subjected to killings and executions. They were later found in mass graves. This is confirmed in a Witness Examination Record of the Sector for Investigation of War Crimes of the State Investigation and Protection Agency (SIPA),<sup>7</sup> which states the following: *“... I remember it was late in the day, and together with Zlatan I transported some people, but I do not recall their names. I did not bring anyone from my battalion, as they had gone to Sućeska. On the first day, I recognised several Roma from Srebrenica; I did not know the others. I asked one of the Roma men who had installed the small power station in front of my house. He told me he did not know, as he was not there at the time. I told him I did not know what would happen to him. One of his sons used to come, he was deaf and mute; and his brother died last year in Tuzla...”* This refers to the events of July 1995, when Bosniak and Roma men – prisoners – were detained in the “Vuk Karadžić” primary school in Bratunac,<sup>8</sup> where killings were committed. They were later deported toward the Zvornik area, where they were systematically executed and buried in mass graves: Branjevo, Pilica, the Dam in Potkovci, Orahovac, and Kozluk.

List of persons killed or reported missing:

**Hakić (Ramiz) Jusuf, born on 20 September 1952**, was killed at the beginning of the war in 1992, in the area of Karakaj, Municipality of Zvornik. His remains have not yet been found. He is listed in the database of the Missing Persons Institute of BiH; not identified, reported missing on 9 April 1992 in Jordan, Municipality of Zvornik;

**Hakić (Jusuf) Nermin, born on 1 September 1976**, was killed at the beginning of the war in 1992, in the area of Karakaj, Municipality of Zvornik. His remains have not yet been found. He is listed in the database of the Missing Persons Institute of BiH; not identified, reported missing on 9 April 1992 in Jordan, Municipality of Zvornik;

**Hakić (Ramo) Ramiz, born on 14 June 1922** in Srebrenica, was last seen in Ljubovija in 1993. He was reportedly killed near or on the Ljubovija Bridge, and his remains have never been found. In 1992, he travelled to Ljubovija to stay with his sister Zulfa and remained there until 1993, when he attempted to cross the Drina River – at which point he was killed. He is listed in the database of the Missing Persons Institute of BiH; not identified, reported missing on 1 May 1994 in Ljubovija (then part of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, now the Republic of Serbia);

**Hakić (Ramiz) Vejsil, born on 11 December 1955** in Srebrenica, killed in 1995. His remains were found in a mass grave and he was buried at the Srebrenica – Potočari Memorial Centre. He is listed in the database of the Missing Persons Institute of BiH; identified through DNA analysis, reported missing on 11 July 1995;

**Hakić (Vejsil) Elvir, born on 11 August 1975** in Zvornik, killed in 1995. His remains were found in a mass grave and he was buried at the Srebrenica – Potočari Memorial Centre. He is listed in the database of the Missing Persons Institute of BiH; identified through DNA analysis, reported missing on 11 July 1995;

**Hakić Hamdija**, killed in 1995. His remains were found in a mass grave and he was buried at the Srebrenica – Potočari Memorial Centre;

**Hakić (Hamdija) Nurdin, born on 1 January 1975** in Srebrenica, killed in 1995. His remains were found in a mass grave and he was buried at the Srebrenica – Potočari Memorial Centre. He is listed in the database of the Missing Persons Institute of BiH; identified through DNA analysis, reported missing on 11 July 1995;

7 Archives of the Srebrenica – Potočari Memorial Centre and Cemetery for the Victims of the 1995 Genocide

8 After the war, in Bratunac, a name swap between the primary schools “Vuk Karadžić” and “Branko Radičević” was most likely carried out in order to conceal the location, traces, and perpetrators of the crimes, as the “Vuk Karadžić” primary school was the place of horrific crimes committed in both 1992 and 1995.



**Hakić (Hamdija) Fahrudin, born on 1 February 1969** in Bratunac, killed in 1995. His remains were found in a mass grave and he was buried at the Srebrenica – Potočari Memorial Centre. He is listed in the database of the Missing Persons Institute of BiH; identified through DNA analysis, reported missing on 11 July 1995;

**Hakić (Hamdija) Admir, killed in 1995.** His remains were found in a mass grave and he was buried at the Srebrenica – Potočari Memorial Centre;

**Hakić Hajro, born on 1 March 1995** in Srebrenica, killed in 1995. His remains were found in a mass grave and he was buried at the Srebrenica – Potočari Memorial Centre. He is listed in the database of the Missing Persons Institute of BiH; identified through DNA analysis, reported missing on 11 July 1995;

**Hakić (Hajro) Nurdin, born on 22 February 1965,** killed in 1995. His remains were found in a mass grave and he was buried at the Srebrenica – Potočari Memorial Centre;

**Hakić Sejad, born on 1 January 1961 in Srebrenica,** killed in 1995. His remains were found in a mass grave and he was buried at the Srebrenica – Potočari Memorial Centre. He is listed in the database of the Missing Persons Institute of BiH; identified through DNA analysis, reported missing on 11 July 1995;

**Hakić Senad, born on 28 January 1965** in Srebrenica, killed in 1995. His remains were found in a mass grave and he was buried at the Srebrenica – Potočari Memorial Centre. He is listed in the database of the Missing Persons Institute of BiH; identified through DNA analysis, reported missing on 11 July 1995;

**Hakić (Ramiz) Medo, born on 16 June 1962** in Srebrenica, killed in 1995. His remains have not yet been found. He is listed in the database of the Missing Persons Institute of BiH.

In addition to the killings and enforced disappearances in this area, one of the respondents highlighted the following: *“Many Roma women who were raped see war criminals walking freely in Srebrenica and Bratunac, and they are afraid that it could happen again... War criminals must be held accountable for their crimes. The war left an impact on me; you can feel the trauma, the stress. Sometimes I cannot sleep, the images come back of who I once had and who is no longer here, everything I have been through, and then I just cannot sleep.”*

The suffering in Srebrenica is further reflected in the destruction of both movable and immovable property. Immovable property (houses, garages, business premises, barns, etc.) was completely looted and then destroyed.

#### **4.2.5.2. The Suffering of Roma in Skelani**

Skelani is a settlement in the northeast of Bosnia and Herzegovina, located right on the bank of the Drina River. On the opposite bank of the Drina lies the town of Bajina Bašta in the Republic of Serbia. Roma from Skelani were victims both at the beginning of the war in 1992 and during the genocide in 1995. One respondent, a Bosniak resident of Skelani, said the following in an interview: *“I know that before the war, several Roma families lived in the Skelani area. They lived in four houses, which were located on the street to the left of the main road when coming from Rešagići towards Skelani. I know that at the beginning of the war, the Serbian army killed some members of those families, but I do not know their names. I also know that none of those families returned to Skelani and that their houses were destroyed during the war... As far as I recall, all of those neighbours were found in a mass grave, and their bodies were buried at the Memorial Centre in Kalesija.”*

The fact that Roma lived in Skelani before the outbreak of the war and were victims of crimes is also confirmed by the factual basis of the indictment against Slavko Milovanović, who was charged by the Prosecutor’s Office of Bosnia and Herzegovina for crimes committed in this area in 1992, as stated:

“Count II.8 of the indictment charges the accused, Slavko Milovanović, with the criminal offence of crimes against humanity in that, as a member of the reserve unit of the Security Service Centre Sarajevo, Public Security Station Skelani, Ministry of the Interior of the Republika Srpska (Mol RS), he committed persecution of the Bosniak and **Roma population** from the settlements of Rešagići and Skelani on political, national, ethnic, cultural and religious grounds, through deportation or forcible transfer of the population from the



**Devastated Roma house**, settlement of Skelani, municipality of Srebrenica

territory in which they lawfully resided, as well as through other inhumane acts of a similar nature committed with the intention of inflicting great suffering and serious physical or mental injury or harm to health.”<sup>9</sup>

#### **4.2.5.3. The Suffering of Roma in Trubari**

Research has revealed that members of the Roma population lived in the village of Trubari, including Roma families Halilović and Salkić.

During the war, a Roma named Vejsil, most likely bearing the surname Halilović, from Trubari, went missing and is believed to have been killed. His remains were discovered, but specific details about the location of the discovery, the identification, burial site, and other information could not be obtained.

It is important to note that there were three settlements within this locality where Roma lived: Jezero, Ljutovo (inhabited by the Muratović family), and Ljubovoda. In addition, Roma families lived in two houses in the area of Posulice. Prior to the war, Roma also resided near the village of Tihći, in the hamlet of Pišonje.

During the war, Roma houses were set on fire. After the war, during the process of demining and clearing, the remnants of these houses were levelled, leaving no visible trace of them today.

#### **4.2.5.4. The Suffering of Roma in Sase**

In May 1992, in the Kolonija settlement, within the local community of Sase, Municipality of Srebrenica, two Roma civilians, Alaga Halilović and Mejra Halilović, were killed. According to the description of the criminal act, Saša Cvetković, dressed in camouflage uniform and armed with an automatic rifle, brought Zoran Halilović, Alaga’s son and Mejra’s grandson, and ordered him to go to the village of Lasovac, also in

<sup>9</sup> Case before the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina: S1 1 K 023868 19 Kžk – Slavko Milovanović, available at: <https://www.sudbih.gov.ba/Court/Case/1097>, accessed on 21 March 2025



**Burned Roma house,** village of Trubari, municipality of Srebrenica



**Roma cemetery,** village of Trubari, municipality of Srebrenica

the Sase area, and deliver a message to the Muslim residents demanding that they surrender and hand over their weapons. He handed Zoran a note with the message and threatened that if he failed to complete the task by the evening, his father Alaga and grandmother Mejra, an elderly woman with limited mobility who lived with him in the family home, would be killed. When Zoran Halilović did not return within the set deadline, Saša Cvetković, accompanied by members of the Army of the Republika Srpska, went to the Halilović family home. As Alaga stepped out to the gate in front of the house, Saša Cvetković opened fire with his automatic weapon, killing him instantly. He then entered the yard and opened burst-fire at Mejra Halilović, who was sitting on the porch. She was killed instantly and remained slumped against the house railing.<sup>10</sup>

According to witness testimony during the court proceedings, their bodies were taken to the area of the mine (Rudnik) and have not been found to this day; they are still listed as missing. The judgment further states: *"The accused, Saša Cvetković, during his hearing at the main trial in the capacity of a witness, stated that he knew the victims, Mejra and Alaga, explaining that they were mother and son, and that they lived together with Alaga's son near his apartment in Sase. In his closing statement, he added that they were miserable and helpless – that is, ill, immobile, and incapable."*

For the aforementioned murders, along with other criminal offences, the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina rendered a judgment on 22 March 2019 in case S1 1 K 023242 17 Kri, finding the accused, Saša Cvetković, guilty of the criminal offence of War Crime Against the Civilian Population under Article 142, paragraph 1 of the Criminal Code of the SFRY, and sentencing him to 12 (twelve) years of imprisonment.

The judgment of the Court of BiH states that Alaga was born on 10 March 1926 and Mejra on 12 September 1900, meaning that at the time of the criminal offence, Mejra was 92 and Alaga 66 years old.

Zoran Halilović, son of Alaga, from Sase, Municipality of Srebrenica, who had been ordered by Saša Cvetković to deliver a message to the local Muslim population instructing them to surrender and hand over their weapons, later became a victim of the wartime atrocities in Srebrenica in July 1995. According to the database of the Missing Persons Institute of BiH, Zoran Halilović, son of Alaga, born on 16 April 1961 in Sase, was reported missing on 11 July 1995 in Potočari, Municipality of Srebrenica, and was identified through DNA analysis.

#### 4.2.6. THE SUFFERING OF ROMA IN VLASENICA

Vlasenica is a town located in northeastern Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to the 1991 census, the Municipality of Vlasenica had a population of 33,942, including 18,727 Muslims (Bosniaks), 14,359 Serbs, and a smaller number of Others. Among them were 221 Roma, making up approximately 0.65% of the total population.<sup>11</sup>

As a people, Roma were victims of the war and armed conflicts in the Vlasenica region, primarily through the loss of property, as most of them left Vlasenica several months before the outbreak of the war.

According to available information, approximately 2,000 Roma lived in the Vlasenica region prior to the war, mostly large families with many children.

One of the respondents stated: *"Roma lived in three villages: Barice, Toplik, and Drum, and now no one lives there... we would all return, but refugees came and are now living in our houses. Currently, there are no Roma living in those villages, and some houses were looted, burned down during the war, and some were completely destroyed... in Barice, almost all the houses were demolished."*

Before the war, Roma mostly worked at the company "Finali" in Vlasenica, and their children attended school. Today, Roma from the Vlasenica region live across Europe and the rest of the world.

10 See: First Instance Judgment of the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, number: S1 1 K 023242 17 Kri dated 22 March 2019, available at: <https://www.sudbih.gov.ba/Court/Case/1125>, accessed on 6 April 2025

11 Source: FBiH Institute for Statistics.





**Roma cemetery**, municipality of Vlasenica

One respondent recalls that the following families used to live in Vlasenica: Osmanović, Sejdić, Čizmić, Hrustić, Sejdović, Hamidović, and Omerović.

The following families lived in **Barice**:

Ismet Osmanović with his family, comprising ten members;  
 Mehmedalija Osmanović with his family, comprising five members;  
 Ahmet Sejdić with his family, comprising nine members;  
 Hajro Hrustić with his family, comprising eight members;  
 Nezir Hamidović with his family, comprising eleven members;  
 Muradif Hrustić with his family, comprising seven members;  
 Ibrahim Hrustić with his family, comprising nine members;  
 Ismet Hrustić with his family, comprising eight members;  
 Delija Omerović with his family, comprising nine members;  
 Akif Hamidović with his family, comprising six members;  
 Krajina Hamidović with his family, comprising five members;  
 Bajro (also known as Bego) Sejdić with his family, comprising nine members.

The following families lived in **Drum**:

Mujo Omerović with his family, comprising ten members;  
 Krajina Sejdović with his family, comprising sixteen members;  
 Rahman Hrustić with his family, comprising eleven members;  
 Fazlija Hrustić with his family, comprising ten members;  
 Redžo Sejdović with his family, comprising eight members.



**Devastated Roma settlement of Ciganluk**, municipality of Zvornik

The following families lived in **Toplik**:

Hasan Hrustić with his family, comprising ten members;

Sejfo Hrustić with his family, comprising eight members;

Ragib Hrustić with his family, comprising eleven members;

Šaban Hrustić with his family, comprising three members.

#### **4.2.7. THE SUFFERING OF ROMA IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF MILIĆI, THE SETTLEMENT OF NOVA KASABA**

Milići is a town in eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina. Nova Kasaba is a local community within the Municipality of Milići, where, prior to the war, 1,042 people lived – 814 of whom were Muslims (Bosniaks), 76 Serbs, 11 Yugoslavs, and 141 Others. It is reasonably assumed that a significant number of Roma were included in the category of Others.<sup>12</sup> In Nova Kasaba, there was a hamlet called Ciganluk located near the Jadar River, where Roma families resided. At the beginning of the war, in the spring of 1992, the Roma families were forcibly expelled from their homes. A respondent who lived in Nova Kasaba before the war stated: *“About 80 members of the Roma population lived in Nova Kasaba. I know the Suljić and Tursunović families lived there, while the families Cibralić and Đekić did not identify as Roma, but as Muslims. Eight or nine Roma were killed during the war.”*

<sup>12</sup> Source: 1991 *Ethnic Composition of the Population: Results by Municipalities and Settlements*, Bulletin No. 234, Statistical Office of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo, 1993



**Devastated Roma settlement,**

Nova Kasaba,  
municipality of  
Milići"



Based on the memorial dedicated to those killed in Nova Kasaba, it can be concluded that, alongside other victims, there are individuals with the surnames Suljić and Tursunović who are reasonably believed to have been of Roma origin, namely:

Tursunović (Šaban) Salko, 1918–1993;  
Tursunović (Zerif) Šerifa, 1928–1993;  
Tursunović (Emin) Hasan, 1945–1992;  
Tursunović (Džulaga) Hanija, 1930–1992;  
Suljić (Suljo) Obran, 1942–1995;  
Suljić (Hašim) Džafer, 1921–1995;  
Suljić (Zuhdija) Safeta, 1942–1992;  
Suljić (Džafer) Ševala, 1972–1995.

Currently, no members of the Roma community have returned to Nova Kasaba. Some individuals occasionally visit to check on their former homes, which are largely damaged or completely destroyed.

#### 4.2.8. THE SUFFERING OF ROMA IN ZVORNIK

The territory of the Municipality of Zvornik covers an area of 387 square kilometres and is located in



**Memorial to the murdered residents,**  
Nova Kasaba, municipality of Milići

northeastern Bosnia. Before the war, according to the 1991 census, 81,295 people lived in the Municipality of Zvornik, of whom 48,102 were Muslims (Bosniaks) and 30,863 were Serbs. These were the largest ethnic groups, while the number of Roma recorded in the census was 269, or 0.33% of the total population.<sup>13</sup>

The suffering of Roma in Zvornik was recorded at the very beginning of the war in 1992. It was documented that Mevludin Adilović was killed in Branjevo after being taken from his home on 9 April 1992. His brothers, Rahman and Izet Adilović, were also taken in 1992 and killed that same year at Kula. Reportedly, *“Serbs in civilian clothes came at the beginning of the war in 1992... and told Mevludin to take his ID card and come with them for questioning. Others were also taken, including his brother Izet, who was taken to Srpska Varoš... There, they were trampled and beaten.”* The body of Mevludin Adilović was found in a mass grave in Kazanbašča. One of his brothers, Rahman, was found with him, while the other, Izet, was found at Crni Vrh. Mevludin was identified through DNA analysis and buried at the Kula cemetery.

According to the testimony of a female witness: *“From Kazanbašča, bodies were exhumed from the mass grave using machinery and transported to Crni Vrh. In addition to Crni Vrh, they also transferred bodies from Kazanbašča to Ramin Grob. One evening, I went to Serbia with my children to get some rest, and from the window I watched as an excavator removed bodies and loaded them onto a truck and they drove away. I saw all this from the settlement of Mali Zvornik.”*

Dušan Spasojević, Ratko Todorović, and Radomir Škiljević were sentenced to long-term imprisonment in a first-instance judgment for the war crime committed at the administrative building of the company “Novi izvor” in Zvornik, where a detention camp had been established. Among the victims held in the camp was a person of Roma ethnicity, B. M., who was subjected to physical and sexual abuse.

#### **4.2.8.1. The Suffering of Roma in Skočić**

Skočić is a settlement in the Municipality of Zvornik. It is located near the M19 road, 17 kilometres from Zvornik in the direction of Bijeljina. According to the 1991 census, 554 inhabitants lived there. Of that number, 412 were Muslims (Bosniaks), 107 were Serbs, one was a Yugoslav, and 34 were classified as Others.<sup>14</sup>

One of the most horrific crimes of the previous war in Bosnia and Herzegovina was committed in Skočić. One of the survivors of this crime is Zijo Ribić, who recounts that everything *“began in the village of Skočić, and the killings took place in the village of Malešić, Municipality of Zvornik... I remember that Simo’s Chetniks, a paramilitary unit from Serbia, came to the village on 12 July 1992, around six o’clock in the evening, in military trucks. They passed by the house where we had gathered – it was the home of Hamdija Ribić. Simo’s Chetniks went to the mosque and we heard a detonation, but we did not know what was happening. Then they returned to the house where we were and started to beat and assault us. They also committed rapes there. Then they forced us out of the house and separated the men from the women, and again started beating us. They forced us onto the trucks, men and women separately. The abuse in Skočić lasted for about an hour. They drove us away, and I saw that we turned near the mosque in Kozluk. There, they stopped and separated three girls – my cousins, though I will not mention their names now... They were later used as sex slaves and were raped afterwards. They brought us to Malešić, both the men and the women. At that point I started crying. There, they began beating us again, and I remember that there were also rapes. They took people behind the truck, and we could hear screams and gunshots. After a short while, a girl named Dragana Džekić, who was part of Simo’s Chetniks, took my hand, told me not to cry, and that she would take me to my mother. Dragana led me in front of the truck. I heard a gunshot and felt a stab wound to my neck. I fell down. They thought I was dead. They threw me into a pit with the other bodies. During the crime committed in my village of Skočić, 27 Roma were killed – all of*

<sup>13</sup> Source: FBiH Institute for Statistics.

<sup>14</sup> Source: 1991 *Ethnic Composition of the Population: Results by Municipalities and Settlements*, Bulletin No. 234, Statistical Office of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo, 1993





**Devastated Roma settlement,** Skočić, municipality of Zvornik



**Zijo Ribić**, witness of the wartime suffering of Roma in the Roma settlement of Skočić, municipality of Zvornik

**Researchers Dervo Sejdić, Ejub Zukić, and Omer Gabela**, settlement of Skočić, municipality of Zvornik

them were killed in the village of Malešić, while in Skočić we were only beaten, abused, and the women were raped. There were also rapes, I do not know how many exactly, both in Skočić and in Malešić.

The houses in the village of Skočić were looted. There were around 30 houses. None of the Roma population has returned... The murdered Roma from Skočić were found in a mass grave at Crni Vrh, Municipality of Zvornik. I was notified about the remains of my father and mother in 2007, and my sisters in 2016 and 2017."

Zijo points out that his relatives, cousins, and neighbours from the village of Ribići were killed in the village of Malešić, Municipality of Zvornik, in the local community of Kozluk. This refers to a primary mass grave that was likely relocated during the war to Crni Vrh, Municipality of Zvornik.

*"In Skočić, 27 people were killed, and three young girls were separated on the way to Malešić. I am the only one who survived, although I was wounded in the upper part of my left arm by a bullet, probably from a "Papovka" rifle, which also has a bayonet attached. I have a scar on the back of my head from the bayonet. I would like to emphasise that my mother was nine months pregnant at the time of her death," Zijo states.*

When it comes to the property in the village, Zijo states that the houses in Skočić were devastated and looted, and that auxiliary buildings (garages, sheds, stables) were also damaged.

Concerning the perpetrators of the crime, Zijo says: *"I know that the perpetrators of the crime in my village were members of the paramilitary unit known as Simo's Chetniks."*

The names of those killed from the village of Skočić have been established, and the list is provided as presented in the amended indictment, with the ages redacted, as follows:

1. Aganović Mehmed, 1921–1992;
2. Aganović Bisera, 1920–1992;
3. Aganović Esed, 1961–1992;
4. Aganović Zekira, also known as Muradija, 1961–1992;
5. Aganović Beriz, 1979–1992;
6. Aganović Šerifa, 1951–1992;
7. Aganović Ešefa, 1941–1992;
8. Aganović Mirzet, also known as Šaban, 1980–1992;
9. Bajrić Džemila, 1928–1992;
10. Bajrić Zumra;
11. Ferhatović Muška, also known as Bisera, 1941–1992;
12. Nuhanović Ziba, 1935–1992;
13. Nuhanović Hadžira, 1905–1992;
14. Ribić Ismet, 1959–1992;
15. Ribić Sarajka, 1931–1992;
16. Ribić Mehmed, 1934–1992;
17. Ribić Rahima, 1934–1992;
18. Ribić Šemsudin, also known as Šemso;
19. Ribić Biber, 1930–1992;
20. Ribić Ševka, who at the time was in an advanced stage of pregnancy, 1963–1992;
21. Ribić Sabrija, 1990–1992;
22. Ribić Zlatija, who was raped prior to being killed, 1979–1992;
23. Ribić Ismeta, 1989–1992;
24. Ribić Zlata, 1992–1992;
25. Ribić Suada, 1987–1992;
26. Ribić Zijada, 1988–1992;
27. Ribić Almasa, 1988–1992.

The Cantonal Prosecutor's Office of the Tuzla Canton conducted an investigation into the killing of 34 persons of Roma ethnicity in the village of Skočić, Municipality of Zvornik, on 26 June 1992. A comparison between the list of names from the indictment and the list of individuals named on the memorial reveals that there are other persons mentioned on the memorial who are not included in the list established by the Higher Court in Belgrade. These names are:



Ribić (Ismet) Ilijaz, 1976–1992;  
 Nuhanović (Aljo) Arif, 1934–1992;  
 Bajrić (Ramo) Šaban, 1932–1992;  
 Ahmetović (Muharem) Šemsudin, 1968–1992;  
 Alić (Hasan) Alija, 1939–1992;  
 Dedović (Avdija) Avdija, 1960–1992;  
 Jamaković (Ilijaz) Mehmed, 1949–1992;  
 Junuzović (Nedim) Halil, 1969–1992;  
 Mehmedović (Džemil) Šaćir, 1952–1992;  
 Tahirbegović (Derviš) Ahmet, 1911–1992;  
 Vehapi (Ćazim) Džemalija, 1962–1992;  
 Vehapi (Ćazim) Dževad, 1972–1992.

In addition to the proceedings before the Higher Court in Belgrade – War Crimes Department, the judicial and security authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina also investigated the crime committed in Skočić, specifically the Cantonal Prosecutor's Office of the Tuzla Canton, the Prosecutor's Office of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the State Investigation and Protection Agency (SIPA).

#### 4.2.9. THE SUFFERING OF ROMA IN SAPNA

Sapna is located in the northeastern part of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is territorially part of the Tuzla Canton. From an administrative perspective, Sapna began functioning as a municipality on 18 March 1998, when the municipal council met for the first time following a decision by the FBiH Parliament. The Municipality of Sapna was established by dividing the former Municipality of Zvornik into two parts: the Municipality of Zvornik in the Republika Srpska and the Municipality of Sapna in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>15</sup>

##### 4.2.9.1. The Suffering of Roma in Vrla Strana, Biberovići and Donji Zaseok

Roma lived in the Sapna region in the settlements of Vrla Strana, Biberovići, and Donji Zaseok. One of the respondents stated the following: *“Before the war, we lived in the village of Vrla Strana, which was then part of the Municipality of Zvornik, and now belongs to the Municipality of Sapna. At that time, there were 12 houses inhabited by Roma families in the village. When the war began, the residents of Vrla Strana were expelled from their homes, so they became refugees. They were forced to leave their homes when the Serbian army attacked. They initially fled into the forest, where they spent six nights, and then moved on to Zukići.”*

Roma families Biberović and Musić lived in Vrla Strana. The respondent further stated: *“A Roma individual, Mirsad Biberović, son of Rahman, was captured during the war and imprisoned in Karakaj. While in captivity, he was beaten, resulting in four of his ribs being broken. He was tied to a radiator, bound and beaten... Mirsad was imprisoned for more than two months. He is now ill and lives in France.”*

It should be noted that in early May 1992, the Serbian army attacked the Sapna region, including the settlements of Donji Zaseok and Vrla Strana. During this attack, a number of residents of these settlements were killed, and women and children were captured and held in detention. Ultimately, the residents of these settlements were exchanged on 10 July 1992. The captured individuals were held in the mosque in Đulići.

After the war, Roma families managed to receive donations and rebuild their houses in Vrla Strana, Municipality of Sapna.

<sup>15</sup> Vidi: <https://opcinasapna.ba/2015-06-30-12-33-02/historija>, accessed on 9 April 2025

#### 4.2.10. THE SUFFERING OF ROMA IN BIJE LJINA

The municipality of Bijeljina is located in the northeastern part of Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to the 1991 census, Bijeljina had 96,988 inhabitants, of which 30,229 were Muslims (Bosniaks) and 57,389 were Serbs, while other groups were significantly less represented. There were 1,746 Roma recorded in Bijeljina in 1991, representing 1.80% of the population. This made Bijeljina the municipality with the highest number of Roma in the Podrinje region, according to the 1991 census. According to estimates by respondents, approximately 2,000 Roma lived in Bijeljina before the war, and around 1,000 during the war. The Roma population in Bijeljina was subjected to wartime persecution, beatings, enforced mobilisation into the army, and sexual violence.

One female respondent stated the following: *"When the war began, the Serbian army came and sent my husband to the frontline on Majejica. He was on the frontline for four years. Later, after the war, he fell ill with tuberculosis and died. While he was on the frontline, I tried to feed my family... We were hungry most of the time. At night, the army would come into the village and into my house. A soldier opened fire on my child and nearly killed him. They would bring flour and bread into the village and spill it in the yard so that we would not have anything to eat. Once they came and shot at my pots, so I would not have anything to cook a meal in. I endured all sorts of suffering, various abuses. I believe that everything that happened to us during the war happened because we were Roma."*

The suffering of Roma also occurred in the Mitrovica region, in the Republic of Serbia. At the beginning of the war in 1992, Šefik Beganović, son of Ešef, was separated from his family, and nothing is known about his fate since then. He was separated in front of a bus after he was not allowed to board, while his wife and children (two daughters) got on the bus. One respondent mentioned cases of rape and sexual abuse, saying: *"I know women who were raped, one of them being my sister-in-law, who had given birth around that time; she was basically in her postpartum period, when the army came to our village. They ordered me to undress, but when I lifted my shirt and they saw that I was very thin, they gave up and let me go. They then raped my sister-in-law and another woman."*

In addition, there was also looting of property in the Bijeljina area.

A witness to the harrowing war events stated: *"During the war, the army would come to our village to loot household appliances, televisions, gold, and money. With their automatic weapons pointed at us, we were too afraid to move, fearing they would kill our children. Once, they came to take my stove, and out of fear and desperation from the abuse, I pulled the pin from a grenade, intending to kill the soldiers, myself, and my children. When they saw I was serious, they backed off and left the stove. I had no firewood, so during the winter, I used old shoes instead of wood to keep the children warm. They even removed the tiles from the roofs of houses."*

During the war, the Batković camp located in the Municipality of Bijeljina detained numerous individuals, including members of the Roma community. A Roma individual, identified by the initials H. N. from Srebrenica, was held in the camp for six months in 1995.

After the war ended, Roma returnees found, as they stated, their houses completely destroyed. *"There were refugees living in our house. I asked the refugee woman to return my land and house, and she tried to hit me with a hoe. There were other Roma houses that were destroyed as well, and later they were rebuilt through donations. My house was also rebuilt,"* said one of the returnees.

### 4.3.

#### Overview of Crimes Committed Against Roma

Below are the available data on crimes committed against Roma in the Podrinje region, which, based on collected information, have been prosecuted by the competent security and judicial authorities.

**Table 5.** Overview of the Suffering of Roma in Podrinje within the Security and Judicial System.

No.	BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE EVENT / CRIMINAL OFFENCE	LEGAL QUALIFICATION OF THE CRIMINAL OFFENCE	PROSECUTION BY COMPETENT AUTHORITIES	IMPOSED CRIMINAL SANCTIONS
1.	Killings of Roma individuals in the village of Skočić, Municipality of Zvornik, in July 1992, and the subsequent sexual enslavement of Roma women.	War Crime Against the Civilian Population under Article 142(1) of the Criminal Code of the SFRY in conjunction with Article 22 of the same Code.	- Prosecutor's Office for War Crimes of the Republic of Serbia - Higher Court in Belgrade – War Crimes Department - Prosecutor's Office of BiH - SIPA	Court of Appeal in Belgrade – War Crimes Department: - Tomislav Gavrić: 8 years in prison; - Zoran Alić: 5 years in prison; - Zoran Đurđević: 8 years in prison;
2.	Killings of Alaga and Mejra Halilović in the village of Sase, Municipality of Srebrenica, 1992.	War Crime Against the Civilian Population under Article 142(1) of the Criminal Code of the SFRY	- Prosecutor's Office of BiH - Court of BiH	Saša Cvetković – sentenced to 12 years in prison.
3.	Crime committed in the administrative building of the company "Novi izvor" in Zvornik (used as a detention camp) – a Roma individual, B. M., was subjected to physical and sexual abuse while detained.	War Crime Against the Civilian Population under Article 142, and War Crime Against Prisoners of War under Article 144 of the Criminal Code of the SFRY.	- Cantonal Prosecutor's Office of Tuzla Canton - Cantonal Court in Tuzla	- Dušan Spasojević: 5 years and 8 months in prison - Ratko Todorović: 5 years and 1 month in prison - Radomir Škiljević: 3 years and 6 months in prison
4.	Persecution of persons of Roma and Bosniak ethnicity in the villages of Rešagići and Skelani, Municipality of Srebrenica, 1992.	Crimes Against Humanity under Article 172(1) (h) in conjunction with Article 172(1)(k) of the BiH Criminal Code, in conjunction with Article 180(1) of the same Code.	- Prosecutor's Office of BiH - Court of BiH	Slavko Milovanović – acquitted of charges.
5.	Killing of Ramo Ramović and others in Miljevina, Municipality of Foča, 1992.	War Crime Against the Civilian Population under Article 142(1) of the Criminal Code of the SFRY in conjunction with Article 22 of the same Code.	- District Prosecutor's Office in Trebinje - District Court in Trebinje	Criminal proceedings ongoing against Ilija Elez, also known as Ico, before the District Court in Trebinje.
6.	Killing of Roma individuals in the area of Nova Kasaba.	Unknown	- Prosecutor's Office of BiH - SIPA	-

According to these indicators, a total of six proceedings have been initiated before the security and judicial authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Serbia. So far, four proceedings have been definitively concluded before competent courts, three of which resulted in convictions for crimes committed against Roma, or involving Roma within other cases, while one case ended with an acquittal of the accused (case of Slavko Milovanović) (Table 5).

**Table 6.** Roma as Victims of Crimes Classified by Municipalities and Types of Crimes.

MUNICIPALITY	MURDER <sup>16</sup>	ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE	RAPE	DETENTION CAMP	INJURY
Foča	1	-	1	8	-
Goražde	-	-	-	-	2
Bratunac	5	1	-	-	-
Srebrenica	29	3	-	-	-
Milići	8	-	-	-	-
Zvornik	59	3	4	1	2
Sapna	-	-	1	-	-
Bijeljina	1	1	2	1	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4</b>

Table 6 shows types of crimes committed in the areas of individual municipalities of Podrinje. According to the data, the highest number of murders occurred in Zvornik and Srebrenica, with 59 and 29, respectively.

**Table 7.** Gender Structure of Roma Victims Classified by Municipalities of Podrinje.

MUNICIPALITY	GENDER	MURDER	ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE	RAPE	DETENTION CAMP	INJURY
Foča	M	1	-	-	4	-
	F	-	-	1	4	-
Goražde	M	-	-	-	-	1
	F	-	-	-	-	1
Bratunac	M	5	1	-	-	-
	F	-	-	-	-	-
Srebrenica	M	28	3	-	-	-
	F	1	-	-	-	-
Milići	M	4	-	-	-	-
	F	4	-	-	-	-
Zvornik	M	39	3	-	1	1
	F	20	-	4	-	1
Sapna	M	-	-	1	-	-
	F	-	-	-	-	-
Bijeljina	M	1	1	-	1	-
	F	-	-	2	-	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>
	<b>F</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>
		<b>103</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4</b>

16 It should be noted that there are victims who perished as members of the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but they have been included in consideration within this research project.



According to the gender structure of victims in the municipalities of the Podrinje region, the majority of victims were men, while women were predominantly subjected to rape.

**Table 8.** *Types of Crimes in Relation to the Age Categories of Roma Victims.*

		TYPES OF CRIMES				
AGE CATEGORY OF ROMA VICTIMS		MURDER	ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE	RAPE	DETENTION CAMP	INJURY
Age category	Up to 5 years	6	-	-	2	-
	5–14 years	3	-	3	3	-
	14–18 years	3	1	2	1	1
	18–21 years	4	-	-	-	-
	21–30 years	15	1	-	2	-
	30–40 years	17	4	-	-	-
	40–50 years	6	-	-	1	-
	50–60 years	10	-	-	-	-
	60–70 years	7	1	-	-	-
	70 and over	7	1	-	-	-
	Unspecified	25	-	3	1	3
TOTAL		103	8	8	10	4

This analysis (Table 8) highlights the brutality of the crimes and the suffering of all age groups, ranging from children under the age of five to elderly individuals over 70 (Table 9).

**Table 9.** Types of Crimes in Relation to the Age Categories and Gender.

			TYPES OF CRIMES				
AGE CATEGORY OF ROMA VICTIMS		GENDER	MURDER	ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE	RAPE	DETENTION CAMP	INJURY
Age category	Up to 5 years	M	1	-	-	1	-
		F	5	-	-	1	-
	5-14 years	M	2	-	-	1	-
		F	1	-	3	2	-
	14-18 years	M	3	1	-	1	1
		F	-	-	2	-	-
	18-21 years	M	4	-	-	-	-
		F	-	-	-	-	-
	21-30 years	M	13	1	-	1	-
		F	2	-	-	1	-
	30-40 years	M	15	4	-	-	-
		F	2	-	-	-	-
	40-50 years	M	5	-	-	1	-
		F	1	-	-	-	-
	50-60 years	M	6	-	-	-	-
		F	4	-	-	-	-
	60-70 years	M	3	1	-	-	-
		F	4	-	-	-	-
	70 and over	M	4	1	-	-	-
		F	3	-	-	-	-
	Unspecified	F	22	-	1	1	1
		Ž	3	-	2	-	2
TOTAL		M	78	8	1	6	2
		F	25	-	7	4	2
			103	8	8	10	4

The consequences of the war events in the Podrinje region can also be observed through the number of Roma living in Bosnia and Herzegovina according to the 1991<sup>17</sup> and 2013 population censuses.<sup>18</sup>

17 Source: FBiH Institute for Statistics – data obtained for the purposes of this research.

18 Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina. 2013 *Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Ethnicity/National Affiliation, Religion and Mother Tongue*. Available at: [https://www.popis.gov.ba/popis2013/doc/Knjiga2/K2\\_B\\_E.pdf](https://www.popis.gov.ba/popis2013/doc/Knjiga2/K2_B_E.pdf), accessed on 14 April 2025

**Table 10:** Overview of Population by Declared Ethnic Affiliation.

POPULATION BY DECLARED ETHNIC AFFILIATION	ROMA	
	1991	2013
Bosnia and Herzegovina	8,864	12,583
Federation of BiH	-	10,036
Republika Srpska	-	2057
Brčko District BiH	-	490

According to the indicators obtained from the 1991 and 2013 population censuses, it can be concluded that the number of residents who identified as Roma increased from 8,864 in 1991 to 12,583 in 2013 in the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Table 10).

In addition to ethnic affiliation, an important indicator is the number of individuals who declared Romani as their mother tongue, based on the 1991 and 2013 population censuses.<sup>19</sup>

**Table 11:** Overview of Population by Declared Mother Tongue.

POPULATION BY DECLARED MOTHER TONGUE	ROMANI LANGUAGE	
	1991	2013
Bosnia and Herzegovina	10,430	5,495
Federation of BiH	-	3,918
Republika Srpska	-	1,341
Brčko District BiH	-	236

A key fact that is immediately apparent is that the number of people who declared Romani as their mother tongue is significantly lower than the number of people who identified as Roma (Table 11). According to the 2013 census, there were 12,583 people identifying as Roma, while only 5,495 reported Romani as their mother tongue in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Table 11). This indicates that the number of people using the Romani language is more than 50% lower than the number of those who identify as Roma.

<sup>19</sup> The same sources were used.

The direct consequences of the war on the Roma population can also be observed through a comparative analysis of census data from 1991<sup>20</sup> and 2013<sup>21</sup> for the Podrinje region.

**Table 12:** Overview of Population by Declared Ethnic Affiliation.

POPULATION BY DECLARED ETHNIC AFFILIATION IN THE MUNICIPALITIES OF PODRINJE	ROMA	
	1991	2013
Foča	32	3
Foča FBiH – Ustikolina	-	1
Goražde	64	29
Novo Goražde	-	0
Čajniče	0	0
Rudo	0	0
Višegrad	0	2
Bratunac	154	8
Srebrenica	161	4
Vlasenica	221	3
Milići	-	9
Zvornik	269	1
Sapna	-	30
Bijeljina	1,746	496
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,647</b>	<b>586</b>

Based on the conducted analysis, it can be concluded that, according to the 1991 census, a total of 2,647 Roma lived in this area. Taking into account the 2013 census, it may be stated that only 586 Roma resided in the same area. Currently, only 22% of the original Roma population recorded in the 1991 census still lives in the Podrinje region (Table 13).

20 Source: FBiH Institute for Statistics – data obtained for the purposes of this research.

21 Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, op. cit.



**Table 13:** Overview of Population by Declared Mother Tongue in the Municipalities of Podrinje.

POPULATION BY DECLARED MOTHER TONGUE IN THE MUNICIPALITIES OF PODRINJE	ROMANI LANGUAGE	
	1991	2013
Foča	37	3
Foča FBiH – Ustikolina	-	0
Goražde	73	3
Novo Goražde	-	0
Čajniče	0	0
Rudo	0	0
Višegrad	0	10
Bratunac	68	0
Srebrenica	168	0
Vlasenica	243	5
Milići	-	0
Zvornik	239	0
Sapna	-	11
Bijeljina	2,483	410
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,311</b>	<b>443</b>

According to the 1991 census, 3,311 people in the municipalities of the Podrinje region declared Romani as their mother tongue, while in 2013, that number dropped to 443.

## 5.

# Crimes of Rape and Other Forms of Sexual Violence Against Roma During the War in BiH (1992–1995)

Wartime rapes in BiH were systematic and widespread. This was particularly evident in the context of ethnic cleansing, where sexual violence was used as a means of spreading terror. The victims were predominantly women, but also men, and sexual abuse was often accompanied by other crimes such as killings, torture, and enforced disappearances. Victims were frequently detained in camps and other places of captivity, where they were subjected to sexual abuse. Many rapes were intended to intimidate communities, destroy ethnic and cultural identities, or contribute to the creation of ethnically “pure” territories.

Roma women are often invisible in historical narratives of the conflict in BiH. Research into their experiences should contribute to ensuring their rightful place in collective memory. Roma women may have been subjected to double discrimination – both as women and as members of the Roma community. Understanding these specific experiences is essential for creating targeted interventions. Identifying the specific needs of Roma women who survived the conflict can support the provision of adequate support and resources, as well as the development of relevant policies.

By documenting these experiences, the research aims to provide an educational tool for the prevention of future conflicts, the promotion of human rights, and the combating of discrimination. This methodology, with its focus on detailed and sensitive issues, enables the collection of comprehensive data that are crucial for understanding and supporting Roma women who survived violence during the war in BiH.

The introductory section should define key terms to facilitate a clearer understanding of the report’s subject matter.

- **Sexual violence** means any sexual act, attempt to commit a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, trafficking, or acts directed against a person’s sexuality using coercion, regardless of the relationship with the victim and regardless of the setting.
- **Gender-based violence** is violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering, based on gender discrimination, gender role expectations and/or gender stereotypes, or on unequal power relations related to gender.
- **Gender inequality** is a root cause of gender-based violence, which disproportionately affects women and girls living in conflict situations. Men are also frequently victims of sexual and gender-based violence during armed conflicts, particularly in detention settings where the inherent imbalance of power between detainees and prison guards increases the risk of abuse. Women and men are typically subjected to different forms of abuse. Women are more often victims of rape, frequently by multiple perpetrators and on a repeated basis, and are often subjected to sexual slavery. Men are more commonly exposed to beatings on the genitals, castration, rape with foreign objects, and being forced to perform sexual acts on other detainees.
- **The combined term sexual and gender-based violence** reflects the dual nature of this type of violence as both sexual and a form of discrimination. Sexual and gender-based violence can be directed at both women and men, although women are more frequently the victims. It includes

rape, attempted rape, all forms of sexual assault, sexual threats, harassment, exploitation or humiliation, forced pregnancy, forced sterilisation, forced abortion, trafficking for sexual exploitation, sexual slavery, and female genital mutilation.

- **Wartime rape** and other forms of sexual abuse in BiH during the 1992–1995 period represent one of the most severe forms of violence committed during the war. This issue has gained significance both in the context of human rights and in international law, as numerous acts of rape were used as a weapon of war aimed at terrorising civilians, destroying communities, carrying out ethnic cleansing, and breaking the moral will of the population.
- **The stigma** surrounding wartime rape in BiH represents a deeply rooted societal problem that has had a serious impact on survivors, both individually and collectively. Sexual violence during the war, particularly wartime rape, not only caused physical and psychological trauma but also led to social marginalisation, isolation, and stigmatisation of the victims.

## 5.1.

### The Crime of Rape and Other Forms of Sexual Abuse During the War in BiH (1992–1995)

#### 5.1.1. DOCUMENTATION OF RAPE AND OTHER FORMS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

Wartime rapes in BiH were systematic and widespread. This was particularly evident in the context of ethnic cleansing, where sexual violence was used as a means of spreading terror. The victims were predominantly women, but also men, and sexual abuse was often accompanied by other crimes such as killings, torture, and enforced disappearances. Victims were frequently detained in camps and other places of captivity, where they were subjected to sexual abuse. Many rapes were intended to intimidate communities, destroy ethnic and cultural identities, or contribute to the creation of ethnically “pure” territories.

It has been proven that during the war in BiH, men were subjected to abuse in detention camps, although this issue has rarely been discussed. Primarily, the sexual abuse of men is often perceived as an “attack on manhood”. Victims experience profound shame, as they struggle to reconcile their trauma with societal expectations of male strength and resilience. Abuse during the war included physical violence as well as psychological methods of degradation, such as being forced to perform sexual acts in front of others. Additionally, many men do not report the abuse due to fear of ridicule, mistrust, or false assumptions about their sexuality. Society, the media, and institutions often fail to acknowledge male victims, further reinforcing the stigma. As a result, the consequences include depression, PTSD, suicidal thoughts, and sexual dysfunction, as victims experience isolation and a loss of identity.

Wartime rapes in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the 1992–1995 period represent a lasting trauma for both the victims and society as a whole. Although significant progress has been made in terms of international justice and the acknowledgment of these crimes, there is still a need for greater recognition of victims, education on this issue, and the provision of support to survivors. Sources of information on this topic come from various sectors: international organisations, state reports, human rights organisations, academic research, and the testimonies of the victims.

The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) was established in 1993 to prosecute war crimes committed during the Balkan wars. The Tribunal rendered several judgments related to wartime rape, including cases where rape and sexual violence were recognised as war crimes. The Tribunal’s investigations, including reports, judgments, and victim testimonies, represent key sources for the documentation of rape. Notable judgments, such as those in the Kunarac, Kovač, and Vuković cases from 1999, which addressed rape and sexual slavery, established criminal responsibility for acts



of sexual violence. Following the establishment of the War Crimes Chamber within the Court of BiH and the adoption of the National War Crimes Processing Strategy, the ICTY transferred cases concerning war crimes committed in BiH to domestic judicial institutions. As a result, trials for wartime rape and sexual abuse continued in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the domestic jurisprudence is now rich in documentation related to these crimes. Lastly, it is important to note that the Court in Belgrade also issued a conviction in a case of sexual abuse and sexual slavery committed during the war in BiH.

The United Nations Commission on Human Rights also recorded instances of rape as a war crime, and its reports serve as an important source for international legal documentation. Furthermore, reports by human rights organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, some of which were published during the war, document cases of wartime sexual violence in BiH.

In the post-war period, non-governmental organisations played a key role in documenting wartime rape, as well as in providing essential professional support to victims through psychosocial assistance, legal aid, and the creation of public platforms for testimonies. In addition, academic research and studies in BiH and abroad, in the fields of sociology, law, and history, are rich in victim testimonies and other forms of documentation of this type of violence committed during the war. Finally, it is important to highlight the significant role of researchers and journalists, who have been collecting and archiving survivors' testimonies for years, which have become a crucial source for understanding the scope and nature of wartime rape.

## 5.1.2. RELEVANT LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

### *International Law and Standards on Wartime Sexual Violence*

- **Criminal Responsibility**

Following the war, the prosecution of war crimes, including sexual violence, became a key aspect of international law, particularly in the context of the **Geneva Conventions** and the **Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC)**. Sexual violence has been recognised as a war crime, a crime against humanity, and, in some cases, even as genocide, as established in judgments for crimes committed during the war in BiH. Furthermore, the criminal codes in BiH recognise rape as a crime against humanity, and in post-war trials, some perpetrators have been convicted on this basis.<sup>22</sup>

- **Reparations for Victims**

Bosnia and Herzegovina has ratified all nine core UN conventions that significantly address the rights of victims, including survivors of wartime sexual violence. It is also important to highlight the **1985 UN Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power**, which sets out fundamental rights of victims. Although this is not a legally binding document, it provides clear guidance on how states should act to ensure the protection and rights of victims. Additionally, within the Council of Europe, a number of documents have been adopted concerning the rights of victims. On the level of the European Union, the legal framework has been significantly improved with the adoption of **Directive 2012/29/EU Establishing Minimum Standards on the Rights, Support and Protection of Victims of Crime**.

In relation to wartime sexual violence and the rights of victims, particular importance is attached to several resolutions adopted within the United Nations and the Council of Europe, which will be presented in the following sections.

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22 Criminal Code of BiH, Article 172(g): "(...) coercing another to sexual intercourse or an equivalent sexual act (rape), sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilisation or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity."

**Resolution 1325 Women, Peace and Security**, adopted on 31 October 2000 by the UN Security Council, is the first resolution to emphasise the critical importance of the role and equal participation of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in building sustainable peace. The Resolution calls upon all parties to armed conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, as well as all other forms of violence in situations of armed conflict. It also emphasises the responsibility of all States to put an end to impunity and to prosecute those responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes, including those relating to sexual and other violence against women and girls, and in this regard stresses the need to exclude these crimes, where feasible from amnesty provisions. Through this Resolution, the UN Security Council *“emphasises the responsibility of all States to put an end to impunity and to prosecute those responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes including those relating to sexual and other violence against women and girls, and in this regard stresses the need to exclude these crimes, where feasible from amnesty provisions.”*

**UN Security Council Resolution 1820**, adopted on 19 June 2008, stresses that sexual violence, when used or commissioned as a tactic of war in order to deliberately target civilians, can significantly exacerbate situations of armed conflict and may impede the restoration of international peace. The Resolution therefore demands that all parties to armed conflict immediately take appropriate measures to protect civilians, including women and girls, from all forms of sexual violence, which could include, inter alia, enforcing appropriate military disciplinary measures and upholding the principle of command responsibility, training troops on the categorical prohibition of all forms of sexual violence against civilians, debunking myths that fuel sexual violence, vetting armed and security forces to take into account past actions of rape and other forms of sexual violence, and evacuation of women and children under imminent threat of sexual violence to safety. The Resolution also stresses the need for the exclusion of sexual violence crimes from amnesty provisions in the context of conflict resolution processes. This means that individuals alleged to have committed rape or other forms of sexual violence during conflict should not benefit from laws or measures that would exempt them from criminal proceedings or sanctions. Member States are called upon to comply with their obligations for prosecuting persons responsible for such acts, to ensure that all victims of sexual violence, particularly women and girls, have equal protection under the law and equal access to justice, and stresses the importance of ending impunity for such acts as part of a comprehensive approach to seeking sustainable peace, justice, truth, and national reconciliation.

**Resolution 1888** was adopted by the Security Council in 2009, establishing the mandate of the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict with the aim of ensuring strategic leadership and enhancing coordination. It supports activities for the prevention of and response to conflict, as well as the formation of a team of experts to strengthen the capacities of national institutions to advance the rule of law and promote accountability for sexual violence in conflict. This resolution builds upon the groundbreaking Security Council Resolution 1820, adopted in 2008, which recognised conflict-related sexual violence as a threat to international peace and security.

**Resolution 1889** was adopted by the Security Council in 2009, calling for a strategy to increase the participation of women in decision-making processes related to conflict resolution, including indicators and proposed monitoring mechanisms. Among other provisions, States are required to maintain specific records of funds allocated to women in post-conflict situations and recovery planning. In the same resolution, the Security Council states the following:

- emphasises *“the responsibility of all States to put an end to impunity and to prosecute those responsible for all forms of violence committed against women and girls in armed conflicts, including rape and other sexual violence”* (paragraph 3);

- encourages Member States in post-conflict situations, *“in consultation with civil society, including women’s organisations, to specify in detail women and girls’ needs and priorities and design concrete strategies, in accordance with their legal systems, to address those needs and priorities, which cover inter alia support for greater physical security and better socio-economic conditions, through education, income generating activities, access to basic services, in particular health services, including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights and mental health, gender-responsive law enforcement and access to justice, as well as enhancing capacity to engage in public decision-making at all levels”* (paragraph 10).

**Resolution 1960** was adopted by the Security Council in 2010, calling for the establishment of a framework for monitoring and reporting on sexual violence in conflict. The names of parties to armed conflict that are credibly suspected of committing or being responsible for systematic rape and other forms of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict must be included in the annual reports on the implementation of Resolutions 1820 and 1888. The Security Council will use this list as a basis for more targeted United Nations engagement with those parties, including, where appropriate, measures in accordance with the procedures of the relevant sanctions committees.

**Resolution 2467** was adopted by the Security Council in 2019, defining a survivor-centred approach in preventing and responding to conflict-related sexual violence. This approach encompasses several aspects, including: psychosocial and medical assistance; mental, physical, and sexual health as well as sexual and reproductive health care; education; livelihood support; justice for survivors and their children; and accountability for perpetrators. The consequences and effects of conflict-related sexual violence include prolonged trauma, stigma, poverty, poor health, and often unwanted pregnancies. Addressing these issues requires support from trained service providers, including civil society organisations, to ensure the provision of high-quality services for survivors.

In addition to the resolutions adopted within the framework of the United Nations, it is also important to highlight the resolutions adopted at the regional level within the Council of Europe, as presented in the following text.

**Resolution 1670** was adopted in 2009 by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and addresses sexual violence against women in armed conflict. This document directly references cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence committed during the war in the Balkans and exposes the fact that there has been almost no criminal prosecution for rape or other acts of sexual violence before domestic courts, leaving thousands of victims without access to justice, reparation, and compensation. Among other things, the Parliamentary Assembly calls on Member States to ensure that rape and other forms of sexual violence are codified as autonomous criminal offences (meaning that criminal codes should include specific and independent provisions on these crimes) in accordance with international standards, to enable the prosecution of perpetrators. It also calls on States to consider sanctions against countries that fail to protect women from sexual violence in armed conflict or to prosecute the perpetrators.

**Recommendation No. R (85)11 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on the Position of the Victim in the Framework of Criminal Law and Procedure** (1985) recommends that Member States ensure that victims are granted rights, protection and support before and during judicial proceedings, including enforcement proceedings, the right to compensation, and that they explore the advantages of mediation and reconciliation programmes.

**Recommendation No. R (87)21 on Assistance to Victims and the Prevention of Victimisation** suggests that Member States conduct victimisation surveys and other types of research in order to gather data on victims’ needs and victimisation rates, which would support the development of victim assistance programmes; raise public awareness, particularly within public services, about victims’ needs; ensure victims’ rights while providing assistance and support in exercising those rights; and strengthen institutional



capacities to adequately respond to victims' needs. The Recommendation also highlighted the need to establish and strengthen national organisations, implement measures aimed at crime prevention, thereby also preventing victimisation, and protect particularly vulnerable groups and prevent their victimisation.

### **Relevant Domestic Legislation**

**The Law on Basics of Social Protection, Protection of Civilian Victims of War and Families with Children** defines that victims of wartime sexual violence are considered civilian victims of war. The key characteristics of the legal framework regulating the status and rights of civilian victims of war in the FBiH are that the law governing this area simultaneously regulates a number of other issues related to social protection. The **2016 Amendments to the Law on Basics of Social Protection, Protection of Civilian Victims of War and Families with Children** established the Commission for Providing Expert Opinions to Determine the Status of a Special Category of Civilian Victims of War as an entirely new administrative mechanism aimed at facilitating the identification of victims of wartime sexual abuse and rape, granting them the status of a special category of civilian victims of war. The introduction of a new system also requires the establishment of appropriate procedures based on which the actors involved determine the status of the special category of civilian victims of war. For this reason, the **Manual on the Method of Obtaining the Status of a Special Category of Civilian Victims of War in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina** was adopted. This Manual serves as practical support for all actors involved in the process and as a contribution to more humane treatment and the adoption of ethical and professional standards in the approach to and work with survivors. Officials and other authorised persons who are in direct or indirect contact with survivors of wartime rape and sexual abuse are introduced, through this Manual, to the entire procedure for determining the status of this category of civilian victims of war, as well as to the working methods and expert opinions of the Commission for Providing Expert Opinions to Determine the Status of a Special Category of Civilian Victims of War. The Manual is primarily intended for individuals who, through their daily work, come into contact with survivors, as well as for public institutions and civil society organisations engaged in the protection of victims of wartime sexual abuse and rape.<sup>23</sup>

According to the most recent **2024 Amendments to the Law on Basics of Social Protection, Protection of Civilian Victims of War and Families with Children**, among other provisions, children born of wartime rape are entitled to priority access to healthcare services, more favourable conditions for education up to the age of 35, priority employment, and housing support.

Although the Federation of BiH has established a legal framework for the protection of the rights of a special category of civilian victims of war, the fact that competencies are divided between the Federation and the cantons in areas such as social and healthcare protection, housing, employment, and legal aid often places these individuals at risk of discrimination.

The key feature of the **Law on the Protection of Civilian Victims of War in the Republika Srpska**, from the perspective of survivors, is the short deadline imposed for submitting an application for recognition of the status of a civilian victim of war. The law requires medical documentation related to treatment to date no later than one year from the day the harm occurred or from the day the circumstances under which the harm occurred ceased. Of particular concern is the fact that the degree of disability is determined by a military commission.

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23 More at: <https://federalnakomisija.ba/prirucnik-o-nacinu-ostvarivanja-statusa-posebne-kategorije-civilnih-zrtava-rata-u-federaciji-bih/>. For the practical application of the Manual, a Guide to Obtaining the Status of a Special Category of Civilian Victims of War and Instructions for Applicants for Recognition of the Status of a Special Category of Civilian Victims of War have also been prepared.

***The Law on the Protection of Victims of War Torture in the Republika Srpska*** regulates the conditions and procedure for recognising the status and rights of victims of war torture as a special category of civilian victims of war, the rights based on the established status and the manner of exercising those rights, the method of securing funds for the realisation of these rights, as well as other issues of importance for the recognition of status and rights under this law (Article 1). Victims have expressed a number of concerns regarding this law, stating, among other things, that it does not include the protection of the rights of all victims and could therefore lead to discrimination in practice. Attention has been drawn to the limited definition of status, which is linked to the victim's place of residence, regardless of the fact that the harm occurred in the territory of the Republika Srpska; the non-recognition of documents issued by the competent institutions of the Federation of BiH and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the process of establishing the status of victims of war torture; and the exclusive acceptance of opinions issued by associations registered in the Republika Srpska, while this right is not extended to associations based in the Federation of BiH, Brčko District, or at the state level. The shortcomings of the aforementioned law were also highlighted by the Committee Against Torture in its concluding observations, noting that certain provisions potentially exclude many non-Serb victims from the possibility of exercising their right to reparation. The Committee recommended, among other things, that the entity-level authorities remove restrictive and discriminatory provisions in their legislation and policies relating to reparations for civilian victims of war, including survivors of wartime sexual violence.

***The Law on the Protection of Civilian Victims of War of the Brčko District of BiH*** recognises victims of wartime rape as civilian victims of war, granting them special status whereby the resulting harm is not assessed in percentage terms. This law also recognises and grants rights to children born of wartime rape.

### 5.1.3. SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS OF WARTIME RAPE

In addition to international and domestic legal obligations, as well as the empathy demonstrated by civil society organisations, it is important to emphasise that numerous studies have shown that wartime rape leaves significant negative effects on individuals, families, and society as a whole.<sup>24</sup> The most significant negative effect lies in the profound short- and long-term consequences on victims' mental health, as well as on their level of social and interpersonal functioning. It is impossible to achieve comprehensive healing of a society without a systematic approach to supporting victims. With this in mind, it is necessary to analyse the level of support available to victims of wartime sexual violence in BiH.

#### Public Service Providers

The role of social work centres, as defined by laws and bylaws, includes assessing and referring victims to other relevant institutions, participating in the process of recognising the status of civilian victims of war, and providing psychosocial assistance.

However, social work centres face many problems in practice, including inadequately trained staff for dealing with war trauma and sexual violence, disparities among municipalities – since centres in smaller communities often lack sufficient resources – poor coordination with the health, judicial, and non-governmental sectors, and a lack of specific programmes tailored for victims of wartime sexual violence.

The role of social work centres in working with victims of wartime sexual violence could be improved through the implementation of training and specialisation programmes for social workers dealing with trauma of sexual violence, enhanced cooperation with psychologists, psychiatrists, and non-governmental organisations, the development of a unified national protocol for working with victims of wartime violence, and the allocation of additional financial and human resources to these centres.

24 <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC2080379/>

### Civil Society

In addition to documenting crimes, a number of non-governmental organisations consider this issue a priority within the context of dealing with the past and ensuring access to justice for victims in BiH. Accordingly, they provide psychosocial and legal support to victims and create public platforms for testimonies.

The role of non-governmental organisations in supporting victims of wartime rape in BiH is of crucial importance. Given the limited capacities of social work centres, certain non-governmental organisations offer direct and continuous professional support to victims of wartime rape.

In many cases, these organisations have been and continue to be the first and only response to the needs of survivors. Organisations such as Vive Žene Tuzla, Medica Zenica, and others are pioneers in working with victims of sexual violence. The support they provide to victims of wartime sexual violence includes:

- **Psychological and psychotherapeutic assistance** in the form of individual and group therapies for victims, crisis interventions, long-term psychological support and workshops on empowerment and community integration;
- **Economic empowerment** of women survivors of wartime sexual violence, along with efforts to prevent **victim retraumatisation** and the development of **transgenerational trauma** within families and communities;
- **Legal assistance and representation**, including free legal aid and counselling, support in reporting crimes and initiating legal proceedings, legal representation of victims in court proceedings, and assistance in exercising the right to the status of civilian victim of war. One such organisation is TRIAL International BiH;
- Non-governmental organisations play a key role in **public advocacy** for victims' rights (legal reforms, budget allocations, formal recognition) and in campaigns aimed at combating stigma and silence (films, documentaries, public forums);
- **Education and training**: non-governmental organisations also provide training for social workers, police officers, and judges on working with victims of sexual violence, and education for youth and communities on trauma, rights, and combating violence.

Although non-governmental organisations are not part of the public system, many of them cooperate with social work centres, public hospitals and community health centres, as well as with prosecutors' offices and courts. Unfortunately, this cooperation is often conditioned by limited resources and largely depends on individuals within public institutions and their willingness to cooperate.

The challenges faced by non-governmental organisations primarily include the lack of stable funding, as they are heavily reliant on donors; high demand for services in contrast to limited resources; occasional pressure from the social and political environment due to their work on "sensitive issues", and a lack of support and recognition from public institutions.

## 5.2.

### The Crime of Rape and Other Forms of Sexual Abuse Against Roma During the War (1992–1995)

#### 5.2.1. FIELD FINDINGS TO DATE

This research, as described in the first part of the report, covered locations where Roma lived in their communities prior to the war. The first part of the report addresses the reasons behind the absence of adequate documentation on the suffering of Roma during the war in sociological, legal, and historical narratives about the 1992–1995 war period.



In addition to all the reasons for the scarcity of data on the suffering of Roma during the war described in the main part of the report, it is important to analyse the aspect of rape as a crime that carries a range of complex consequences for the victim – one of which is the fact that victims often refuse to speak about it.

Namely, during this research, the majority of Roma respondents confirmed knowledge of multiple cases of rape of Roma women during the war. However, when asked to invite survivors who would be willing to speak about their experiences as part of this research, the answer was usually negative. A few women agreed to speak about their experiences during the war, but they mostly talked about other forms of mistreatment they endured after their husbands and other male family members were forcibly taken from their homes. There was little mention of rape and sexual abuse. Nevertheless, one individual, whose identity is known to the interviewers in the field, agreed to give a statement on the condition that their identity remains undisclosed.

This situation in the field revealed a limitation of this project – the lack of time, which in turn made it impossible to create the specific conditions and safe environment necessary for public testimonies by victims. The fact that nearly all respondents spoke informally during the interviews about the rapes of women in Roma communities, while access to the victims during the research remained impossible, indicates that further efforts are needed in this area.

Roma women are often invisible in historical narratives of the conflict in BiH. Research into their experiences should contribute to ensuring their rightful place in collective memory. Roma women may have been subjected to double discrimination – both as women and as members of the Roma community. Understanding these specific experiences is essential for creating targeted interventions. Identifying the specific needs of Roma women who survived the war can support the provision of adequate support and resources, as well as the development of relevant policies.

Furthermore, by documenting these experiences, the research aims to provide an educational tool for the prevention of future conflicts, the promotion of human rights, and the combating of discrimination. This methodology, with its focus on detailed and sensitive issues, enables the collection of comprehensive data that are crucial for understanding and supporting Roma women who survived the conflict in BiH.

## **5.2.2. POSSIBLE CAUSES OF LIMITED AND HARD-TO-ACCESS DATA**

It is well known that the stigma surrounding wartime rape in BiH represents a deeply rooted societal problem that significantly affects survivors, both individually and collectively. Sexual violence during the war, particularly wartime rape, has not only resulted in physical and psychological trauma but also led to social marginalisation, isolation, and the stigmatisation of victims. When this is coupled with the widely recognised fact that Roma are a marginalised group within the BiH population, it becomes clear that the stigma faced by Roma victims of wartime sexual violence is at least doubled. Finally, it is important to recall the first part of this report, which describes the continuous work carried out over several decades by public institutions, the international community, and non-governmental organisations in supporting victims of wartime rape. Available data indicate that there have been no activities specifically targeted at Roma communities within this process. In conversations with women's associations that provide psychosocial support to victims of wartime rape, it was confirmed that Roma women are among the beneficiaries of their programmes. However, these associations apply an equal-access approach to all women who have experienced wartime violence and do not differentiate among beneficiaries when providing services. This finding once again points to the high likelihood that crimes of wartime rape were indeed committed against Roma women, but due to the strong stigma and the additional marginalisation of the Roma communities in which they live, these crimes have remained untold. Such an approach is understandable from the perspective of service-providing non-governmental organisations; however, further sensitisation is necessary. This includes closer cooperation with Roma associations in order to increase the number of Roma women seeking and receiving the crucial support they need.

One of the key lessons that BiH society has learned over the past 30 years of addressing the issue of wartime rape relates to the various dimensions of victim stigmatisation and the consequences that such stigmatisation has on victims, their families, and society as a whole. The factors contributing to the stigmatisation of victims are numerous, and some of them include patriarchal norms and social values, the failure to recognise sexual violence as a crime, and the lack of psychological and social support. It is important to reflect on some of these factors in the specific context of the suffering of Roma women.

- **Patriarchal norms and social values.** BiH society is characterised by deeply rooted patriarchal values. In such societies, women's sexual purity is often perceived as a symbol of honour, which generates profound stigma against women who have survived sexual violence. Women who were raped during the war were often regarded as "disgraced" or were subjected to condemnation by their families, communities, and the broader society. This social pressure prevented many victims from reporting the abuse or seeking help, often leading to further emotional and psychological trauma.
- **Failure to recognise sexual violence as a crime.** Although wartime rape was recognised as a war crime at the international level, in BiH, many victims encountered significant obstacles in having their experiences acknowledged. Wartime rape was long suppressed both legally and socially. Many victims lacked the support necessary to report the rape or to receive adequate medical and psychological treatment. This social taboo and the absence of institutional support have contributed to ongoing stigmatisation.
- **Consequences for the family.** In many cases, the families of wartime rape victims faced additional challenges. A woman who had survived rape often experienced social isolation, but her family was also affected by dishonour. Families were subjected to contempt, which further intensified the scope of stigmatisation. This frequently led to the breakdown of family relationships or forced the victims to retreat into privacy, concealing their trauma.
- **Lack of psychological and social support.** In the post-war period, victims of wartime rape faced significant difficulties reintegrating into society. The absence of psychological support and a general lack of awareness about the consequences of war trauma made the healing process even more difficult. Many women never had the opportunity to speak openly about their experiences for fear of further stigmatisation. Over time, this contributed to a deterioration in their mental health.

Furthermore, the research revealed that Roma women often fear rejection by their families (including parents, and later husbands and children), as they tend to blame themselves for being raped. There is also a widespread mistrust in institutions, stemming from various factors – ranging from the general sense of exclusion experienced by the Roma community, to the fact that their rapists still walk freely in the streets of the towns where the crimes were committed, and are, in some cases, even employed by local public authorities. Lastly, the research highlights that court proceedings related to the prosecution of war crimes are lengthy and complex, and often prove to be extremely exhausting for women. Combined with the fear of retaliation from the perpetrators, this results in their refusal to speak about their wartime experiences. In the context of court proceedings, Roma women fear that if they are unable to prove the crime in court, they may be forced to cover court fees, including attorney fees and other costs that they cannot afford due to the widespread poverty in Roma communities, caused by their marginalisation in society. Under such circumstances, victims of wartime rape are, unfortunately, often forced to live near their abusers, feeling helpless.

### 5.2.3. SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE MARGINALISATION OF A NATIONAL MINORITY AND THE STIGMATISATION OF ROMA WOMEN AS VICTIMS OF WARTIME RAPE AND OTHER FORMS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

The marginalisation of Roma as the largest and most vulnerable national minority in BiH in the post-war period has been documented by both domestic and foreign institutions dedicated to the protection of human rights and the prevention of discrimination. This is evidenced by many reports on the implementation of international conventions, as well as field reports over the past three decades. One such report is that of the Institution of Human Rights Ombudsman of BiH from 2017, which emphasises that a number of recommendations from the United Nations Human Rights Council “specifically address the issue of protecting Roma, as the most vulnerable national minority, and are aimed at eliminating ethnic and racial discrimination against Roma, ensuring greater recognition of Roma-led initiatives, creating an environment for equal access to all public services, including healthcare, addressing the extreme poverty and marginalisation faced by Roma, and ensuring effective mechanisms for the social and educational inclusion of Roma.”<sup>25</sup>

On the other hand, when it comes to the stigmatisation of victims of wartime rape, the social consequences may include: isolation and retreat into privacy, psychological consequences, and social and economic marginalisation. These consequences most commonly manifest in the following ways:

- Due to shame and fear of social condemnation, many women who survived sexual violence retreated into privacy, isolating themselves from their communities, and often even from their families. Victims frequently carried their emotional and psychological pain in silence, without the possibility of reaching out for help, which worsened their daily existence;
- Stigma has a serious impact on the mental health of victims, leading to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and other psychological disorders. Stigmatisation can intensify feelings of guilt and shame, further hindering the process of healing and reintegration;
- Survivors of wartime rape, in addition to facing emotional and psychological trauma, are often confronted with economic marginalisation. Many women lost their ability to work, and their position in society remains burdened with obstacles. Without support, many have been forced to live in poverty and deprivation.

The stigma surrounding wartime rape in BiH is deeply rooted in social norms, ethnic prejudices, and patriarchal values, which significantly hinders the healing process for victims. Although progress has been made in recent decades in terms of providing support and justice, survivors still face social barriers and emotional challenges that this stigma entails. Reducing the stigmatising environment requires a joint effort across all sectors of society – from the legal system to educational institutions and non-governmental organisations. When we add to this the fact that Roma communities are largely closed, isolated, and marginalised, and as such have for many years lacked trust in the rest of society, especially in public institutions, we are once again led to the conclusion that all the aforementioned factors of stigmatisation are felt even more strongly within Roma communities.

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25 Report on the Implementation of the Recommendations of the Institution of Human Rights Ombudsman of BiH from the Special Report on the Status of Roma in BiH, Recommendations of the Universal Periodic Report of the United Nations Human Rights Council, page 9. Available at (in BCS): [https://www.ombudsmen.gov.ba/documents/obmudsmen\\_doc2017070515172836bos.pdf](https://www.ombudsmen.gov.ba/documents/obmudsmen_doc2017070515172836bos.pdf).



## Concluding Observations

Crimes against humanity, war crimes, and other serious violations of international humanitarian law committed during the armed conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992–1995) have left deep and lasting consequences for social cohesion, inter-community trust, and institutional stability. The systematic violence, which included mass killings, torture, rape, enforced deportations, detention in camps, and the destruction of civilian infrastructure, resulted in hundreds of thousands of people being killed, missing, or displaced. The material and non-material damage caused by these processes is of immeasurable scale.

Although the victims of these crimes came from various ethnic groups and communities, particularly vulnerable and socially marginalised groups, such as the Roma community, were exposed to multiple forms of violence, while at the same time remaining excluded from most institutional and public processes of recognition and reparation. The Roma, as the largest national minority in Bosnia and Herzegovina, endured severe forms of persecution, including ethnic cleansing, mass executions, sexual violence, imprisonment in camps, and the destruction of their property, identity, and cultural heritage. Their suffering was not only physical and symbolic – it was further deepened in the post-conflict period through institutional silence, a lack of public recognition, and limited access to justice.

This research, conducted through the cooperation of the Srebrenica Memorial Centre and the Roma Association Kali Sara, represents a major step toward understanding the crimes committed against the Roma community, particularly in the Podrinje region. Cases of killings, enforced disappearances, rapes, deportations, and detentions in camps have been thoroughly documented. In many locations, the Roma community no longer exists, which clearly illustrates the scale of violence that, by its nature and consequences, was structured as a policy of elimination. Although numerous obstacles hindered evidence collection – including the passage of time, lack of witnesses, institutional inaction, and the absence of will to document these crimes – the core message of this research remains clear: without the inclusion of Roma victims in transitional justice processes, Bosnia and Herzegovina cannot achieve full democratisation, rebuild trust, or meet human rights standards in line with European values.

As transitional justice advisors, we recognise that processes of remembrance and acknowledgment are inextricably linked to guarantees of non-repetition. Memorialisation is not a symbolic addition to justice – it is an integral part of it. Acknowledging that Roma were victims of the same genocide that was legally established against the Bosniak population in Srebrenica does not relativise the truth; rather, it complements and corrects it, ensuring that it is complete. Victims cannot and must not be placed in a hierarchy. If transitional justice is to fulfil its purpose – the building of sustainable peace – it must rely on universal standards, equal treatment of all victims, and the societal courage to acknowledge what has thus far been silenced.

The findings of the research conducted within the framework of this project represent a significant step forward in understanding the scope and nature of the crimes committed against Roma, particularly in the Podrinje region. Many forms of violence have been identified, including mass and individual killings, enforced disappearances, sexual violence, detentions, deportations, and other serious violations of human rights. In many locations, the Roma community no longer exists, clearly indicating the scale of ethnic cleansing. Given the brutality of the crimes, the passage of time, and the challenges of documentation (such as the lack of witnesses, destroyed evidence, and institutional inaction), it is evident that the process of investigating and establishing the truth is extremely complex. However, precisely for that reason, there is a moral, legal, and social obligation to continue this process. Without establishing the full truth and

sanctioning those who are responsible, Bosnia and Herzegovina cannot achieve democratic consolidation, build trust among communities, or progress toward European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

Moreover, the sexual abuse of Roma women during the 1992-1995 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina remains a taboo topic within BiH society. Although sexual violence was widespread across all parts of BiH and frequently used as a weapon of war, sexual violence against Roma women, as well as women from other minority communities, has been largely neglected in post-war analysis and documentation.

Roma women were particularly vulnerable due to both their ethnic identity and their marginalised status in society. During the war, Roma women were subjected to systematic violence, rape, abuse, and other forms of sexual violence, yet their experiences were often overlooked due to a victim narrative that primarily focused on members of the majority ethnic groups – those officially recognised as “constituent peoples” in the Constitution of BiH. In contrast, all other citizens of BiH who do not belong to these groups are classified under the constitutional category of “Others.”

In many cases, available data indicates that Roma women were subjected to sexual abuse in detention camps, villages, and towns, where they were forced to endure physical and psychological torture. After the war, their testimonies and experiences were omitted from historical, political, and social narratives, further contributing to their marginalisation. This position of Roma women is most evident in the scarcity of testimonies about their wartime experiences, as well as in their current economic and social status, and their limited access to psychosocial and legal support.

After the war, a series of human rights violations were committed against survivors of wartime sexual abuse, particularly through the denial of necessary reparations that could have contributed to the healing process – both for the individuals who endured such torture and for a society that collectively suffered the trauma of war atrocities, mass loss of life, torture, enforced displacement, and other crimes. The reparation system for survivors of wartime sexual abuse has been partially integrated into social welfare programmes at the entity level, and more recently in the Brčko District. However, since the time of wartime destruction, the majority of the work, especially in terms of providing psychosocial support, has been conducted by the non-governmental sector, particularly women’s associations. Non-governmental organisations have been a pillar of support for victims of wartime rape, as they provide holistic and empathetic care, empower women, fight against stigma, and fill the gaps often left by public institutions.

Public apologies, opportunities to speak publicly about the crimes, memorials, and guarantees of non-repetition have, unfortunately, been largely absent in the post-war period.

In such a climate of a fragmented society and a lack of adequate dealing with the past in BiH, achieving justice for victims of sexual violence, particularly Roma women, remains extremely difficult. In addition, legal, social, and cultural discrimination has placed Roma, and especially Roma women who survived sexual abuse, in an even more marginalised position. Many women did not report the abuse out of fear of stigmatisation, leaving many crimes unresolved.

This report serves as an introduction to an extraordinarily complex topic, aiming to raise awareness within BiH society about the mass crimes committed against Roma as the country’s largest national minority. It places particular emphasis on women and the sexual violence they suffered during the war, thereby creating the much-needed space for Roma women to speak out about these crimes and seek the support they urgently need.

Research of this kind remains extremely limited, as numerous reports and analyses on wartime sexual violence fail to mention Roma women. Thus, from a methodological standpoint, it was only possible to open this topic with the intention of creating the conditions for these victims’ voices to be heard and for their traumas and fight for justice to be acknowledged.

# Recommendations and Proposals

The research documented in this report clearly demonstrates that the crimes committed against Roma during the armed conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina were not isolated incidents, but part of a broader structure of violence and social exclusion. For this reason, responses to these human rights violations must be multidimensional: simultaneously focused on documentation, education, institutional recognition, and the development of sustainable memorialisation policies. To that end, we recommend the following strategic measures.

## **1. Initiating Systematic and Continuous Research into Crimes Against Roma**

Previous efforts have been fragmented and often driven by individual initiatives. It is necessary to institutionalise the research of crimes against Roma as a long-term commitment, through partnership projects involving academic institutions, memorial centres, Roma associations, and judicial bodies. The focus of such research must encompass not only the factual circumstances of the crimes but also their consequences, patterns of denial, and the survival mechanisms of the Roma community.

## **2. Development of a Comprehensive and Interactive Map of War Crimes Against Roma**

A geographically accurate and publicly accessible digital map should document locations of executions, detention camps, mass graves, deportations, and destroyed Roma settlements. This tool can serve not only as a visualisation of the suffering but also as an educational resource, a source for research work, and a platform for digital memorialisation that enables participation of the Roma community.

## **3. Establishment of a Public Thematic Database on Crimes Against Roma**

A centralised database is needed, structured according to key parameters (location, date, type of crime, victims, perpetrators, legal outcomes), which would serve as a primary resource for researchers, the judiciary, and the media. The database must be protected in accordance with privacy standards and the processing of sensitive data, but at the same time remain open for verification, updating, and use in public policies.

## **4. Strengthening the Capacity of the Roma Community for Active Participation in Documentation**

It is necessary to develop educational programmes and training for young Roma and Roma activists on transitional justice, crime documentation methodology, working with trauma, archiving materials, and witness protection. This enables the Roma community to assume the role of active bearer of remembrance, rather than merely being a passive subject of external research. It is especially important to ensure long-term technical and financial support for Roma associations that wish to engage in this area.

## **5. Establishment of Institutional Cooperation Between Academic, Judicial and Civil Actors**

The process of documentation and memorialisation must be linked with the judiciary so that the information collected can be used in criminal investigations and reparation claims. It is recommended to establish working groups including researchers, prosecutors, representatives of ministries and the Roma community, with the aim of improving the alignment of objectives and facilitating data exchange. It is essential to create mechanisms for regular reporting and monitoring of the implementation of recommendations.

## 6. Establishment of an Institutional Mechanism for Documenting the Suffering of Marginalised Groups

It is proposed to establish a special unit within the state structures for transitional justice (e.g. within the BiH Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees) responsible for researching, preserving, and publishing data on the suffering of minority and marginalised groups, including Roma. This unit must be functional, transparent, and operationally integrated with existing war crimes databases.

## 7. Integration of Roma Suffering into Official Memorialisation and Education Policies

The suffering of Roma must be institutionally recognised through the introduction of commemorative dates, inclusion in museum exhibitions and educational programmes, as well as the creation of permanent memorials at sites of suffering. Ministries of Education and Culture at the entity and cantonal levels, along with the Institute for Textbooks, must take on the obligation to systematically incorporate these topics into history and civic education. Without this, the suffering of Roma risks being erased from collective memory.

## 8. Ensuring Access to Reparations and Protection of Survivors' Rights

It is recommended that institutions responsible for implementing laws on civilian victims of war adopt guidelines that guarantee equal access to reparations for Roma survivors. Additionally, information and instructions should be developed in the Romani language, social work centre staff should receive training, and legal aid should be made available to victims to help them exercise their rights.

With the aim of opening a broader dialogue on the suffering of Roma during the war, with a particular focus on the wartime sexual abuse of Roma women, it is necessary to continue with more in-depth research and, drawing on lessons learned over the past decades in working with victims of wartime rape, to foster a safe and trusting environment, along with other necessary conditions, that would enable victims to speak about their trauma – if and when they feel the need to do so. In this context, the **recommendations** outlined in the following text have been defined.

- **Fight Against the Stigmatisation of Victims.**
  - Non-governmental organisations play a key role in providing support to victims of wartime rape. They can work to reduce the negative aspects of stigma, offer a safe environment for victims, help them in accessing psychological, legal, and social support, and enable them to share their experiences. Therefore, it is necessary to develop project proposals on this topic and seek funding for their implementation, in close cooperation with women's and Roma associations.
  - Raising awareness about the consequences of wartime rape and educating the public about victims' rights are crucial for reducing stigma. Educational programmes in schools, communities, and the media can help shift public attitudes and decrease social stigmatisation of victims.
  - It is also essential that the legal framework and institutions provide appropriate protection for victims of wartime rape. Recognising their rights, prosecuting perpetrators, and offering support through legal mechanisms all contribute to reducing stigma.
- **Develop an Awareness-Raising Programme and Information Campaign within Roma Communities.**
  - A programme focused on raising awareness about the importance of mental health, both for individuals and the wider community, as well as on the prevention of transgenerational trauma.



- The information campaign should aim to provide victims with clear and practical information on the steps necessary to exercise their rights guaranteed under the laws of Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- **Develop Specialised Programmes for Roma Communities**
  - Establish ongoing cooperation between Roma associations and women's associations or other available providers of legal and psychosocial support for victims of wartime rape.
  - Introduce Roma women mediators as support assistants for victims, who will continuously provide operational and logistical assistance in exercising rights guaranteed under the laws of Bosnia and Herzegovina.
  - Organise gatherings for Roma women victims of rape, in the form of occupational therapy programmes aimed at developing self-awareness and eventually identifying individual psychosocial support needs.
  - Confidentiality must be strictly guaranteed throughout all activities and programmes to prevent retraumatisation and ensure that victims do not withdraw due to the aforementioned fears.
- **In-Depth Analysis of the Situation on the Ground Regarding the Wartime Rape of Roma Women.**
  - Continue research across Bosnia and Herzegovina, in parallel with awareness-raising efforts and strengthening of support systems for victims, including the creation of a safe and supportive environment for Roma women to talk about their trauma.

Crimes that are not recognised – are repeated. The recognition of victims and their integration into institutional and collective memory is not only a moral imperative but also a prerequisite for the long-term stability of the country. This report and the recommendations it puts forward are a call for political responsibility, scholarly engagement, and social courage. It is time for Roma, as victims of genocide and systematic persecution, to claim their rightful place in the narrative of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina – not on the margins, but at the heart of the truth.

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*In Podrinje, according to the 1991 census, 2,647 Roma lived there, but by 2013, that number had dropped to only 586 — a decrease of over 78%. Similarly, the number of Roma who declared Romani as their mother tongue in 2013 fell from 3,311 to just 443, indicating cultural destruction and loss of collective identity as a consequence of the war and the post-war period.*

*When speaking about criminal justice as one of the pillars of transitional justice, it is important to mention that to date only three cases explicitly involving Roma victims have been finally adjudicated, while none of the genocide verdicts in Srebrenica mention Roma as victims, even though they were killed in the same executions, camps, and death convoys.*

*In this context, this report not only provides an overview of the committed crimes and patterns of violence but also lays the foundation for concrete measures of public recognition — through memorials, educational content, museum exhibits, days of remembrance, and joint commemorations. Such measures serve multiple functions besides affirming the right to truth, they act as a means of collective learning, social reparations, and function as an institutional mechanism against revisionism and forgetting.*



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