



DECEMBER 2021 | VOL. 1

SDG4: QUALITY EDUCATION

SOCIAL ACTION PROJECT UNDER
THE ESC RESOLVE: VOLUNTEERING FOR PEACE PROJECT



“TWO SCHOOLS UNDER ONE ROOF” – UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF AN EDUCATIONAL DIVIDE FOR CHILDREN IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

**WRITTEN
BY EMILY
POSNER**

Constructing a stable, inclusive, and effective education system is a vital goal for governments worldwide, with “Quality Education” being a United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goal due to its connection with escaping poverty. With global statistics showing 6 in 10 children leaving primary school without minimum literacy proficiency and 1 in 6 living in extreme poverty, surviving on less than \$1.90 per day, implementing this cannot wait. However, the complexities associated with this are innumerable, with sociocultural and economic issues creating physical barriers and both conscious and subconscious biases creating psychological ones. Post-conflict countries exemplify this. For example, in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), the effects on the education system in the country’s two entities of the Federation of BiH and Republika Srpska as well as the Brčko distrikt are significant.

Whilst the education system differs across the country, with some schools more integrated and others exclusively educating one ethnic group, a “two schools under one roof” approach was popularised within the primarily Bosniak and Croat populated Federation following the end of the war and the Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995. It was designed as a temporary solution to ethnic homogenisation, aiming to promote the return of refugees; yet this approach remained across 56 schools in 2020. It involves Bosniaks and Croats sharing a school building, but attending segregated classes with different curriculums, textbooks, and languages. Students often have different entrances and break times to prevent socialisation, which The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, who oversee education in BiH, argue further polarises groups.

A “two schools under one roof” approach can also lead to significant disparities in accessing quality education. In the town of Travnik, the school building is owned by the Catholic Church, and they operate the right side, educating Croat students who have a refurbished institution and access to an indoor gym. Conversely, the left side for the Muslim Bosniak students remains un-refurbished and pupils have physical education classes outdoors. Situations like these have prompted international children’s charities to conclude that young people in BiH are facing notable systemic disadvantages in their education. Efforts to combat these issues have been made; in 2014 the Bosnian supreme court ruled that educational divides based upon ethnicity should be removed, but this has not been enforced.

Despite the separation a “two schools under one roof” system can promote, many students mix inter-ethnically outside of school and fight to be educated together. In 2016 in the town of Jajce, claims that high schools teaching a Croatian curriculum were discriminating against Bosniak students prompted politicians to call for a new school to accommodate them exclusively, but students argued against this and talks of a new school dissolved. Moreover, there are cases of some segregation aspects are being removed, with the same teachers working at both schools and joint extracurricular activities. This provides hope for the country’s educational future, whereby barriers between groups are being actively dismantled and all children have equal access to the opportunities a high-quality education can provide them with.



Story of solidarity:

Travnik, Bosnia and Herzegovina – Elizabeth Hrgić and Inas Dagoja attended the same school but were segregated by a fence because of their Bosniak and Croat backgrounds. Despite this, they were high school sweethearts and got married in 2019. At their wedding, they had pictures in own “ethnic schoolyard” holding hands through a fence. This picture went viral. Apparently unrelated, the fence at the school was torn down and replaced by one going around the building and protecting all the students together.

Sources:

1. [Education – United Nations Sustainable Development](#)
2. [More Than One-Half of Children and Adolescents Are Not Learning Worldwide](#)
3. [The UN agency for children](#)
4. [Love Triumphs Over Bosnia's Segregated Schools](#)
5. [In a Divided Bosnia, Segregated Schools Persist - The New York Times](#)