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POLICY BRIEF

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Peacebuilding Initiative and the Institute for Development Impact (I4DI).*

Everyday Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Findings from Sarajevo and East Sarajevo

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This brief examines how people in Bosnia and Herzegovina understand and sustain peace in everyday life. The study draws on ten focus-group discussions in Sarajevo and East Sarajevo, using a participatory Fuzzy Cognitive Mapping approach to elicit and map how participants perceive the conditions, factors, and drivers that contribute to their understanding of everyday peace. The analysis identifies common patterns and relationships situating peace in the interplay of institutional reliability, information integrity, and civic tone and interaction. The research also identifies several context-specific social, economic, legal, and psychosocial pressures that affect how predictable daily life feels in each individual locality.

In Sarajevo and in East Sarajevo, a sample composed of higher-education students, professors, peace specialists from civil society, and local government officials described everyday peace in terms of a confidence that systems and people behave in predictable ways. Three dimensions of predictability are defined in this brief as conditions that allow people to plan, act, and interact without uncertainty: Institutional Reliability refers to the consistent application of rules, timely decisions, and clearly-defined and explained outcomes; Information Integrity refers to the accuracy and transparency of public communication; Civic Tone and Interaction refers to the quality of behavior in the public sphere, where the interplay of certain social dynamics either enable or restrain cooperation.

Participants also described the factors that they perceive as negative influences towards everyday

peace, making it harder to sustain. In cognitive maps, strong negative drivers included unemployment and uncertainty about the future, inconsistent administration, contradictory and sensational reporting, fragmented historical narratives and denial of crimes, and the inconsistent enforcement of laws, among others. This policy brief proposes a set of practical measures that strengthen the positive conditions linked to everyday peace, and address constraining variables. These include building institutional literacy and imposing clearer service standards, improving public communication and professional media practice, expanding transparent opportunities for young people, reinforcing civic and professional ethics in education and public service, and supporting practical cooperation efforts across communities.

Keywords:

Bosnia and Herzegovina, Everyday Peace, Institutional Reliability, Information Integrity, Civic Tone and Interaction, Fuzzy Cognitive Mapping, Participatory Research, Public Communication, Youth Opportunity

BACKGROUND

Study Context

Bosnia and Herzegovina has operated under the Dayton Peace Agreement since 1995, when the accord ended war and set up a single state composed of two governing Entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska, with the Brčko District as a self-governing unit under shared sovereignty. The Federation is further divided into ten cantons with their own ministries and budgets; Republika Srpska is organized centrally. Brčko runs on a separate legal framework. In practice, these three systems carry most day-to-day government work within their territories. *This brief examines how that arrangement is lived in Sarajevo and East Sarajevo, a single metropolitan area administered separately by the two entities, which allows a side-by-side view of everyday peace under parallel administrations.*

State-level institutions are built around a complex ethnic power-sharing structure. The Presidency has three members: one Bosniak and one Croat elected from the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and one Serb elected from Republika Srpska. The chair of the Presidency rotates, and most decisions require agreement among all three members. A similar consent logic runs through the Council of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly, so state-level laws and appointments typically require cross-group approval. The Office of the High Representative (OHR), an ad hoc international institution created to supervise implementation of the peace agreement, retains authority to impose decisions and remove officials, though it has intervened only occasionally in recent years. The Peace Implementation Council (PIC), composed of representatives of key international actors, provides the political framework supporting the OHR's mandate and reviews progress on implementing civilian aspects of the Dayton Peace Agreement. While the PIC is not an executive body, it continues to play an important role in shaping the international community's engagement in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Responsibilities are distributed across several tiers of government, and the boundaries between them are not always clear. The state manages external relations, border control, currency, and parts of security and trade, while education, health care, policing, social policy, and most infrastructure are managed by the

Entities and, within the Federation, by the cantons. As a result, regulations and administrative practice can differ between the Entities, but also among cantons and the Brčko District, often reflecting political alignments and the composition of constituent peoples in a given area. Mandates overlap, coordination is uneven, and decisions frequently pass through multiple layers of approval and review. Veto rights exist in a number of institutions and are used both in voting and in procedural steps, which can slow implementation and reform.

Public administration functions across the country, with schools, clinics, and municipal offices operating regularly in both Entities and in Brčko, although capacities and the reliability of services vary widely by location and sector. Services tend to be more predictable in larger urban areas, while gaps between mandate and implementation are wider in some rural or returnee communities. There are examples of cooperation across Entity lines in technical fields such as transport corridors, energy projects, tourism promotion, and environmental monitoring, although these efforts are usually narrow and time-bound, and often depend on specific officials or outside support rather than established inter-governmental routines.

Sarajevo and East Sarajevo illustrate how this structure works in daily life. The two cities effectively share one metropolitan space but are administered separately: Sarajevo within the Federation, and East Sarajevo within Republika Srpska. Each maintains its own legal framework, budget, and service systems. People move freely between the two, work and study across the line, and sometimes the cities coordinate around events, utilities, or roads. Most core administrative functions, however, are operated entirely in parallel. That separation is not always visible on the ground, but it shapes how institutions behave and how residents understand where to turn when they need something from government. This is the setting in which policies are made, services are delivered, and expectations about fairness and predictability take shape in daily life.

Research Description

This brief synthesizes qualitative findings from ten focus-group discussions in Sarajevo and East Sarajevo with higher-education students in "Student" groups, professors and peace actors in "Peace Experts" groups, and local government officials in "Peace Actor" focus groups. Using a facilitated Fuzzy Cognitive Mapping

(FCM) methodology,¹ each focus group generated a visual map of how participants perceived the factors that sustain or disrupt everyday peace and discussed how they play out in daily life. The project received ethics approval from the University of Sarajevo.²

The FCM process enabled participants to translate complex reasoning into a shared visual model, making explicit how they understand relationships among institutional, informational, and civic dynamics. Claims in this brief reflect recurrent patterns across groups and are based on a thematic review of group cognitive maps, focus-group transcripts, and facilitator notes. Findings are indicative of participants' perceptions rather than city-wide prevalence, and are not intended as representative estimates.³ The analysis focused on identifying patterns of reasoning and convergence across maps, examining how participants explained the mechanisms that make institutions predictable, information trustworthy, and social interactions civil. This brief first presents the key factors and dynamics participants most often linked to everyday peace, and then draws out the policy implications and programmatic recommendations that follow from these findings.

EVERYDAY PEACE IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Study participants in both contexts described *everyday peace* in terms of how predictably systems and people behave. Peace was understood as the confidence that systems and people will behave in expected, orderly ways, enabling citizens to plan, act, and cooperate without constant uncertainty. The FCM maps developed in focus groups show three interrelated dimensions of predictability that emerged across both locations:

1. Institutional reliability: Refers to the expectation that public systems operate according to law and deliver services in a consistent manner.

It encompasses the legal system, political leadership, and public administration as the central mechanisms that contribute to *everyday peace*. Participants associated reliability with institutions that apply rules uniformly, issue decisions on time, and explain outcomes clearly. The maps also show that confidence in legality, professional conduct, and administrative functioning reinforces stability across other dimensions as well.

2. Information integrity: Concerns the accuracy, transparency, and independence of communication within public life. It spans both institutional communication and the broader media environment. Reliable information, free of manipulation or political interference, signals that institutions are accountable and citizens are respected as informed participants. Negative influences, such as inflammatory or sensational media and historical revisionism, erode confidence and contribute to uncertainty. Freedom of speech, independent journalism, and access to factual reporting were identified as key to maintaining trust in governance and in the productivity of social dialogue.

3. Civic tone and interaction: Describes the nature and quality of interaction in the public sphere. This includes interpersonal behavior, leadership conduct, intergroup dynamics, and the social values that shape cooperation. Positive social values, peaceful coexistence, and functional interpersonal relationships sustain cohesion, while polarization, disrespect toward differences, and political incivility weaken it. Participants emphasized that civility, fairness, and self-control in both public and private settings are visible signs of *everyday peace*. When leaders engage responsibly and citizens treat one another with respect, institutions gain legitimacy; when hostility, cynicism, or apathy dominate, order persists formally but loses substance.

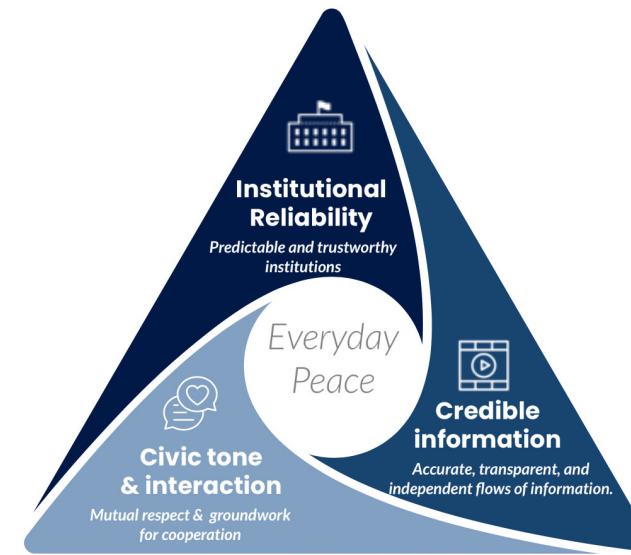
¹ Fuzzy Cognitive Mapping is a participatory, visual technique for representing social knowledge and modelling perceived relationships in complex systems. Participants define variables (nodes), draw causal links (arrows) showing how one influences another, and assign relative strengths to those links. The approach combines qualitative discussion with a systems-mapping framework, allowing participants to visualize their collective reasoning. It follows the participatory methodology implemented by the Yale Peacebuilding Initiative (*How Global Peacebuilders Think: A Tool for Policy Dialogue and System Change*, 2025).

² Ethics Council of the University of Sarajevo approval: No. 0105-641125, 19 June 2025. Earlier positive opinion: Ethics Committee, University of Sarajevo – Faculty of Law, Ref. 01-676-2/25, 5 June 2025.

³ The analysis emphasises (a) variables and relationships that appeared across multiple group maps, (b) the context participants used to explain those relationships, and (c) mechanisms they illustrated with concrete, observable examples such as on-time administrative decisions or transparent grading. Where perspectives diverged, these are reported separately; generalisations are made only for patterns observed in several groups.

Everyday Peace as Reliability

The conditions that make peace predictable in daily life



INSTITUTIONAL RELIABILITY

Positive characteristics: Apply rules uniformly, issue decisions on time, and explain outcomes clearly

Negative characteristics: Selective enforcement of rules, politicized decision-making, administrative delays, and lack of written explanations of outcomes

CREDIBLE INFORMATION

Positive characteristics: Freedom of speech, independent journalism, and access to factual reporting

Negative characteristics: inflammatory or sensational media and historical revisionism

CIVIC TONE & INTERACTION

Positive characteristics: Positive social values, peaceful coexistence, and functional interpersonal relationships

Negative characteristics: polarization, disrespect toward differences, and political incivility

These three dimensions are interdependent parts of the everyday peace system participants described in focus groups. Predictable institutions create the conditions for credible information, while accurate information flows reinforce public confidence in institutions; together, they shape the civic environment in which cooperation between groups and individuals can take place. When one element fails (e.g. when rules are applied selectively, when communication loses credibility, or when public discourse becomes hostile), the perception of peace erodes even if formal structures remain.

Predictability was also tied to the concrete conditions that facilitate daily wellbeing. Regular employment, access to health care, and fair opportunity were cited as practical signs that institutions meet their responsibilities and that citizens can depend on systems to function. Formal education systems were a recurring topic across groups; participants linked quality and coordinated education to fairness and the creation of opportunities. They also said education should regain its formative role alongside instruction, so that schools teach shared civic values that connect rather than divide. Inadequate or politically divided schools were described as indicators of disorder. Furthermore, historical revisionism and fragmented curricula were identified as direct threats to stability, because they undermine shared understanding, weakening trust between segregated communities.

Structural Drivers of Everyday Peace

Families, schools, workplaces, and local networks in Sarajevo and East Sarajevo sustain the routines that build trust in public systems and make cooperation possible. Participants of all generations felt that these everyday dynamics are most often disrupted by political contestation, administrative inconsistency, and the pressure of the media environment. In Sarajevo, shifting rules, delayed procedures, and politicized debate make institutions appear unreliable and weaken confidence in merit-based outcomes, especially among young people.

The cognitive visual maps developed in the focus groups translate the participants' lived experiences into a structured view of how everyday peace is produced and sustained. They show everyday peace as an outcome that emerges from the interaction of stabilizing and destabilizing forces within the system. Within this structure, drivers are the variables that directly shape everyday peace, while other factors are the broader conditions that reinforce or weaken these effects through their interaction with the drivers. For example, functional state systems, human rights, and a strong legal framework act as core drivers that directly shape stability, while reinforcing factors such as a sense of security, freedom of speech, or mental health, among many others, determine how reliably that stability is sustained in daily life. For clarity, the table below organizes the mapped drivers under the primary dimension where their influence was most consistently observed.

Dimension	System Drivers Strengthening Everyday Peace	System Drivers Undermining Everyday Peace
Institutional reliability	<i>East Sarajevo: Functional state system; Stable system; Human rights; Financial stability and regular salary.</i> <i>Sarajevo: Fulfillment of basic needs; Strong legal system.</i>	<i>East Sarajevo: Corruption; Unemployment; Negative political climate.</i> <i>Sarajevo: Absence of rule of law; Negative local politics; Regional political events (when destabilizing).</i>
Information integrity	<i>East Sarajevo: Media (when accurate and independent).</i> <i>Sarajevo: (no drivers recorded).</i>	<i>East Sarajevo: (no drivers recorded).</i> <i>Sarajevo: Negative media; Inflammatory media; Media as a catalyst of negative events; Historical revisionism.</i>
Civic tone & interaction	<i>East Sarajevo: Family relationships; Peace beliefs; Personal development.</i> <i>Sarajevo: (no drivers recorded).</i>	<i>East Sarajevo: Social polarization (division).</i> <i>Sarajevo: Religious communities (when divisive); Political incivility; Citizen passivity.</i>

The intertwined institutional, informational, and civic spheres that sustain daily stability form the backbone of everyday peace. For Bosnia and Herzegovina citizens, peace rests on the reliability of everyday systems, meaning the steady, lawful, and transparent performance of institutions that people encounter directly. The following subsections examine how participants explained these relationships between drivers and factors in practice and how they connect to broader patterns of public life.

How Reliability Shapes Everyday Peace

“If someone breaks the law, will they be sanctioned?”... “What matters most in our country is law enforcement; our laws themselves aren’t so bad.” - Student, Sarajevo

Participants said that when rules are enforced as they are written, permits are issued on time, and administrative outcomes are reported clearly, they interpret these actions as proof that institutions still function as intended. This reliability also has a stabilizing effect across other dimensions, which the participants linked to psychosocial well-being through a greater sense of calm and safety; material security through steady work and income; and to civic tone through respectful interactions.

In Sarajevo, students and professors both used the term “partial rule of law” to describe the gap between

legislation and enforcement, positing that systems lose their functionality when rules can be bent through personal connections, when hiring depends on political alignment rather than merit, or when legal cases stall indefinitely. This weakens public confidence in justice and leads to a growing acceptance and expectation among public that institutions will not act consistently.

In East Sarajevo, participants described institutional reliability as reflected in professional conduct and everyday responsibilities at work. Teachers, civil servants, and city administrators said they are expected to act consistently, meet deadlines, and follow procedures even when oversight is weak. Behaviors such as composure, punctuality, and respect for rules were cited as visible signs that institutions continue to function and can be trusted. In the East Sarajevo cognitive models, the *legal system* and *educated society* appeared as the strongest positive drivers of *everyday peace*, reflecting the view that stability depends both on functional institutions and on the conduct of those who make them work.

Information Integrity as a Source of Public Confidence

“Svaki dan nešto novo, bombarduju. Ne znaš više šta je tačno.”

“Every day there’s something new, they bombard us. You don’t even know what’s true anymore.” - Local Government Official, East Sarajevo

“They contribute significantly to undermining peace, even though they do it for clicks and their own interests.” - Student, Sarajevo

In both cities, participants linked the flow of information in the public sphere to how they experience stability. They described frustration with contradictory, inflammatory, and exaggerated reporting, and said that partisan coverage makes it difficult to know which sources to trust. In their view, unclear or inconsistent communication reduces confidence that institutions operate transparently and that official information reflects reality.⁴

In East Sarajevo, participants described the exhausting and disorienting effect of the constant stream of sensationalist headlines, political commentary, and speculation. Students and teachers talked about how conflicting messages sap focus and optimism in their families and neighborhoods, ultimately resulting in the loss of “inner peace”, while officials noted similar effects in their workplaces. In Sarajevo, the emphasis was on placed on accuracy of reporting rather than volume, with all respondents (professors, peace workers, and students) citing conflicting differing reports of identical events, denial of certain verified facts, and other selective framing examples as direct obstacles to trust in media and the institutions they report on.

In both contexts, people saw transparent communication as clear evidence that institutions are working properly. When communication is lacking, media narratives fill the gap and affect how their work is perceived. In the cognitive maps, variables tied to the flow of information were positioned close to *Rule of law* and *Functional state system*, indicating a strong connection between communication and predictable institutional behavior.

Civic Tone and Public Conduct as a Measure of Peace

“Politics sets the tone. When leaders shout and insult each other on TV, it teaches everyone else that disrespect is normal.” - Student, Sarajevo

The tone of discourse in the public sphere emerged as both a measure and a driver of perceptions of everyday peace, across all participant groups. In this vein, participants discussed the nature of regular interactions between individuals,

groups, and the way institutions and leaders conduct public affairs, both on the internet and in daily life.

At the social and *moral level*, *morality*, *positive social values and community norms*, *peace beliefs*, *peace as a social value*, and *family relationships* all contribute directly to *everyday peace*. These factors express the ethical consistency and relational trust that allow people to rely on one another. Participants associated these values with an individual’s informal education, drawn from their families, schools, and workplaces. In this sense, *everyday peace* depends on the reliability of social behavior as much as on the strength of institutions, from the grassroots level to the highest levels of leadership.

Factors relating to the conduct of different identity groups and individuals were also tied closely to the feeling of *everyday peace*. *Social polarization*, *lack of intergroup interaction*, *negative interpersonal relationships*, and *disrespect toward differences* weaken trust between people and feelings of belonging. Some causal factors were tied to powerful social institutions, such as the *abuse of religion*, which amplifies intergroup divisions when moral or faith language is used to separate identity groups rather than to connect them. Participants explained that when dialogue narrows in this way, people stop engaging in civic discourse and cease cooperation across ethnic and other lines.

At the political and institutional level, civic tone is shaped by the conduct of those in power. Across both cities, *political incivility*, *nationalism*, *leaders uninterested in peace*, *corruption*, and *dysfunctional or disorganized state systems* appear as major negative influences. What was described in the country as a *negative political climate* erodes confidence, while *state system stability* and *functional institutions* strengthen it. Participants observed that confrontational political language and opaque decision-making corrode public trust and set a tone of intolerance that trickles down into community life.

Additional Context-Specific Conditions

While patterns across both cities pointed to shared dimensions of reliability, information integrity, and civic conduct, participants also described context-specific conditions that shaped how peace is experienced in practice. The observations from Sarajevo and East Sarajevo point to pressures that sit alongside the main drivers of everyday peace. The following captures factors that did not fit neatly within the broader catego-

⁴ Media-related variables appeared as negative drivers in multiple cognitive maps, including *Media sensationalism*, *Negative media*, *Media as a catalyst of negative events*, and *Three ethnic echo chambers*

ries, social, economic, and legal dynamics that continue to affect the predictability of daily life in each locality.

East Sarajevo - In East Sarajevo, many participants began sessions by describing *everyday peace* as ordinary life continuing without fear or disruption. The cognitive maps positioned *Health, Human rights, Legal system, and Educated society* nearest to *everyday peace*, showing that people link stability to wellness, dignity, fairness, and predictable systems.

- **Health, rights, and dignity:** Participants said peace begins when care is dependable, accessible, and people are treated with respect. They viewed these conditions as proof that society protects human worth. *Poor health* appeared as a negative link, confirming that gaps in care or wellbeing are felt as direct threats to peace.
- **Economic security and fair opportunity:** Across student focus groups, *Unemployment and Future uncertainty* were identified as some of the strongest destabilizing factors. Participants connected peace to job opportunities, secure employment, and fair contracts, explaining that a stable career provides income and a sense of fulfillment and order at home. However, they felt that education no longer guarantees work, and that progress often depends on personal ties rather than effort. Student groups in Sarajevo cited an absence of small, practical indicators of regularity, such as dependable timelines for grading and applications, clear criteria for internships and jobs, and brief written explanations of decisions. Without this consistency, motivation declines and anxiety increases.
- **Psychological strain and information pressure:** *Anxiety* appeared as a negative influence in several maps, which participants tied to the continuous flow of political commentary and sensational reporting. Many said they limit their exposure to media to preserve a sense of calm in daily life. They described informational fatigue as one of the causes of difficulty in maintaining sustained focus and reflection. Participants also observed that when institutional communication is clear, factual, and delivered at regular intervals, it helps maintain attention and trust, whereas aggressive or politicized messaging contributes to distraction and tension.

Several groups also mentioned a lingering fear of renewed armed conflict as something which en-

courages restraint and cooperation, and the limited mobility between Entities as a factor that segregates ethnic groups even without direct hostilities.

Sarajevo - Sarajevo participants on the other hand defined stability more through the lens of credibility of law and public information. They emphasized how fragmented historical narratives and selective application of rules weaken trust in institutions and make legality appear conditional. The discussion centered on the following three related domains where predictability is most fragile:

- **Fragmented historical narratives and factual coherence:** Students and professors identified education and media as major obstacles to a shared factual base. Divergent curricula between entities and cantons extend into how recent history is taught and how current events are presented. Several cognitive maps linked this to weaker coordination among institutions and reduced confidence that rules are applied consistently. In both expert and student models, *Historical revisionism* and *Three ethnic echo chambers* ranked among the strongest negative factors for *everyday peace*. This reflects the view that contested facts erode both administrative coherence and social trust. Professors noted that ministries and schools often rely on incompatible “reference facts,” which makes coordination difficult and undermines predictability in governance.
- **Procedural regularity and enforcement consistency:** In all Sarajevo focus groups participants linked the credibility of law enforcement to whether institutions apply rules in a consistent and transparent manner. Students and professors discussed politicised hiring and delays in administrative decisions as examples of evidence that discretion often overrides procedure. Officials noted that overlapping mandates slow case handling and create space for negotiation and rule bending. At the same time, respondents also recognized that institutions still function as intended and cited small, visible signs of regularity, such as documents issued on schedule, sanctions applied consistently, written explanations for decisions. Several officials added that transparency in how state-level institutions handle cases could demonstrate that agencies are capable of following their own rules, making reliability itself a practical proof of legality.

- **Denial of crimes and the credibility of law:** Law and political-science students described denial of war crimes as a direct threat to the legitimacy of legal institutions. In one group, *Genocide denial* had a strong negative influence on *everyday peace*. Students argued that when judicial rulings are ignored or publicly disputed, citizens conclude that laws are conditional and that legality depends on political will. Professors viewed denial and historical revisionism as consequences of weak enforcement capacity: legal provisions exist, but sanctions rarely follow. From the students’ perspective, the same institutions that fail to enforce denial laws also fail to uphold routine accountability, indicating a shared pattern between symbolic and procedural inconsistency. Officials did not debate denial directly but agreed that justice loses meaning when judgments are unenforced. Students and professors concluded that public acceptance of final court verdicts, especially in war-crimes cases, is essential for the rule of law to function. When verdicts are contested or applied selectively, it signals that legality is negotiable and undermines confidence in judicial independence.

POLICY AND PROGRAM IMPLICATIONS

To support everyday peace, the recommendations that follow draw directly from the experiences described in Sarajevo and East Sarajevo and propose actions that strengthen the conditions participants associated with tangible peace.

1. **Institutional reliability and access to services.** To strengthen the predictability of administration and ensure rules are applied consistently, decisions are issued on time, and services are efficient and accessible, policy and program design should prioritise measures that make procedures easy to follow and verifiable across offices, with responsibilities, timelines, and outcomes documented and open to review.
 - **Develop practicums on working with institutions in tertiary and secondary education.** In partnership with local offices, universities and

secondary schools should offer small practicums co-supervised by a designated representative from a municipal or state office. Students learn to request information, follow a case through each step, cite decisions, track timelines, and complete a supervised task, then publish a short reflection on lessons learned. At the secondary level, the format can be lighter and classroom-anchored, for example preparing a simple service-access guide or submitting and tracking a basic request. Practicums should be aligned with the EU active-citizenship model⁵ in Bosnia and Herzegovina, linking classroom work to real participation channels such as access-to-information requests, public consultations, monitoring service standards, and use of e-services. This approach builds practical skills, makes procedures legible, and helps students experience institutional reliability in practice.

- **Make performance and responsibility visible.** Wherever possible, publish straightforward service standards, such as expected timeframes, decision criteria, and simple completion data, and map the end-to-end process for high-volume services, for example civil registration or public-sector recruitment and selection. Share this information on official websites, service portals, municipal notice boards, local media, and the city’s social media channels. Provide a short, plain-language guide that sets out each step, required documents, and expected timelines, and keep a publicly accessible, time-stamped log of application handoffs between offices to support transparency and accountability.
- **Expand opportunities for transparent civic internships and placements.** Public bodies and universities could create coordinated internship programmes with published criteria, anonymised first-round screening where feasible, and brief post-selection explanations. Where rules restrict placements, ministries of education and universities can pilot targeted adjustments that allow enrolled students to complete supervised assignments in public institutions for credit. Partner with key ministries, universities, and CSOs to design and test transparent selection models for public internships, scholarships, and early-career placements. Documenting and communicating these pilots publicly would

⁵ European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). *Active citizenship: for a better European society*. Brussels: EESC, 2012. The publication outlines EU practice and rationale for citizen participation beyond voting, including volunteering, public consultation, and participatory democracy.

demonstrate fairness in practice and build confidence that merit and procedure are valued.

2. Information integrity and public communication.

To strengthen integrity and improve public communication, initiatives should focus on practical steps that make official information easy to find, consistent across outlets, and traceable to source.

- **Develop a community-based information verification program through municipal councils and youth centers.** To contribute to reinforcing the integrity and transparency of public communication at the community level, establish a publicly or donor funded initiative to train teachers, librarians, and municipal communication staff to lead short “claim-check” sessions for residents and students. These sessions would teach how to verify information using primary sources such as the Official Gazette, court and statistics portals, and regulator notices. Partnering with local universities and the Press Council, the program could operate through “mjesne zajednice” (municipal councils), libraries and youth centers, ensuring access for both young people and adults.
- **Support professional standards in journalism.** Expand support and increase funding for voluntary peer-review sessions and shared referencing standards for accurate use of public data and official documents.

3. Civic competence, composure, and ethical practice.

To strengthen professional conduct in classrooms, offices, and media, efforts should focus on practical steps that normalise measured, rule-based communication and fair behaviour across education, public administration, and journalism.

- **Provide stress-management and procedural communication workshops.** Studies in public-service and newsroom settings show that pairing stress-management with clear communication standards improves well-being, performance, and trust. Create or expand short, skills-based sessions for frontline public servants, school leaders, and newsroom staff that focus on calm, rule-based communication under pressure. Include coaching and learning on how to explain criteria, timelines, and grounds for decisions, how to acknowledge and correct errors, and how to handle high-salience interactions with composure. These sessions could be delivered through civil-service academies, teacher-training centres, and journalism schools.

4. Cooperation across communities. Building on the examples participants cited as effective, such as small, practical collaborations between Sarajevo and East Sarajevo, efforts should aim to make these forms of cooperation routine. As such, institutions and civic partners could:

- **Form neutral, technical working groups.** Sarajevo and East Sarajevo municipal departments nominate technical staff to meet quarterly, under university or international facilitation, on low-salience topics (air quality, waste routes, traffic, tourism), and issue brief joint outputs with dates and contacts.
- **Support community-level partnerships across the city division line.** Schools, youth clubs, and neighbourhood associations co-organise local projects with measurable outputs (e.g. environmental clean-ups, joint exhibitions, or cross-community workshops), using modest municipal or donor support to sustain regular collaboration.

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