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## FAIR PLAY, FAIR CHILDHOOD: BRINGING CHILDREN TOGETHER THROUGH SPORTS IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Young people are important for developing and maintaining peace and stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and having shared goals and values decreases the social distance between them. This USAID program brings together young people of different ethnicities and from divided communities to play on the same sports teams, leagues, and tournaments throughout the year. The Youth Sports and Recreation Association implements this \$500,000 three-year project for USAID.

More than two decades after the war, the political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) remains tense at all levels of society and in all communities, which remain largely segregated by ethnicity. School-age children from the country's two entities (Republika Srpska and the Federation of BiH) rarely travel to and meet children from municipalities or entities other than their own. With no outside exposure or experiences, many young people in BiH begin to harbor radical and simplistic nationalistic views of those from other ethnicities and communities.

### USAID ASSISTANCE

USAID's "Fair Play, Fair Childhood" project brings together BiH young people through joint sports activities and leagues across the country all year long. The program helps bridge the divide between citizens and communities by increasing mutual trust and friendship among children and teens through a youth basketball league during the school year and Youth Sports Games during the summer break. The activities offered through this project are often the only opportunities for children to travel and

meet other kids from different ethnicities and other parts of the country. Ultimately, both children and adults will learn about the importance of friendship and mutual respect.

## IMPLEMENTATION AND RESULTS

The project carefully selects cities and communities from both entities and involving members of all ethnic groups in BiH. The project also makes a special effort to include girls, disabled children, and children from so-called ‘two schools under one roof’ (schools in which pupils are segregated and have different curricula according to their ethnicity).

### BASKETBALL LEAGUE OF 12 CITIES

The USAID-supported youth basketball league provides an opportunity for young players to realize their potential by being part of a national league. USAID partnered with the BiH Basketball Association, which organizes formal youth basketball tournaments in 12 cities each year.

In 2018, the first year of the project, more than 200 teams of boys and 80 teams of girls played in the league. The coaching staff and volunteers, 4,200 parents, and more than 100,000 spectators were involved in preparing, organizing, assisting, or attending and supporting these basketball games and events.



Participants in 2018 Youth Sports Games in Sarajevo. Photo: USAID

By 2021, the end of this project, the goal is to have reached 11,000 players, 15,750 staff and volunteers, and 420,000 spectators through the basketball league alone.

### YOUTH SPORTS GAMES

The Youth Sport Games (summer games) comprises 10 sports, including street basketball, soccer, dodge ball, handball, volleyball, and tennis, as well as educational workshops and social networking events for the children and their families – and including disabled children through the BiH Special Olympics.

In 2018, Youth Sports Games brought together 47,039 boys and girls (and thousands of parents and coaches) from 117 cities in BiH through sports activities and tournaments organized in 34 cities. Tournament finalists – 1,910 young people from all parts of the country – had the opportunity to visit Sarajevo, where they played in the final rounds of competition. In total, the number of spectators at the tournaments topped 115,000.



Finalists of 8<sup>th</sup> Youth Sports Games in Sarajevo, BiH, 2018. Photo: USAID

At the end of the project in 2021, USAID’s goal is to have reached more than 158,000 children through Youth Sports Games, with some 5,860 children coming to the grand finale games in Sarajevo, involving a total of 6,150 project staff and volunteers, and more than 385,000 spectators from different municipalities/cities.