

## Landmine Victims Peer Counselling Group II in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH)

In partnership with Solutions for Women Business Owners, the Federation of Bosnia, and the Herzegovina Ministry of Health.

**Dates:** January 2001 to April 2002

**Primary sites:** Bosnia and Herzegovina

**Budget:** \$270,000 CAD

**Donor:** Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)

### Overview

During the Bosnian War anti-personnel landmines were used extensively by three warring armies. A large proportion of the population of Bosnia and Herzegovina has been injured by the mines, with injuries often causing disability. At the time of the project's onset, peer counselling was not widely used in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and people with disabilities were often isolated from their communities, struggling to find avenues to engage in social or economic reform. The Landmine Victims Peer Counselling Group II in Bosnia-Herzegovina

(BiH) project had the goal of supporting victims of landmine injuries and other people with disabilities by establishing peer counselling groups. The project achieved this goal by working to enhance the services offered at 41 existing community based rehabilitation (CBR) centres in the country.



The following activities were accomplished and/or planned by the project:

- The project expanded the capacity for peer counselling programs for people with disabilities, including those who experienced trauma as a result of landmine injuries. The project reached 400 people with disabilities and linked them to existing peer counselling groups.
- The project helped each of the 10 peer counselling groups overcome obstacles unique to their regions – for example, one group removed architectural barriers at two primary schools and a one coffee shop, while another group presented on a local TV program about disability, independent living, and peer support to raise awareness of the challenges people with disabilities face.
- The project hosted workshops for CBR workers to promote peer counselling as a fundamental part of community based rehabilitation.
- The project hosted a “Small Business Development” course for over 22 participants. It helped people with disabilities and parents of children with disabilities to find meaningful self-employment.

## Background

During the Bosnian War, the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Croatian Defence Council, and the Army of Republika Srpska used anti-personnel landmines extensively – there were roughly 2 million unexploded landmines and other explosives remaining in Bosnia and Herzegovina after the war. The ICACBR team wrote a report during the Emergency Assistance to the Disabled Population in Kosovo, Albania, and Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1999, in which they explained that there were nearly 35 casualties a month from landmines. These mines caused both physical and emotional distress, and many citizens lived in fear knowing the entire country was heavily populated with landmines. While significant efforts to remove the mines were undertaken prior to and during this project, the quantity and area that the landmines cover is so large that removal efforts are ongoing in 2020. Many civilians had been killed or injured by landmines, leading to a significant population of people with disabilities due to injury in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Historically people with disabilities in this region have struggled to engage with their communities and tended to be isolated from society.

## Rationale

Peer counselling is an effective way to support victims of landmine injury and people with disabilities. Peer counselling can empower people with disabilities to advocate for themselves and sustainably increase their social and political visibility. While there were 38 community based rehabilitation centres in Bosnia and three in Republika Srpska at the time of this project's onset, there was opportunity to improve and expand the peer counselling programs at each centre. The ICACBR hoped to increase the capacity and reach of these programs.

The project's ultimate goal was to allow people with disabilities, particularly survivors of anti-personnel landmine injury, to participate in society both socially and economically. The project worked towards this goal by improving access to peer counselling services for landmine survivors and other people with disabilities. These programs were supported and established in partnership with the network of community based rehabilitation centres in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

## Actions and Outcomes

The Landmine Victims Peer Counselling Group II in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) project had three main objectives: to support peer counselling programs, to educate healthcare professionals about community based rehabilitation techniques, and to run small business development training to increase the ability of people with disabilities to find meaningful work.

The project's initiatives included the following:

- At the project's onset there were 83 members in ten peer counselling groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The **project contacted over 400 people with disabilities on behalf of these groups and worked to engage them in peer counselling.**
- **The project contacted over 40 organizations on a local, national, and international level to form partnerships and increase support for peer counselling groups.** These partner organizations also helped the peer counselling groups expand their reach. Groups contacted included the Association for Persons with Disabilities (APWD), the Association of People with Paraplegia (APWP), the Union of Civilian Victims of the War, and the International Law Group for Human Rights.

- The project **worked to meet the unique needs of each peer counselling group and worked to change public attitudes towards people with disabilities**. Different methods were used in each region and by each center. Examples include:
  - The removal of architectural barriers at two primary schools and at one coffee shop in Sarajevo.
  - The presentation of a local TV program about disability issues, independent living, and peer support in Srebrenik.
  - Official registration of peer counselling groups, giving them more legitimacy and negotiating power, such as achieved with the group in Gorazde.
  - Facilitation of meetings with local government to discuss challenges for people with disabilities.
- The project **organized two workshops for community based rehabilitation workers** in Tuzla and Srebrenik titled “New WHO Classification of Health, Function and Disability and Peer-Support Groups”. These workshops discussed the role of peer counselling and gave the centres an opportunity to discuss their activities and plans for the future.
- **The project hosted a “Small Business Development” training course in Sarajevo**. The course had 18 attendees, including representatives from peer counselling groups and parents of children with disabilities. The instructors made the content accessible to all participants regardless of education or background. As unemployment was growing in Bosnia and Herzegovina at the time, this workshop gave practical advice about finding meaningful self-employment.
- **The project supported peer counselling groups to raise awareness of the challenges they faced**. Efforts were different for each centre and included members of peer counselling groups participating in interviews that were broadcast on six TV stations and published in two local newspapers. These efforts sought to increase understanding among the population of people with disabilities and peer counselling, allowing each group to obtain more support from their communities and allied organizations.
- **The project worked to build networks and partnerships**, including those with local, national, and international organizations. These partnerships allowed the project to explore the possibilities of future collaboration. The project grew these relationships with roundtable discussions and other events.

## Conclusion

The Landmine Victims Peer Counselling Group II in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) project worked to establish sustainable peer counselling groups for people with disabilities, particularly those who were victims of injury due to landmine. In doing so, the project supported the people with disabilities to live independently and to autonomously advocate for themselves both politically and socially.

## Partners

Implementing partners: Solutions for Women Business Owners, the Federation of Bosnia and the Herzegovina Ministry of Health.

Local/community collaborators: 10 established community based rehabilitation centers, Bosnia-Herzegovina government, the Union of Civilian Victims of the War, and various other local NGOs, municipalities and television stations.

International collaborators: Association for Persons with Disabilities (APWD), the Association of People with Paraplegia (APWP), 40+ international NGOs (including the International Law Group for Human Rights).

### Sources and Project Resources

1. Landmine Victims Peer Counselling Group II in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH)\*
2. Landmine Victims Peer Counselling Group II in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) website archive
3. Lacic, M. (2019, September 10). Wartime Landmines Still Taking Lives in Bosnia. Retrieved August 05, 2020, from <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/09/02/wartime-landmines-still-taking-lives-in-bosnia/>\*
4. Living with landmines in Bosnia and Herzegovina. (2019, April 05). Retrieved August 05, 2020, from <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/living-landmines-bosnia-and-herzegovina>\*

\*used to generate this report