



HILFSWERK

**SUPPORT.
HOPE.
FUTURE.**

30 Years of Hilfswerk International in the Balkans

From Emergency Reconstruction
to Sustainable Solutions



HILFSWERK

Foreword - Our Mission

From the First Roof to Living with Dignity

When Hilfswerk International began its humanitarian work in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1996, post-war reconstruction was the absolute focus of our support. Our primary goal was clear: to provide hundreds of families with a roof over their heads.



Today, three decades later, our mission has evolved. Through various projects, we have helped more than 25,000 people build better lives in dignity. Our work now rests on several key pillars: social protection and inclusion, human rights, economic development, disaster relief, and support in migration management processes. Our focus remains the same - empowering people.

The Beginnings, 1996 – Emergency Reconstruction

Foundations of Hope: The First Steps in BiH



The establishment of the Hilfswerk Austria office in Sarajevo marked the beginning of the long-term, organised presence of this Austrian humanitarian organisation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

It all began with an emergency reconstruction programme in Sarajevo, Travnik and Jajce, launched immediately after the war. With the support of the Republic of Austria, in 1996 we reconstructed 319 family homes, enabling hundreds of people to return from displacement.

A particularly significant outcome of the project was the first organised minority return: 59 Bosniak families returned to Jajce, while 24 Croat families returned to Travnik. In this way, the project was not only a construction effort, but also a powerful step towards peace, as the physical reconstruction of homes became a foundation for rebuilding trust and coexistence.

With the establishment of the Sarajevo office and this first major reconstruction programme, Hilfswerk Austria clearly demonstrated its long-term commitment to supporting return, reconstruction and reconciliation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.



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Sustainable Return

Economic Development and Independence

For decades, we have been one of the key actors in the implementation of Annex VII of the Dayton Peace Agreement. Through many project phases across the country, we have reconstructed thousands of homes for returnees and internally displaced persons.



However, we understood that walls alone do not create a future. Sustainability is key. That is why we have always supported return with socio-economic grants. More than 8,000 families received agricultural machinery, livestock, greenhouses and tools for crafts. Through support to small and medium-sized enterprises, we created new jobs for returnees and other members of local communities, helping them achieve economic independence and strengthening the process of integration.

“Sustainable return requires much more than rebuilding roofs – it requires creating opportunities for work and economic development.”

Social Housing

Closing the Most Difficult Chapters



For too long, collective centres served as painful reminders of the war and its lasting consequences. To offer the most vulnerable a lasting solution, Hilfswerk International has been a pioneer in the development of the social housing system in BiH.

Through synergy with local authorities and international donors, we built dozens of modern, energy-efficient residential buildings in Sarajevo, Zenica, Rogatica, Bijeljina, Tuzla, Brčko and other cities across BiH.

We closed inadequate centres such as the “People’s University” in Rogatica and provided a permanent, safe home for persons with disabilities, single parents and families without income. Alongside housing support, families were also offered socio-economic support measures through grants and activities that encouraged their integration and economic independence. The final relocation from the “People’s University” brought great benefit to the entire community of Rogatica, as after many years this building was restored to its true social and cultural purpose.



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Roma Inclusion – ROMA ACTION

Social Protection and Equal Opportunities

Roma are the largest and often the most vulnerable national minority in the region. Through multi-million-euro projects such as ROMA ACTION, funded by the EU, we have made a historic step forward in their social inclusion.



Through this programme alone, more than 140 Roma families moved into new or fully reconstructed homes. Alongside infrastructure support, we worked on resolving civil status issues, protecting human rights, improving access to education and awarding grants to help people start their own businesses.

“Roma Action has shown that inclusion is not an abstract policy, but a measurable result - reflected in new homes, stable incomes and opportunities for Roma families to live with dignity.”

Flood Recovery

Disaster Relief



When the catastrophic floods and landslides of 2014 devastated Bosnia and Herzegovina, our teams were immediately on the ground to provide emergency disaster relief.

In the first phase, our engineers carried out damage assessments, after which we took on direct construction and professional supervision for hundreds of buildings. In Maglaj and 20 other severely affected local communities in the Federation of BiH, we built 80 entirely new homes in safe locations and reconstructed an additional 60. We also provided families who had lost everything with essential agricultural tools and land decontamination support.



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Healthy Ageing and Solidarity

Against Isolation and Discrimination

Old age must not mean isolation. By addressing age-based discrimination, we actively work to challenge stereotypes about older persons and protect their human rights at all levels.



During the COVID-19 pandemic, our regional project connected older persons in BiH, Serbia and North Macedonia through virtual healthy ageing centres. We trained hundreds of new volunteers and provided IT equipment (tablets) to improve digital literacy among older persons and enable them to stay connected with the world when they needed it most.

A Dignified Life in Older Age



Faced with the dramatic outflow of young people, older persons are often left to care for themselves. In response, we established the “Hilfswerk House of Support” – an innovative model of mobile home care, in cooperation with the Association for Help and Development „HAJDE”.

Drawing on decades of experience from Austria, we employed and trained highly skilled mobile teams of caregivers. Today, hundreds of older and vulnerable persons receive high-quality care, based on the “all from one source” principle, in the warmth of their own homes. We provide them with the care and dignity they deserve.

The “House of Support” is not only a service provider, but also seeks to become a recognised leader in the field of care for older persons, with an active role in shaping broader social policies.



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Education

Investing in Knowledge

Recognising the irreplaceable role of quality education in social inclusion, through the “Book by Book” project we directly improved the teaching process in numerous schools across BiH.



Through careful needs mapping, we equipped 13 educational institutions with required reading materials, professional literature and modern equipment. More than 9,300 students and hundreds of teachers directly benefited from this support. Through related projects, we organised specialised training for educators to support the successful integration of children with developmental difficulties.

Children with Developmental Difficulties

A Safe Space for Growth and Development



Children and young people with multiple developmental disabilities deserve the best possible conditions and equal rights. We are proud to have built the modern “Koraci nade” Day Centre in Tuzla, a facility with a specialised therapy pool, as well as the “Leptir” Day Centre in Srebrenica.

These centres provide professional rehabilitation, education and socialisation. In addition to infrastructure, we developed NETSI (Network to Support Inclusion in BiH) – a digital and institutional platform that connects parents with special educators, speech therapists and psychologists, offering them direct and free support.



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Migration Management

Security and Human Rights

For years, the Western Balkans has been located along one of the world's most active migration routes. In cooperation with partners, HWI implements extensive projects aimed at strengthening institutions responsible for refugees, migrants and displaced persons in BiH, Serbia, North Macedonia and Montenegro.



The main objective is to strengthen capacities for reception, asylum and return, in full compliance with fundamental human rights, international standards and best practices. Through the development of standard operating procedures and the networking of security institutions and agencies, we help countries manage migration in a humane and secure manner.

Readmission and Reintegration

A New Beginning for Returnees



The readmission process (the return of BiH citizens from the EU) brings significant challenges, especially for vulnerable groups. Together with the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees of BiH, HWI is actively working to build a sustainable system for the reception and rapid integration of these persons.

We have established a housing fund for the temporary accommodation of those returning without a roof over their heads and equipped specialised facilities for the reception of older persons, unaccompanied minors and chronically ill persons. By developing clear socio-economic plans, we help returnees secure a stable and sustainable future.



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HWI in Numbers

Our Results on the Ground (1996–2026)



SUPPORT.
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**30 YEARS OF COMMITMENT TO
PEOPLE AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**



**4+ COUNTRIES IN WHICH
WE OPERATE REGIONALLY**

(BiH, Serbia, North Macedonia and Montenegro)



**5,000+ HOUSING UNITS BUILT
AND RECONSTRUCTED**



**8,000+ GRANTS FOR ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT AND SELF-
EMPLOYMENT**



**TENS OF THOUSANDS OF
SERVICES PROVIDED**

through social protection, the Hilfswerk House of Support, and support to day care and gerontological centres across the Western Balkans region.

SUPPORT. HOPE. FUTURE.

Creating Change Together

Three decades of our successful work in the Balkans would not have been possible without the selfless support of local communities and institutions, the dedicated work of our partners, the trust of our donors, the strength of our beneficiaries, and the commitment of HWI employees. To all of you, we extend our sincere gratitude for building solidarity with us, providing support and changing lives for the better.



New challenges lie ahead, but our mission remains the same - to build a sustainable and secure future for all.



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