



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

## BACKGROUND

### Land and Climate

Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the Balkan Peninsula, is about the same size as Costa Rica and slightly smaller than the U.S. state of West Virginia. It is divided into two entities: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (the Federation), which is mostly populated by Bosnian Croats and Muslims, covers the western portion of the country, and the Republika Srpska (Serb Republic, or RS), which is home mostly to Bosnian Serbs, covers the north and east. Herzegovina (“Land Governed by a Duke”) is the historical name for an arid southwestern region contiguous with Croatia.

Bosnia’s central and southern regions are dominated by the dense forests of the Dinaric Alps, whose highest peak is Mount Maglic, at 7,828 feet (2,386 meters). Fertile plains lie in the north, and there is a short Adriatic Sea coastline in the southeast. The Drina River forms part of the eastern border. Other major rivers are the Una, Vrbas, Neretva, and Bosna. The continental climate features long, hot summers and cold winters. Areas of high elevation have short, cool summers and long winters. Coastal winters are mild and rainy.

### History

#### Kingdom of Bosnia

Illyrian and Celtic tribes may have been the earliest

inhabitants of Bosnia, followed by Romans and Greeks in the second century BC, Goths in the third century AD, and Slavs (including the Croat and Serb tribes) in the sixth century. The Bosnian state was first mentioned in Byzantine sources in the tenth century. An independent Kingdom of Bosnia emerged around 1200 and endured for more than 260 years in a tolerant religious environment that included three Christian churches: Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Bosnian Bogomil. In 1463, Bosnia was conquered by the Ottoman Turks, who introduced Islam and ruled for four centuries.

#### World War I and Yugoslavia

After the Ottoman demise, the Berlin Congress of 1878 gave Austria-Hungary a mandate to occupy Bosnia. Annexation followed in 1908. In 1914, a young Serb nationalist from *Mlada Bosna* (“Young Bosnia,” a multiethnic group in favor of joining the occupied Slavic lands to independent Serbia) assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, who was visiting Sarajevo. The assassination sparked World War I.

After the war, Bosnia and Herzegovina was included in the newly created Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes—later named the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (“Southern Slavs”). During this period, Bosnia’s Muslim population, the Bosniaks, was pressured to register as either Serb or Croat, and the group’s political strength was undermined by nationalist leaders.

### **World War II and the Communist Era**

In 1941, during World War II, the Axis powers invaded Yugoslavia. During the war against the German and Italian occupiers, various nationalist movements also battled one another. Bosnia became a killing ground as Serbian *Chetniks* (royalists), Croatian *Ustashe* (fascists), local militia, German and Italian troops, and (to a lesser extent) the multiethnic communist troops all terrorized various segments of the civilian population.

At the end of the war, the communist faction gained control, and the new Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina became one of eight federal units in communist Yugoslavia. Partisan leader Josip Broz Tito ruled Yugoslavia from 1945 until his death in 1980. Under Tito, Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks) were officially recognized in 1974 as having a separate identity. However, overt manifestations of nationalism were forbidden and religious devotion was discouraged. In essence, Tito tried to unite people under communism by suppressing those elements of culture that historically divided them.

### **War and the Dayton Peace Accords**

When Tito died in 1980, Yugoslavia's federal system unraveled. Dormant nationalist feelings surged as communism crumbled. After multiparty elections in 1990 and a referendum in 1992, Bosnia and Herzegovina declared independence within its historical borders. The UN Security Council recognized the nation's sovereignty in May 1992. The new republic was immediately threatened by its neighbors, whose ambitions were to create a Greater Serbia and a Greater Croatia. During the ensuing war from 1992 to 1995, brutal ethnic cleansing and fighting left more than 250,000 Bosnians dead and 1.8 million people displaced.

The 1995 Dayton Peace Accords, which were negotiated in the United States and signed in Paris, stopped the fighting by dividing the country into a Bosniak-Croat federation and the Serb Republic, loosely joined by a central government. A military presence led by the European Union (EU) has ensured a secure environment, while an international monitor (the Office of the High Representative) coordinates Dayton's civil implementation. In the 1998 national election, voters chose Bosnian Croat, Bosnian Serb, and Bosniak members of parliament. A rotating presidency was created to allow all three groups to share in national leadership. Although democratic transformation is under way, some refugees and displaced persons have not yet returned to their original homes.

### **EU Candidacy**

Bosnia and Herzegovina began talks with the EU in 2005 about the country's potential candidacy for membership. The EU required Bosnian cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), and the pressure contributed to the capture and indictment of over 100 Bosnians by the ICTY for genocide and war crimes. After a decade of negotiations, the EU and Bosnia and Herzegovina agreed on the adoption of the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) in 2015, which outlined commitments to economic, political, and human-rights reforms to prepare the country for EU membership. In 2016, Bosnia and Herzegovina filed its formal application for EU membership,

a process that could take years to complete. One of the barriers to EU membership includes the country's reluctance to recognize Kosovo's independence from Serbia, which some fear could lead to the secession of Republika Srpska, the Bosnian-Serb republic that makes up half of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Bosnia and Herzegovina's biggest challenges include the country's struggle to meet the requirements for EU membership and the treatment of migrants from the Middle East and Africa.

## **THE PEOPLE**

### **Population**

In 1991, Bosnia had very few areas where only one ethnicity was present. Today, Bosnian Serbs (31 percent of the total population) live mainly in the Republika Srpska. Bosniaks (also called Bosnian Muslims, 50 percent of the population) and Bosnian Croats (15 percent) live mostly in the Federation. Sarajevo is the capital and largest city.

During the war, many Bosniaks came to Bosnia from Serbia and Croatia, while some Bosnian Serbs, Bosnian Croats, and Bosniaks fled to other nations. Small numbers of Albanians, Roma, and others also live in the country. At birth, all citizens receive a government-issued ID number that indicates where they are from, which further highlights ethnic divisions in the country.

### **Language**

Bosnians speak a Slavic language that linguists classify as Serbo-Croatian. Its 30 distinctive sounds each have their own letter. Serbo-Croatian uses two alphabets: Latin and Cyrillic. Schoolchildren in the Federation learn the Latin script, and schoolchildren in the Republika Srpska learn the Cyrillic script.

Some ultranationalists are attempting to accentuate or even create differences among the Serbian, Croatian, and Bosnian variants of the language. Roma speak Romani, and smaller groups speak Hungarian, Albanian, and Slovene.

### **Religion**

Religion is a highly politicized subject in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Medieval Bosnia was almost entirely Christian, but the benefits provided to Muslims by the Turkish Ottoman Empire and a weak organization in the Christian churches prompted many people to adopt Islam. In the 20th century, despite the historical mixing of peoples, Bosnians whose ancestors were Catholic came to be identified as Bosnian Croats, while those of Eastern Orthodox background were considered Bosnian Serbs. Muslims are called Bosniaks, a name derived from the surname *Bosnjak*, which means "Bosnian." Animosity remains strong between the three religious groups.

During the communist period, most Bosnians became secularized, and as many as one-third of all urban marriages were between partners from different religious backgrounds.

Many Bosnians even assumed the ethnic identity of “Yugoslavs” to indicate membership in a broader national group. Since 1990, religious activity has grown. Today, 51 percent of Bosnians are Muslim, 31 percent are Orthodox Christian, and 15 percent are Roman Catholic. A small number of people are atheist or agnostic.

### General Attitudes

Bosnians are outgoing, friendly, and warm. All Bosnians value hospitality. They enjoy *merak* (a relaxed pace of life) but value hard work. Bosnians are community oriented. In general, people appreciate close relations with *komšija* (neighbors) and friends. They are inquisitive and often discuss personal topics such as relationships, schooling, employment, and finances with friends and acquaintances; this is partly because of the value that Bosnians place on stability and financial security. Personal space is not particularly important.

Bosnians' sense of humor, which allows them to laugh at their own faults, helped them survive the hardships of war. A common attitude is *ćeif* (a meditative mood in which a person acts spontaneously for enjoyment and without worrying about the consequences, such as the cost of something or the time it takes to do it). For instance, one can decide to have a coffee and a cigarette break in the middle of a hard day at work, because it's one's *ćeif* to do so.

Each major ethnic group is known for its distinct characteristics: Bosnian Serbs consider themselves heroic and proud; Bosnian Croats emphasize their correct behavior and historical ties to western Europe; and Bosniaks consider themselves warm in personal relationships.

With the war still present in the minds of many and ethnic differences emphasized by vocal nationalists, reconciliation is hard to achieve. Shame, fear, or anger inhibits reconciliation in regions where all sides committed war atrocities. Still, some progress is being made, especially in rural areas, among people who just want to return to their homes and among those who recognize the consequences of listening to the nationalist politicians who led them into war. Bringing war criminals to justice is an ongoing but slow process.

### Personal Appearance

Most people wear Western-style clothing. Urban residents pay particular attention to their appearance and brand names. Young people enjoy modern fashions and casual clothing. Wealthier families have silk clothing and furs from eastern countries. Women often dye their hair; gray hair is seldom seen, and red and auburn shades are popular.

Some rural people may wear elements of traditional clothing with Western attire. For example, one might wear *dimije* (long, wide Turkish pants ideal for working in the fields) with a T-shirt. Many Bosniak men wear traditional berets and women wear headscarves. Some people wear rubber *opanke* (shoes with upturned toes).

A Bosnian Serb woman might wear her *nošnja* (long white skirt and cotton blouse) for a special occasion, as might a Bosnian Croat woman wear her white skirt, embroidered white blouse, and apron. Bosniak women who are strictly religious wear long skirts under long coats and fuller

headscarves.

## CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

### Greetings

When people meet, they usually shake hands. Friends add a kiss—once on each cheek for Bosnian Croats and Bosniaks and three times total for Bosnian Serbs. Younger people greet older people first, and women offer their hand first to men. Bosniak women wearing religious coverings are not directly addressed or offered a handshake.

The usual greeting is *Dobro jutro* (Good morning), *Dobar dan* (Good day), or *Dobro vecer* (Good evening). *Zdravo* (Hi) is an informal greeting usually followed by *Sta ima?* (What's up?). When parting, Bosnians might say *Do vidjenja* (Good-bye), *Zbogom* (Farewell), the more informal *Vidimo se* (See you), or *Ciao*.

*Gospodin* (Mr.) has replaced *Drug* (male form of the communist term “Comrade”), and *Gospodja/Gospodijica* (Mrs./Miss) have replaced *Drugarice* (female form of “Comrade”) as common titles. Bosnians tend to use the informal *ti* (you) in conversation with peers. Friends and family call each other by first name, as do older people talking to those younger. In written form, a person's surname usually precedes the given name.

Unlike the English language, in which there are few words (e.g., cousin, relative) to describe extended family members, in Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian there are words for all the members of the extended family. For example, a person's maternal uncle is a *dajdža* or *ujak*, and his daughter is a *dajdžična* or a *sestra od ujaka*. Similarly specific expressions exist for all the members of the extended family.

### Gestures

Friends may wave to one another on the street. It is impolite to beckon with the index finger or shout in public. However, many such rules of etiquette are routinely ignored. It is polite to offer elderly people a seat on the bus. Eye contact is expected when people raise their glasses for a toast.

### Visiting

Family and friends visit each other often; weekends are the most popular time to get together. People often sit for hours over cigarettes and a cup of coffee or some *rakija* (brandy); this habit reflects the leisurely pace of life most Bosnians prefer. Such visits are informal; people simply drop by without prior arrangement.

Visiting is expected for events such as weddings or funerals; guests do not need to call ahead, nor do they receive invitations. For arranged visits, they offer *meze*, a spread of various fried pies, dried meats, cheeses, and salads. Bosniaks typically stay for a brief time to offer congratulations or condolences. Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats tend to stay longer and have something to eat.

When entering a home, Bosnians generally remove their shoes and replace them with slippers. Bosnians are known for their hospitality, and guests are always offered something to eat or drink. Hosts serve coffee at the beginning and end of a

visit. Invited guests often bring gifts such as flowers, coffee, or a box of chocolates. Gift giving is nearly obligatory for first-time guests. With the exception of roses, flowers are given in odd numbers—even numbers are reserved for funerals.

### Eating

A day usually begins with strong black coffee (made in a *džezva*, a Bosnian coffee pot), followed by breakfast at midmorning. Lunch is the main meal and consists of soup, meat with a vegetable, salad, bread, and dessert. Supper is served around 8 p.m.

One's hands should remain above the table, with elbows off the table. Rural Bosnians eat some foods, like pies, with their hands. It is impolite to speak with a full mouth, but it is not impolite for friends to share food from the same plate.

When entertaining, hosts offer more food than can be eaten; this practice is intended to give an impression of hospitality and wealth. Indeed, hosts consistently urge guests to eat more during the meal, and guests customarily decline several times before accepting. Still, it is impolite for a guest to eat too much.

At restaurants, usually one person pays the entire bill. Tipping is not necessary but increasingly expected and appreciated. One does not tip the restaurant owner even if he or she served the meal.

## LIFESTYLE

### Family

#### Structure

Rural households include grandparents, parents, and two or more children. The oldest male (father or grandfather), who is typically the owner of the home, has a dominant role. The extended family is close-knit. Urban households include one or two children, and the grandparents are less involved than in rural families; they do not often live with their children. Generally, both husband and wife work outside the home and share in decision making. Children often go to day care centers or are cared for by babysitters or family members.

#### Parents and Children

The high unemployment rate and lack of government financial support for families and children makes young couples increasingly unlikely to marry and raise children. Those who do decide to marry and have children are most often partially supported by extra money and help from their parents or other family members.

In general, due to low income, children are less likely to leave their parents' home upon reaching adulthood. Even when children do move away, family ties remain strong.

Parents often feel obligated to give their grown or married children money or housing. In turn, children are expected to care for their elderly parents. Rest homes for the elderly are not common. Adult children often live with their parents until they marry, and in rural areas, a son and his wife might live in his parents' house after marrying.

#### Gender Roles

Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina are typically partial

breadwinners and housekeepers. In rural areas, female children are taught that housekeeping is their duty. Although women and men have equal legal rights in regard to inheritance, male children are more likely to inherit more land or better parts of the family land than their sisters are; female children are expected to marry and become part of their husband's family. Domestic violence against women is common—about one-half of women are victims of domestic abuse.

### Housing

#### Urban

In urban areas, most dwellings are high-rise apartments made of concrete. A typical apartment has one or two bedrooms. Houses, generally built on the hillsides surrounding a city, have concrete foundations, brick walls, and red-tiled roofs. Lively colors have replaced formerly grey exteriors. In Sarajevo, many home exteriors display damage from shelling that took place during fighting in the 1990s.

Rooms are furnished functionally; often, sofas are slept on or beds are pulled out at night. A woven carpet commonly decorates the center of each room. Flowers decorate balconies, while gardens next to houses grow flowers and fruit trees.

#### Rural

Traditional Bosnian houses were built of stone and had roofs of wood. Rural houses are built of brick covered in whitewashed plaster and have red-tiled roofs. They often have vegetable gardens outside and a side yard with a small barn for animals (sheep, goats, cows, or pigs). Where running water is lacking, a toilet and water pump are located outside. Older houses are heated by coal and wood stoves in their kitchens. Dirt or wood floors are covered with handmade wool rugs dyed with natural pigments. In some homes, people sleep on thick mattresses laid on the floor. Windowsills often hold potted flowers.

### Dating and Marriage

#### Dating and Courtship

Differences in dating customs are more evident between urban and rural areas than between different ethnic groups. In urban areas, young people often gather in city or town squares, where they drink alcohol and mingle with friends. For example, in Tuzla, the country's fourth-largest city, thousands of young people gather in the square every weekend. Although traditionally forbidden, interethnic dating is more common in urban areas. Dating couples enjoy going to cafés, fairs, cinemas, or dance clubs or visiting each other at home.

In rural areas, couples may go on short walks together or spend time with their families, who strongly influence the selection of a partner. Muslim youths attending a *madrasah*, an Islamic religious school, have distinct rules for dating: they may pair off as couples, but touching of any kind (including hand holding), staying out late, and dating people outside of their ethnic group is forbidden.

#### Marriage in Society

Young adults are expected to marry, and in rural areas, they

may be constantly reminded of this by their families, parents' friends, and neighbors. People usually marry after they finish their schooling. In urban areas, most people marry in their mid- to late twenties, and in rural areas, where people are less likely to pursue higher education, in their early twenties. The minimum legal age for marriage is 18. Same-sex marriage is not legally recognized in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In rural areas and smaller towns, the couple arranges a meeting between their families, and the family of the future groom proposes the marriage to the family of the future bride. In urban areas, marriage is more likely to be proposed without the families present.

### Weddings

Weddings typically occur a few months after formal proposals. In rural areas, traditional marriage ceremonies and receptions are seen as a matter of honor; they are often extravagant. Traditional marriages may force the couple's families, especially the groom's family, into debt. Urban couples are more likely to spend the money they would have spent on a traditional celebration on a honeymoon or furniture for their new home.

The bride and groom must have a civil ceremony for the marriage to be legal; many couples then also have a religious wedding. Civil weddings usually take place in town halls, with a registrar and a small circle of family and close friends. Religious weddings are simple and short. During Muslim religious wedding ceremonies, an *imam* (Muslim religious leader) makes a short speech and gives a prayer to bless the couple.

Wedding ceremonies are followed by a reception either at home or at a restaurant. Rural celebrations are more elaborate than urban celebrations; they include big tents for guests and several days of festivities. Meat such as roast beef or lamb, cakes, and sweets are served to the guests, along with drinks such as *rakija* (brandy) and Bosnian coffee. Modern and folk dancing is common.

Wedding rituals vary according to region and may include traditions such as carrying the bride over the threshold, tossing rice or corn grains over the newly married couple, or throwing salt before entering the house for the first time.

### Divorce

Families and friends are often very involved in others' marriages and divorces. Divorced people are often looked down on; they may have a hard time fitting in with their community after their divorce occurs. In rural areas especially, divorce is seen as highly disgraceful for divorced people and for their families.

## Life Cycle

### Birth

After a baby is born, the mother recovers and bonds with her baby for 40 days in the care of a female nanny or relative, a period called *babine*. Friends and relatives visit to give presents.

Among Bosniaks, a golden coin is attached to the baby's cap so the child will grow big and healthy; money may also be put under the baby's head or pillow. In some Muslim communities, the baby's hair is not cut until the first birthday; the parents save the first cut lock of hair as a keepsake.

Orthodox and Roman Catholic families christen their babies, typically within the three months after birth, and give them godparents, who remain important figures throughout a child's life. Babies are usually named by their parents or grandparents. Traditionally, children were named with Christian- or Muslim-associated names, but people today are more likely to give their children names that are neutral in terms of national or religious belonging.

### Milestones

Following secondary education, young people take on employment or higher education responsibilities that mark them as adults. Mandatory military service was abolished in 2007. Previously, when military service was obligatory, a young man's departure to serve in the military was marked by a banquet, and he was considered an adult. Young women were considered adults when they married; a married woman is known as a *žena* (woman), while an unmarried woman is known as a *djevojka* (young girl).

### Death

When a Bosniak dies, his or her body is taken to a funeral home, where it is wrapped in a special cloth called *čefini*. The body is then placed in a plain wooden coffin and covered with an Islamic religious flag (which is taken off bit by bit as the coffin is covered by wooden boards, starting from the head and progressing down to the legs of the deceased). The body is buried within 24 hours, and only men attend the funeral ceremony. Immediately after the burial, women go to a separate prayer service called a *tehvid*. Among Bosnian Christians, a memorial service is performed in a chapel, followed by a funeral; men and women wear black clothes to attend.

Cremation is not a common practice in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The deceased are buried in graveyards, which are usually found on hilltops; a graveyard being situated above the city or village symbolizes respect for the deceased, whose resting place is above the living. Among all ethnic groups, family members, friends, and neighbors are expected to visit each other following the death of a loved one; these visits are separate from attending the official memorial services and are called *Žalost* (literally, grief).

### Diet

Pies dominate the menu of Bosniaks: *burek* (meat pie), *sirnica* (cheese pie), *zeljanica* (spinach-and-cheese pie), cabbage pie, and many more. Breakfast pies are served with bread, cheese or cream, and smoked meat like *sudzuka* (a sausage). For lunch, people also eat a hearty soup, meats, and vegetables. Other favorite dishes include chicken and stuffed onions, peppers, or cabbage. *Čevapi*, a dish made of grilled, minced meat, is served with gravy on round rolls.

Devout Muslims do not eat pork, but other Bosnians enjoy pork in various forms. It is customary for a Christian family to slaughter a pig or two in November; part of the meat is prepared for Christmas and the rest is smoked.

Bosnian Muslim cooking is influenced partly by Turkish and Greek cuisine, as evidenced by its grilled meat, stews like *bosanski lonac* (with cabbage and meat), and sweets such as *baklava* (a Turkish layered pastry with nuts). Favorite Bosniak desserts include *tufahija* (poached apple stuffed with

nuts and sweet cream) and *sevdižan* (soft cake). Bosnian Serb and Bosnian Croat specialties include chocolate cakes, strudels, and pancakes. All ethnic groups drink *rakija* (also called *šljivovica*), a strong type of brandy usually made of plums.

## Recreation

### Sports

Favorite sports include basketball, tennis, swimming, handball, and soccer. People often gather on smaller sports fields to play soccer or other sports. Soccer, volleyball, and basketball are also popular spectator sports.

Schoolchildren often participate in sports, such as soccer, karate, or volleyball, in local clubs. Physical education is part of the curriculum, and schools frequently organize internal sports competitions.

### Leisure

Schoolchildren usually participate in extracurricular activities such as dancing, drama, poetry, or sports. Students are often involved in ecology clubs, a type of volunteer organization that focuses on cleaning parks and other public areas.

Bosnians enjoy cultural, historical, and sporting events, as well as visits at home. In urban areas, film festivals, music festivals, theater festivals, and book fairs are common throughout the year. In rural areas and smaller towns, a fair is called a *vašar* ("carnival," literally "to buy") or a *proslava* (celebration) and is often filled with amusement parks, cheap food, and discount clothes.

In the city, people may take evening strolls or meet at cafés and restaurants. People watch television in the evening and on weekends. Barbecues are common throughout the summer. Working men socialize in local coffee houses and pubs, where they play billiards and watch soccer matches on television. Older men gather in social halls to play checkers or chess.

In rural areas, married women organize group potlucks; each woman brings a sweet or salty dish, and the socializing lasts for most of the day. Members of the group take turns hosting such an activity at least once a year. In urban areas, women tend to have a smaller circle of friends and typically gather at home or in restaurants. Young women in cities enjoy attending fitness clubs, while older women are more likely to have traditional hobbies such as knitting, embroidery, gardening, or belonging to an organization such as a book club.

### Vacation

The nearby Adriatic Coast is a common destination for families taking vacations during the summer. People tend to gather at the same vacation sites year after year. Tunisia, Egypt, Turkey, Greece, and Spain are also popular destinations for summer vacations. Winter vacations are not as common.

## The Arts

Epic poetry is sung and accompanied by the *gusle* (a single-string instrument). *Sevdalinka* songs, or love songs, are well known. Folk dance varies within cultures and regions. Each region has its own unique *kolo*, a dance performed by a group of people dancing while holding hands or with their

hands around each other's waists. Architecture, weaving, silk embroidery, and calligraphy are other important arts. Bosnia and Herzegovina has a long and rich cultural tradition in award-winning film, literature, and art.

Sarajevo was once a vibrant cultural center in the former Yugoslavia; however, the war caused a great deal of damage. Bombing demolished many important monuments and ruined the building of the National and University Library, which contained many valuable texts. The people of Bosnia and Herzegovina are currently struggling to rebuild their artistic traditions.

## Holidays

Public holidays include New Year's Day (1–2 January), the Day of the Republic (9 January, celebrated in the Republika Srpska), Independence Day (1 March, celebrated in the Federation), Labor Day (1–2 May), Saint Vitus Day (28 June, celebrated in the Republika Srpska), and Statehood Day (25 November; mostly observed only in the Federation for political reasons, though officially a state holiday).

Religious holidays are important, even to people who are not particularly religious. Roman Catholic Christians and Protestants celebrate Christmas (*Božić*) on 25 December, while the Orthodox Christians celebrate it on 7 January. Muslims celebrate *Eid al-Fitr* (*Ramazan Bajram*, feast at the end of the holy month of *Ramadan*) and *Eid al-Adha* (*Kurban Bajram*, or Feast of the Sacrifice). Christians also celebrate Easter, Ascension (15 August), and All Saints' Day (1 November).

### Christian Holidays

Christmas is traditionally celebrated over a dinner with a large amount of food; especially important are the different kinds of Christmas cakes, such as gingerbread, and small balls made of rum, chocolate, and nuts. Orthodox Christians traditionally leave the smoked bones and meat of pigs to freeze outside overnight; in the morning, the way the bones crack predicts how successful the following year will be.

On Easter, Christians boil and dye eggs to give as gifts to friends. They also use eggs in a game called *tucanje*, where two people smash their eggs together; the person whose egg does not crack wins. In order to have the hardest egg in this game, some people use eggs with thicker shells (such as an egg from a larger bird) as a prank.

### Muslim Holidays

Muslims celebrate *Eid al-Fitr* for three days (two of which are non-working days). On the *Eid* holidays, men attend the morning prayer services, which include a speech by an *imam* (Muslim religious leader) and the *Eid* prayer. They return home from the mosque to have a traditional breakfast of *baklava* (a Turkish layered pastry with nuts), *pitas* (Bosnian pies), stuffed cabbage rolls, stuffed yellow peppers, goulash, and meat with their families. The rest of the holiday is spent visiting relatives and friends, giving them gifts, and distributing candy and money to the children.

*Eid al-Adha* celebrations, which last for four days (two of which are non-working days), include giving portions of the meat of a sacrificed animal to people in the community, especially to people in poverty, so that they can have their own *Eid* dinner.

### Other Holidays

Traditionally, people of all religions decorated a tree for the New Year's holiday, and on New Year's Eve, one person in a family would dress up as *Djeda Mraz* (Father Frost) and distribute gifts to the children. After the Yugoslav wars, it became more common for Saint Nicolas to visit Christian communities and give gifts for Christmas instead.

Labor Day, or May Day, is celebrated in the springtime and is often the first barbecue of the year. Friends and extended families often gather in the countryside or in summerhouses to eat barbecued chicken and *ćevapi* (minced meat) and drink wine, beer, or homemade *rakija* (brandy).

## SOCIETY

### Government

The country's status as a parliamentary republic relies on ongoing political transformation at home, in Serbia, and in Croatia. The 1995 Dayton Accords created the Federation and the Republika Srpska; each has its own constitution, parliament, and president. The Federation and the Republika Srpska are further divided into *cantons* (administrative areas), each of which has its own laws and government. There is also a small, semi-autonomous district in the northeast called Brčko, which is under national and international supervision. Sarajevo is the national and Federation capital. Banja Luka is the capital of the Republika Srpska.

Positions in the weak central government are divided among the three main ethnic groups. The government combines elements of a parliamentary and presidential system. The Chair of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina consists of three members; a Bosniak, Bosnian Serb, and Bosnian Croat are elected to serve in the presidency for four years, and each becomes the chair for eight months. The chair is the head of state and is mainly responsible for international affairs. The prime minister, or leader of the Council of Ministers, is head of government; the prime minister is nominated by the presidency and approved by the House of Representatives. The legislature, or Parliamentary Assembly (Skupstina), consists of the National House of Representatives (42 seats) and the House of Peoples (15 seats). International authorities strongly influence the country's political life. The voting age is 18, or 16 for people who are employed.

### Economy

Bosnia and Herzegovina was one of the poorest republics of the former Yugoslavia, and production fell 80 percent between 1990 and 1996. Much infrastructure and private enterprise remain devastated. Resettlement, returning people displaced by the war to their homes, is an enormous economic challenge; efforts are underway to enact new property laws and rebuild infrastructure. The economy is dependent on the export of metals, remittances, and foreign aid.

The banking sector is largely controlled by foreign banks, and the privatization of state industries has been slow. Though the economy grew during the years 2003 to 2008, the

global financial crisis contributed to a decline in gross domestic product after 2009. Limited foreign investment, corruption, and government bureaucracy hinder economic recovery, but some benefits of international business loans, reconstruction, and investment are being realized. Government spending is high because of redundant offices at the state, entity, and municipal level. Economic coordination and reform are difficult because of Bosnia and Herzegovina's decentralized government, and foreign investment is weakened by excessive bureaucracy and a segmented market.

Bosnia and Herzegovina's top economic priorities include membership in the European Union and the World Trade Organization. The country became a member of the Central European Free Trade Agreement in 2007 and received a large amount of foreign aid, including a 2009 International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan. Incomes are rising, though unemployment is around 16 percent and many people live in poverty. Exports are resuming and will eventually include such natural resources as coal, iron, manganese, copper, lead, zinc, and timber. The currency is the *konvertibilna marka* (convertible mark; BAM).

### Transportation and Communications

A public trolley line serves most of Sarajevo, while public buses provide transportation between major cities. Private and public buses connect rural areas to cities. Passenger train travel is limited. Roads and bridges need repair. Some rural people rely on bicycles and horse-drawn carts. Cars do not normally yield to pedestrians, so one must watch out for traffic. Bosnia has four international airports.

Dozens of television and radio stations exist, but most tend to promote the interests of a specific ethnic group. Journalists come under pressure from state governments and from political party institutions. The Open Broadcast Network is a genuine multiethnic station. A state-run telephone system exists, and most Bosnians have a cellular phone.

### Education

#### Structure and Access

Education is very important to Bosnians. Children begin primary school at the age of six and must attend for at least nine years. The majority of Bosnian students continue on to secondary school; secondary schooling lasts three or four years but is not mandatory. Students may choose between a gymnasium (university-prep high school); several other four-year, profession-focused secondary schools; or a three-year vocational school to learn a trade.

Students are responsible for providing their own textbooks (often purchased used from students one year ahead) and school supplies. Some textbooks, such as those on native languages or history, can be highly politicized. Parents are usually involved in their children's schoolwork, and parental organizations at each school participate in decision making.

#### School Life

The education system emphasizes memorization and factual knowledge. Critical thinking is given more priority in secondary education than in primary education. Primary

school is focused on general knowledge, and all the subjects are mandatory. Equal importance is given to math, languages, natural sciences, social sciences, arts, and physical education. All students study English as their first foreign language; secondary school students study at least one additional foreign language.

As students near secondary school, more subjects, such as physics and chemistry, are introduced. Students in a gymnasium study up to 14 subjects at once; they may choose between subjects such as sociology, psychology, logic, philosophy, Latin, or democracy and human rights in addition to their other courses.

Students sometimes struggle to cope with their workloads and may try to cheat on their exams. Cheating is punishable but is not considered as serious an offense as it is in the United States or United Kingdom; a student caught cheating will receive a bad grade, be removed from an exam, or be made to retake the exam, but the student is seldom expelled. Cheating at the university level is seen as a more serious offense.

The issue of religious classes in public schools is controversial; some Bosnians see it as a religious right, and others see it as a threat to minority religions. In the Federation, religious classes are regulated differently in each *canton*, or administrative area, but are generally offered only in the area's majority religion. Legally, religious classes are optional. In the Republika Srpska, religious classes are mandatory and students are graded on their knowledge. In both the Federation and the Republika Srpska, schools are required to offer religion classes for a large religious minority; however, minority students are often scattered across remote areas and qualified teachers are difficult to find.

**Higher Education**

Gymnasium students take an entrance exam before applying to university; public universities require an excellent exam score and good grades from secondary school for admission. Education is free to citizens at all levels, though enrollment fees are paid for each semester at the university. Students who can pay university tuition are allowed to enroll even if the normal entrance quotas are filled. Sarajevo, Tuzla, Banja Luka, and Mostar are major university cities. Private universities exist but do not constitute a large part of the university network; they are too expensive for all but the wealthiest citizens.

A unified curriculum is being developed for the entire country that will allow students to receive a balanced view of history and culture, but there are still differences between regional higher education laws, since there is no single law of higher education. This can be a problem if a person graduates from one university but wants to work in another *canton*, as the degree might not be valid. For instance, a three-year bachelor's degree from the University of Sarajevo is not valid in Tuzla Canton (where it takes four years to obtain a bachelor's degree in the same field).

**Health**

Primary health care is free to all citizens, but some treatments and medicines must be paid for by patients. Different systems

of health care in different areas of the country contribute to inequality in access to health care. Private clinics have multiplied since the war, but most people cannot afford their fees. Hospitals are found in regional centers, but they face supply and equipment shortages. The greatest health challenges include noncommunicable diseases such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, HIV, and tuberculosis.

**AT A GLANCE**

**Contact Information**

Embassy of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2109 E Street NW, Washington, DC 20037; phone (202) 337-1500; web site [www.bhembassy.org](http://www.bhembassy.org).

**Country and Development Data**

Capital	Sarajevo
Population	3,816,459 (rank=128)
Area (sq. mi.)	19,767 (rank=125)
Area (sq. km.)	51,197
Human Development Index	73 of 189 countries
Gender Inequality Index	38 of 162 countries
GDP (PPP) per capita	\$15,700
Adult Literacy	99% (male); 97% (female)
Infant Mortality	5.21 per 1,000 births
Life Expectancy	74 (male); 78 (female)
Currency	Convertible Mark