



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

## BACKGROUND

### Land and Climate

Bosnia and Herzegovina, covering 19,767 square miles (51,197 square kilometers) of the Balkan Peninsula, is slightly smaller than West Virginia. It is divided into two entities. In the west is the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (51 percent of the territory), which is mostly populated by Bosnian Croats and Muslims. In the east and north is the Republika Srpska (Serb Republic, or RS, 49 percent), which is home mostly to Bosnian Serbs. Sarajevo is the national and Federation capital. Banja Luka is the Serb Republic capital. 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

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 overrun by the Ottoman Turks, who introduced Islam and ruled for four centuries.

Jewish merchants fleeing the Spanish inquisition settled in Sarajevo in the 16th century. They soon built their own quarter in the city. Discrimination against Jews in the Ottoman Empire was less common than in neighboring Christian countries.

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) assassinated the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, who was visiting Sarajevo. *Mlada Bosna* thought the occupied Slavic lands should join independent Serbia. The assassination was the spark necessary to ignite 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 was pressured to register as either Serb or Croat, and its political strength was undermined by nationalist leaders.

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 he died 35 years later. Under Tito, Bosnian Muslims were recognized in 1974 as having a separate identity. Overt manifestations of nationalism were forbidden, however, and religious devotion was discouraged. In essence, Tito tried to unite people under communism by suppressing those elements of culture that historically divided them.

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. Muslims and Croats were targeted mostly by Serbians, but all sides were responsible for some bloodshed.

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 Muslim/Croat Federation and the Serb Republic, loosely joined by a central government. A strong military presence led by the European Union (EU) now ensures a secure environment, while an international monitor (the High Representative) coordinates Dayton's civil implementation. Although democratic transformation is under way, most refugees and displaced persons have not yet returned to their original homes. In the 1998 national election, voters chose Bosnian Croat, Bosnian Serb, and Bosnian Muslim members of parliament. A rotating presidency was created to allow all three groups to share in national leadership. In November 2004, the Bosnian Serb government apologized for the first time for the 1995 massacre of 7,800 Muslims at Srebrenica. War crimes trials are under way for atrocities committed during the 1992-to-1995 war. A main suspect, Radovan Karadžić, was arrested in July 2008, though other suspects are still at large. Ethnic tensions in the region remain high. In 2010, Bosnian Serbs passed a law that allows them greater freedom in proposing changes to national law. Many see this as a move that could ultimately threaten the authority of the High Representative in Bosnia and lead to the creation of an independent Bosnian Serb Republic.

## THE PEOPLE

### Population

Bosnia and Herzegovina's population of about 4.6 million is growing at a rate of roughly 0.2 percent. In 1991, Bosnia had very few areas where only one ethnicity was present. Today, Bosnian Serbs make up about 37 percent of the total

population and live mainly in the RS. Bosnian Muslims make up 48 percent, and Bosnian Croats make up 14 percent; they live mostly in the Federation. During the war, many Bosnian Muslims came to Bosnia from Serbia and Croatia, while some Bosnian Serbs, Bosnian Croats, and Bosnian Muslims fled to other nations. Returning people to their homes is a major goal. Small numbers of Albanians, Roma (Gypsies), and others also live in the country.

### Language

Bosnians speak a Slavic language that linguists classify as Serbo-Croatian. Some ultranationalists are attempting to accentuate or even create differences among the Serbian, Croatian, and Bosnian variants of this language. It has 30 distinctive sounds, each with its own letter. Schoolchildren learn the Latin and Cyrillic scripts, which are used in the Federation and Serb Republic, respectively. Roma speak Romany, and smaller groups speak Hungarian, Albanian, and Slovene.

### Religion

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 Bosniacs, a name derived from the surname *Bosnjak*, which means "Bosnian." Animosity remains strong between the three religious groups. A small number of people are Protestant or Jewish.

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 (like "Americans"). Since 1990, religious activity has grown. Today, 40 percent of Bosnians are Muslim, 31 percent are Orthodox Christian, and 15 percent are Roman Catholic.

### General Attitudes

Bosnians are outgoing, friendly, and warm. They enjoy *merak* (a relaxed pace of life) but value hard work. Each major group is known for certain characteristics: Bosnian Serbs consider themselves heroic and proud; Bosnian Croats emphasize their good behavior and historical ties to western Europe; and Bosnian Muslims consider themselves warm in personal relationships. In general, people appreciate close relations with neighbors (*komsija*) and friends. Even during the war, Bosnians kept their extraordinary sense of humor, which allowed them to laugh at their own faults. *Ceif* (to act spontaneously for enjoyment and without regard for consequences like cost and time) is a common attitude.

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 go home, and among those who recognize the folly of listening to the nationalist politicians who led them into war. Bringing such war criminals to justice is an ongoing 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. Young women like red and auburn shades. 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. Some people wear rubber *opanke* (shoes with upturned toes). A Bosnian Serb woman might wear her *nosnja* (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. Many Bosnian Muslim men wear traditional berets and women wear headscarves. Bosnian Muslim 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. Under Islam's recent influence, Bosnian Muslim women wearing religious coverings are not to be addressed or offered a handshake. Younger people greet older people first, and women offer the hand first to men. 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?). Friends add a kiss—once on each cheek for Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Muslims, and three times total for Bosnian Serbs. 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.

### 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. Invited guests often bring gifts such as flowers, coffee, or a box of chocolates. Gift giving is nearly obligatory for first-time guests. Flowers are given in odd numbers, as even numbers are reserved for funerals. The exception is roses, which are given singly or in even numbers.

When entering a home, Bosnians generally remove their shoes, replacing them with slippers. Hosts serve coffee at the beginning and end of a visit. For arranged visits, they offer *meze*: a spread of various fried pies, dried meats, cheeses, and salads. Visiting is expected for events such as weddings or funerals; guests do not need to call ahead, nor do they receive invitations. Bosnian Muslims typically stay for a brief time to offer condolences or congratulations. Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats tend to stay longer and have something to eat.

### Eating

A day usually begins with coffee (black and strong), 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

Rural households include grandparents, parents, and two or more children. The male (father or grandfather) has a dominant role. Urban households include one or two children, and the grandparents are less involved. Both husband and wife work outside the home and share in decision making. Children go to day-care centers or are cared for by babysitters or family members. Parents often feel obligated to give grown or married children money or housing. In turn, children are expected to care for their elderly parents. Adult children often live with their parents until they marry.

### Housing

Urban houses are made of brick walls and red tiled roofs. High-rise apartments are concrete. Lively colors have replaced formerly grey exteriors. A typical apartment has one or two bedrooms. Rooms are furnished functionally; often, sofas are slept on or beds are pulled out at night. Flowers

decorate balconies, while gardens next to houses grow flowers and fruit trees.

Rural houses are built of brick covered in whitewashed plaster. Where running water is lacking, a toilet and water pump are located outside. Dirt or wood floors are covered in handmade wool rugs dyed with natural pigments. In some homes, people sleep in rooms covered with rugs upon which they spread a thick mattress. Rural gardens and yards tend to be small. Animals such as goats, cows, sheep, and pigs are kept on bigger lots.

### Dating and Marriage

Dating couples enjoy going to cafés, fairs, cinemas, dance clubs, or visiting each other at home. Young people in rural areas gather in city squares. People usually marry after they finish their schooling. The bride and groom must have a civil ceremony for the marriage to be legal; many couples then also have a religious wedding. Rural celebrations are more elaborate than urban celebrations; they include big tents for guests and several days of festivities. Urban wedding parties usually are held at home or a restaurant.

### Life Cycle

When a baby is born, the mother recovers and bonds with her baby for 40 days in the care of a female relative, a period called the *babine*. Among Bosnian Muslims, the baby is given a golden coin (*mashala*) on a safety pin that is attached to its cap so it will grow big and healthy. Money may also be put under the baby's head or pillow. The baby's hair is not cut until the first birthday, when the baby's godfather snips the first lock of hair, which the parents save as a keepsake.

When a Bosnian Muslim dies, his or her body is taken to a funeral home, where the body is wrapped in a special cloth called a *cefini*. The body is then placed in a plain wooden coffin and covered with an Islamic religious flag. The body is buried within 24 hours, and only men attend the funeral ceremony. Women go to a prayer service, which is repeated 40 days later. Among Bosnian Christians, a memorial service is performed in a chapel followed by a funeral. Men and women wear black clothes to attend.

### Diet

Pies dominate the menu of Bosnian Muslims: *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. Devout Muslims do not eat pork. Other Bosnians enjoy pork in various forms; it is customary for a family to slaughter a pig or two in November. Part of the meat is prepared for Christmas and the rest is dried.

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 Bosnian Muslim desserts include *tufahija* (boiled apple stuffed with nuts and sweet cream) or *sevdidzan* (soft cake). Bosnian Serb and Bosnian Croat specialties include chocolate

cakes, strudels, and pancakes. Bosnian Muslims drink less wine than other groups in Bosnia, but *rakija*, a strong type of brandy, is found everywhere.

### Recreation

Bosnians enjoy cultural, historical, and sporting events, as well as visiting in the home. In the city, people may take evening strolls or meet at cafés and restaurants. Favorite sports include basketball, tennis, swimming, handball, and soccer. Older men gather in social halls to play checkers or chess. People watch television in the evening and on weekends. On May Day (1 May), families customarily enjoy games and eat roast lamb at a picnic. Grilling is common throughout the summer. The Adriatic Coast is a popular destination for families taking vacations during the summer. People tend to gather at the same vacation sites year after year.

### 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. The *kolo* is a dance not accompanied by music. Architecture, weaving, silk embroidery, and calligraphy are other important arts. Sarajevo was once a vibrant cultural center in the former Yugoslavia. Bosnia and Herzegovina has a long and rich cultural tradition in award-winning film, literature, and art. However, the war caused a great deal of damage. Bombing demolished many important monuments and ruined 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 (1–2 Jan.), Day of the Republic (9 January in the RS and 1 March in the Federation), Labor Day (1–2 May), St. Vitus Day (28 June in the RS), and Statehood Day (25 Nov.). Catholics and Protestants celebrate Christmas on 25 December, while the Orthodox celebrate on 7 January. Muslims celebrate *Ramazan Bairam* (feast at the end of the holy month of *Ramadan*) and *Kurban Bairam* (Feast of the Sacrifice). Christians celebrate Easter, Ascension (15 Aug.), and All Saints' Day (1 Nov.). Jews can take a holiday on *Yom Kippur* and *Rosh Hashanah*.

## SOCIETY

### Government

The country's status as a parliamentary democracy relies on ongoing political transformation at home and in Serbia and Croatia. The Dayton Accords endorsed a multiethnic society but complicated matters by creating the Federation and the RS. There is also a small, semi-autonomous district in the northeast called Brcko, which is under national and international supervision. Positions in the weak central government are divided among the three main ethnic groups. The chief of state and chairman, one of the three-member rotating presidency, is mainly responsible for international

affairs. Prime Minister Nikola Špirić is head of government. The 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.

**Economy**

Bosnia and Herzegovina was one of the poorest republics of the former Yugoslavia. The war only made things worse. Production fell 90 percent between 1990 and 1996. Socialist military industries now lie idle; other state plants are overstaffed, closed, or barely functioning. Much infrastructure and private enterprise remain devastated. Nearly 60 percent of houses were destroyed in the war, and many hundreds of thousands of people remain displaced. Resettlement is an enormous economic challenge; efforts are underway to enact new property laws and rebuild infrastructure. Limited foreign investment, corruption, and government bureaucracy hinder economic recovery. Even so, some benefits of international business loans, reconstruction, and investment are being realized. However, the global financial crisis of 2008 may slow further international aid and development. Incomes are rising, though unemployment still averages 40 percent. Exports are resuming and will eventually include such natural resources as coal, iron, manganese, copper, lead, zinc, and timber. However, Bosnia's greatest asset is a skilled and highly educated workforce. The currency is the 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 because of war damage. Rural people continue to rely on bicycles and horse-drawn carts. Cars do not normally yield to pedestrians, so one must watch out for traffic. Roads and bridges need repair. Bosnia has four international airports.

The free press is growing. Dozens of television and radio stations exist, but most tend to promote the interests of a specific ethnic group. The Open Broadcast Network and the Free Election Radio Network are genuine multiethnic stations. The state-run telephone system is still being repaired and upgraded, while a private cellular-phone network is growing.

**Education**

Children begin primary school at age six and must attend for at least nine years. Secondary schooling lasts four years but is not mandatory. Thereafter, students may attend *gymnasium* (university-prep high school) or a vocational school to learn a trade. After eighth grade, students must pass a matriculation exam to get a *workbook*. Without it, one cannot get a job. Sarajevo, Tuzla, Banja Luka, and Mostar have universities. Education is free to citizens at all levels. Students who can pay university tuition are allowed to enroll even if the normal entrance quotas are filled. Education is very important to Bosnians. A unified curriculum is being developed for the entire country that will allow students to receive a balanced

view of history and culture.

**Health**

Primary health care is free to all citizens, but some treatments and medicines must be paid for by patients. Many rural clinics destroyed in the war have not been rebuilt. Hospitals are found in regional centers. Private clinics have multiplied since the war, but most people cannot afford their fees. Hospitals face supply and equipment shortages. The greatest health challenges include lack of proper hygiene, tuberculosis, cancer, and kidney ailments caused by unpurified water.

**AT A GLANCE**

**Contact Information**

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**POPULATION & AREA**

Population	4,621,598 (rank=120)
Area, sq. mi.	19,767 (rank=126)
Area, sq. km.	51,197

**DEVELOPMENT DATA**

Human Dev. Index* rank	68 of 182 countries
Gender inequality rank	NA
Real GDP per capita	\$6,500
Adult literacy rate	99% (male); 94% (female)
Infant mortality rate	9 per 1,000 births
Life expectancy	75 (male); 83 (female)

\*UN Development Programme, Human Development Report 2010 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).