

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA (*Bosna i Hercegovina*)



Bosnia and Herzegovina is still recovering from the 1992-95 war of independence from the Yugoslav Federation which destroyed lives and devastated its infrastructure and economy. Roughly two million people were displaced and 100,000 killed. The psychological impact of the ethnic cleansing and atrocities continue to impact children. The three main ethnic groups are Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims), Croats and Serbs. The Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian languages are virtually identical; the distinction being a matter of identity politics as identity is inexorably tied to ethnic and religious identity.

QUICK FACTS

Population: 3.8 million

Area: slightly smaller than West Virginia

Capital: Sarajevo (pop. 389,000)

Languages: Bosnian (official), Croatian (official), Serbian (official); the three together are often referred to as BCS

EDUCATION

The education system in Bosnia was severely impacted by the war and schools were often targeted and forced to close. It currently has a compulsory 9-grade education system for ages 7-14. Grading is on a 5-point scale (5=excellent, 4=very good, 3=good, 2=sufficient, 1=insufficient). The literacy rate for 15 and over is 97%. Traditionally greater emphasis has been placed on rote-learning rather than inquiry-based or critical thinking and exams

RELIGION

The majority of Bosnians are Muslim (40%). Bosnian Serbs are Eastern Orthodox (31%) and Croats are Roman Catholic (15%). In addition 4% is Protestant and another 10% follow other religions. While a majority of the population is not practicing or observant, religion is a key aspect of national identity.

ETHNICITY/NATIONAL IDENTITY

Prior to the civil war, the three dominant groups identified predominantly as Bosnian. Today they distinguish themselves from one another. Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims) represent the majority (48%) and have a culture influenced by centuries of Ottoman Turkish rule. Bosniaks tend to identify themselves in opposition to Serbia which also dominated the region for years. Bosnian Serbs (37%) are culturally linked to their neighbors in Serbia to the south. They identify less as Bosnians and primarily as Serbs. Croats (14%) distinguish themselves from both Serbs and Bosnians. While in 1991, before the civil war, 40% of marriages registered were ethnically mixed, today the regions are much more homogeneous and mixed marriages are extremely rare. Family names are often an indication of ethnicity and most end in "ić," (ich) or "the little one."

FAMILY, RELATIONSHIPS & CUSTOMS

Each of Bosnia's three distinct populations have their own customs and traditions and observe individual religious holidays. While on the state level the Gregorian calendar is observed, Bosniaks follow the Islamic calendar and observe Ramadan followed by Bajram. Serbs follow the Orthodox Julian calendar with Christmas on January 7. And Croats observe Catholic holidays. The war had a considerable impact on family life with fewer extended families cohabitating and many families separated or with members killed. This has resulted in many women becoming heads of households. Each of the respective groups tends to settle with its respective community in the US and these communities provide considerable support for their members.





CONTEMPORARY BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

Bosnia and Herzegovina declared independence from Yugoslavia in March 1992 following a referendum which was boycotted by ethnic Serbs. With support from neighboring Serbia and Montenegro and the government of extremist leader Slobodon Milosevic, a Bosnian Serb armed resistance pursued a campaign of ethnic cleansing and attempted to create a "Greater Serbia". Millions were killed, wounded and left homeless. While it was the Serbs, with the backing of Milosevic, who were responsible for most of the atrocities, Croats also persecuted Bosnian Muslims.

In March 1994, Bosniaks and Croats ended their warring to form a joint Bosniak/Croat Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. All parties finally came together in Dayton, Ohio in November 1995, to lay the groundwork for a peace agreement to end three years of interethnic civil war. The Dayton Peace Accords recognized Bosnia and Herzegovina's pre-war international boundaries and established a multi-ethnic democratic government as well as a second tier of government composed of the Bosniak/Bosnian Croat Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Bosnian Serb-led Republika Srpska (RS). A large NATO presence was established but has since been replaced by a smaller EU military policing presence.

In 1993, The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) was established to prosecute war crimes including the massacre of at least 7,500 Bosnian Muslim men and boys at Srebrenica and systematic raping of women and girls. While efforts have been made at reconciliation, the war was devastating both psychologically and economically and has left the country divided. Globally, Bosnia has the third highest unemployment rate for 15-24 year olds at 57.5%.



Stari Most (Old Bridge) in Mostar

BOSNIANS IN THE USA

There have been multiple waves of immigrants beginning with peasant men in the 1820s, followed by refugees after WWI and WWII, intellectuals in the 1960s-70s fleeing Tito's Yugoslavia, and large-scale immigration of refugees from the recent civil war. There are roughly 100,000 Bosnians in the US today. In 1906, Bosnians in Chicago established *Džemijetul Hajrije* (The Benevolent Society) of Illinois, the oldest existing Muslim organization in the United States.



The triangle on the flag approximates the shape of the country and its three points stand for the constituent peoples - Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs; the stars represent Europe.



Traditional dzesva and coffee service

LANGUAGE

Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian (often referred to as BCS) are virtually identical yet maintain some regional differences; the distinction being a matter of identity politics. Croatian and Bosnian use the Latin script, whereas Serbian use the Cyrillic alphabet. BCS is an Indo-European language. Like Russian and Latin it is highly inflected—nouns are altered to indicate relation in a sentence. Nouns also have gender and cases, and the past tense is conjugated by gender and person while other tenses are conjugated only by person. Articles and prepositions are rarely used. Turkish and Albanian are spoken by a small minority.

BOSNIAN WORDS

Hi/Bye.....Zdravo (ZDRAH-vow)
Good day.....Dobar dan (DOH-bahr dahn)
Good morning Dobro jutro
Yes Da (dah)
No Ne (neh)
Please.....Molim (MOH-leem)
Thank youHvala (HVAH-lah)
You're welcome .. Nema na čemu (NEH-mah nah CHEH-moo)
How are you?Kako ste (KAH-koh steh)?
I do not understandNe razumijem (neh rah-ZOO-myehm)
Do you understand? Razumijete li?/Da li razumijete?
What is your name?..... Kako se zovete?
(KAH-koh seh zoh-VEH-teh)
My name isZovem se.. (ZOH-vehm she)
Where are you from? Odakle ste?

USEFUL LINKS

[The World Factbook: Bosnia and Herzegovina](#)
[BBC Bosnia and Herzegovina Profile](#)
[Onasa English Language News](#)
[Educational Country File](#)
[Bosnian Language 101](#)