

Bosnia and Herzegovina



General Information



Population

3 233 526 (World Bank 2022)

3 475 000 (BHAS 2020)



Immigration

36 042 (UN DESA 2020)



Emigration

1 687 639 (UN DESA 2020)

1 804 991 (MSB 2020)



Working-age population

2 157 762 (World Bank 2022)

2 320 000 (BHAS 2021)



Unemployment rate

12.7 % (World Bank 2022)

16 % (BHAS 2021)



GDP

24 473 906 673.7 current prices USD (World Bank 2022)

34 240 000 000 current prices KM (BHAS 2020)



Refugees and IDPs

Refugees

310 (UNHCR 2023)

Asylum Seekers

65 (UNHCR 2023)

244 (MSB 2020)

IDPs

96 305 (UNHCR 2023)



Citizenship

By Birth

No (GLOBALCIT 2022)

By Descent

Yes (GLOBALCIT 2022)

Years of Residency

5 (GLOBALCIT 2022)



Territory

51 197 km² (CIA World Factbook)

Migration Authorities

Responsible Body

Ministry of Security

Line Ministries

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees

Ministry of Civil Affairs

Ministry of Justice

Directorate for European Integration

Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina Ministry of Interior

Republika Srpska Ministry of Interior

Agencies

Border Police

Service for Foreigners' Affairs

Intelligence & Security Agency (OSA)

State Investigation & Protection Agency

Key Policy Documents

2015 Law on Aliens

2015 Law on Asylum

Strategy for Integrated Border Management in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the period 2019-2023

Strategy for fight against organized crime in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2017 - 2020)

Relevant Publications

Policy Brief 'Changing Demographics in the Countries of the Prague Process: Implications for Migration'

Webinar Recording 'From refugee crises to labour migration and back?'

Policy Brief 'Labour migration from East to West: The example of foreign workers in Austria'

Analytical report 'The Western Balkan Migration Route (2015-2019)'

Analytical report 'Lessons learned from the 2015-2016 migration situation in the Western Balkan region'

Policy Brief 'The 10th Anniversary of the Prague Process'

Policy Brief 'Highly-skilled Return Migrants to the Western

A long-standing country of emigration, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) in recent years has also become an important transit point. Approximately **2 million people of BiH origin** – over half of the country's total population – are estimated to reside abroad, predominantly in Europe and North America. While emigration in the 1990s was conflict-induced, it nowadays largely results from the dissatisfaction with the socioeconomic and political realities along with the existence of economic incentives and established social networks in key destinations.

Researchers estimate that some **400.000** people left Bosnia and Herzegovina between 2011 and 2019. Intentions to emigrate are particularly high among the youth. The recent **UNFPA survey** shows that 47% of young BiH nationals (18-29 years old) are contemplating to migrate in search of stability, employment and career opportunities. One of the persistent push factors is the long-term unemployment that affects **two-thirds of unemployed youth in BiH**. Since 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused further **substantial damage** to the BiH labour market. Consequently, youth unemployment rose to **37.7% in 2021**. The outward migration combined with a rapidly ageing population and a low fertility rate might ultimately result in depopulation.

Croatia, Serbia, Germany, Austria and Slovenia host the largest BiH migrant communities, and along with Montenegro attract the majority of BiH labour migrants. Since 2017, over **3.000 BiH nationals** annually have de-registered their residency in the country leaving for the EU and to the neighbouring Western Balkan states, but many more migrated without de-registration. The stock of BiH residence permit holders in the EU increased by **74.000 since 2017, reaching 430.000 in 2020**. The majority of valid residence permits are issued on family and 'other' grounds for a period of 12 months and longer in the four above-mentioned EU MS. Furthermore, every year some **3.000 to 4.000 BiH nationals** renounce BiH citizenship to acquire German, Austrian, Slovenian or Croatian passports. The vast BiH diaspora considerably contributes to the economy of its home country through remittances, which amounted to **9.3%** of the national GDP in 2020.

When it comes to outflows, the number of BiH nationals granted **first-time residence permits** in the EU has been on the rise since 2011 reaching **56.363 in 2019**. However, in 2020, it declined by 37% due to COVID-19. Slovenia and Croatia have been issuing a growing number of first-time residence permits to BiH nationals, with most granted for remunerated activities for a period of six months and longer. Labour migration to the EU also includes BiH migrant workers employed via bilateral employment agreements in Germany and Slovenia. There were over **15.000 BiH nationals** employed through these schemes in 2019 (7.151 in 2020). While labour migration to the EU features both longer and shorter-term patterns (55/45% ratio based on first-time residence permits), labour **migration to Montenegro and Serbia** is mostly temporary and circular. BiH migrant workers come to neighbouring Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro for seasonal employment in tourism, construction and agricultural sectors, with many of them working in the informal economy.

For the past few years, the annual data on irregular outmigration reflect on average **3.500-4.000 BiH nationals staying illegally** in the EU, mostly in Germany. Meanwhile, the number of BiH citizens refused entry to the EU – primarily at the Croatian and Slovenian borders – nearly doubled in 2020 compared to 2019 (**8.145 vs 4.245**). The return rate of irregular BiH migrants from the EU has declined from over 80% in 2015

to 37% in 2020. Both the number of BiH nationals ordered to leave and those actually returning following such order has equally declined to reach respectively 2.710 and 1.010 persons in 2020.

The worldwide stock of refugees from BiH has considerably declined over the past decade reaching **15.394 persons in 2021**. Serbia, Kosovo, Switzerland, France and Germany host the majority of BiH refugees. The latter two countries along with the US also receive the most asylum applications filed by BiH nationals. In 2021, the number of BiH asylum seekers reached its historical minimum of **954 persons** since the Bosnian war. Meanwhile, there are still **close to 100.000** persons who remain internally displaced. The risk of continuing/further displacement persists given the complicated political structure of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is home to some 36.000 immigrants, who mostly originate from Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro. In 2020, the number of new visas, temporary and permanent residence permits issued to foreigners amounted to 1.857, 8.293, and 312 respectively, dropping by 96%, 18% and 60% when compared to 2019. The number of work permits, with most issued to citizens of Serbia, Turkey, Kuwait, Croatia and China, equally declined from 3.183 in 2019 to 2.586 in 2020.

Since mid-2018, irregular migrants and asylum seekers have frequented the route via BiH to the EU, turning it into one of the most travelled mixed migration routes in the Western Balkans. Between January 2018 and October 2021, BiH registered almost **84.000 irregular arrivals**. The top countries of origin declared were Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and Syria. Moreover, IOM estimates that there are around **9.000-10.000 migrants** in the country at any given time. Despite the intention of migrants to transit the territory of BiH, many of them have been forced to remain there after being returned by the Croatian authorities. Yet, only a small share of migrants (e.g. **244 persons in 2020, 784 in 2019**) claim asylum in BiH and only **86 persons** received either a refugee status or subsidiary protection in 2018-2020. The country **struggles to meet** the basic needs of migrants, whereas its reception and accommodation capacities remain limited. Moreover, BiH communities hosting migrants have seen increased **social tensions** and anti-migrant sentiment.

BiH adopted both the Global Compact for Refugees and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. It is a party to several migration dialogues. Since 2020, BiH is a member of the Joint Coordination Platform that promotes better coordination of measures against irregular migration along the Eastern Mediterranean Route. Since 2010, the country has been enjoying visa-free travel to the EU. It has also concluded readmission agreements with the EU and Schengen associated countries, all the Western Balkan countries, Turkey, Russia, Moldova and Pakistan. The increased mixed migration flows forced BiH to step up efforts to improve migration management, but many obstacles in terms of institutional cooperation, coordination and legislation remain to this day. The country is working on a **new Strategy and Action Plan on Migration and Asylum 2021-2025**, still under adoption in early 2022.