PRAGUE PROCESS
ПРАЖСКИЙ ПРОЦЕСС



Bosnia and Herzegovina

General Information

Population

3 140 095 (World Bank 2025)

3 531 159 (Ministry of Security 2024)

Immigration

34 120 (UN DESA Stock 2024)

13 481 (Ministry of Security 2023)

Emigration

1 608 324 (UN DESA Stock 2024)

2 391 (Ministry of Security 2024)

Working-age population

2 018 817 (World Bank 2025)

2 257 000 (STAT BiH 2024)

Unemployment rate

13.3 % (STAT BiH 2024)

GDP

32 599 982 936.4 current prices USD (World Bank 2025)

49 779 827 000 current prices KM (STAT BiH 2024)

Refugees, Asylum seekers, IDPs

Refugees

586 (UNHCR 2025)

Asylum Seekers

164 (UNHCR 2025)

234 (Ministry of Security 2024)

IDPs

94 796 (UNHCR 2025)

Citizenship

By Birth

No (GLOBALCIT 2024)

By Descent

Yes (GLOBALCIT 2024)

Years of Residency

3 years of residence required (GLOBALCIT 2024)

Territory

51 197 km^2 (CIA World Factbook)

Data from international sources is updated automatically as it becomes available.

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 Federal Ministry of Interior

Agencies

Border Police

Service for Foreigners' Affairs

Intelligence & Security Agency (OSA)

State Investigation & Protection Agency

Labour and Employment Agency

Key Policy Documents

2015 Law on Aliens

2015 Law on Asylum

2025 Law on Border Control

Migration and Asylum Strategy 2021-2025

Strategy for Combating Human Trafficking in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2024-2027

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

Western Balkans 2035: Demographic Resilience and Strategic Migration Planning under EU Integration and Isolation Scenarios

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

Webinar: From refugee crises to labour migration and back?

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

The Western Balkan Migration Route (2015-2019)

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

The 10th Anniversary of the Prague Process

Highly-skilled Return Migrants to the Western Balkans

Bosnia and Herzegovina Extended Migration Profile 2012

ICMPD Policy Brief, Diasporas‘ Contribution to the Socio-Economic Development in the Western Balkans (ECONDIAS)

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), traditionally a country of emigration, has in recent years also become an important transit point for migrants. An estimated 2.2 million people of BiH origin – around 65% of the current population of 3,412,000 – reside abroad, primarily in Europe and North America. While conflict drove emigration in the 1990s, post-2000 mobility has been shaped by economic incentives, dissatisfaction with socioeconomic and political conditions, and the pull effect of EU visa liberalisation. Combined with rapid ageing and negative natural population growth, sustained emigration risks accelerating depopulation and labour shortages.

According to the UNDESA, in 2024, 1,608,324 Bosnian and Herzegovinians lived abroad in 2024, with 95.8% residing in Europe. The largest communities are in Croatia (22.6%), Germany (19.9%), Serbia (17.2%), Austria (11.2%) and Slovenia (8.6%). Between 1990 and 2020, destination countries diversified. Alongside established migration flows to Germany, Austria, and Slovenia, growing numbers of Bosnian citizens settled in Scandinavian countries, particularly Sweden, Norway, and Finland, as well as the United Kingdom, which was not a traditional destination. Overseas, Canada and Australia also saw a steady rise in BiH-origin emigrant populations over the past three decades. The vast BiH diaspora continues to make a significant contribution to the national economy through remittances, which accounted for around 11% of the national GDP in 2024, one of the highest shares in Europe.

Emigration intentions are particularly high among the young people. According to the FES Youth Study (2024), 31% of BiH nationals aged 14-29 strongly wish to leave, mainly in search of better living standards, employment opportunities, and higher salaries. Although the youth unemployment has been declining since 2021, it remains high at 30.2%.

After the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of BiH nationals receiving first-time residence permits in the EU has fluctuated. Following a rise from 39,500 permits in 2020 to 50,276 in 2022, numbers declined again, reaching 39,179 in 2024. Germany, Croatia, and Slovenia issued most of these permits. primarily for family reunification in Germany and Slovenia, and for employment in Croatia. The number of BiH citizens holding valid residence permits in the EU has grown steadily from 347,594 in 2014 to 497,475 in 2024. Most valid permits were issued on family (26.9%) and 'other' (36.1%) grounds for a period of 12 months and longer. In 2024, 2,391 BiH nationals formally de-registered their residency before leaving for the EU and neighbouring Western Balkan states, but many more might have left without de-registration.

Labour migration to the EU also takes place through bilateral agreements and national regulations in destination countries. Notably, the bilateral labour agreement with Slovenia and the Western Balkan regulation in Germany have expanded formal labour migration pathways. Under these schemes, 12,761 BiH citizens were employed as of November 2024 (12,499 in 2023), particularly medical workers. Beyond healthcare, BiH nationals in Germany work in construction, seasonal agriculture and hospitality, while in Slovenia they are predominantly employed in construction, manufacturing, transport and storage, and accommodation and food service.

According to UNESCO, 14,827 students from Bosnia and Herzegovina were enrolled in higher education institutions abroad in 2022, primarily in Serbia (5,968), Austria (2,568), and Croatia (2,360), followed by Germany, Slovenia, Türkiye, and Italy.

Over the past decade, an average 3,500-4,000 BiH nationals were found to be staying illegally in the EU, mostly in Germany. The only exception was 2022, when detections peaked at almost 5,000. Since then, numbers declined to around 3,500 in 2024. Refusals of entry to the EU – mostly at the Croatian land border peaked in 2020 at 8,145, and reached 5,060 in 2024, an increase of about 27% compared to 2023 (3,985). In addition, both the number of BiH nationals ordered to leave and those actually returned following such orders increased in 2024, reaching 2,475 and 1,290 persons respectively. For both measures, leading countries were Croatia and Germany.

Over the past decade, the worldwide stock of refugees from BiH has fluctuated. It declined before COVID-19, reaching 15,578 persons in 2020, but has risen again, reaching 26,821 in 2024.Serbia, Kosovo*, France, Denmark, Switzerland, Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands host the majority of BiH refugees. The largest number of asylum applications by BiH nationals are filed in Germany, the US and Italy. In 2024, asylum applications dropped to historic low of 961 persons, the smallest figure since the Bosnian war. Meanwhile, an estimated 95,000 persons remain internally displaced.

The number of foreign citizens residing in Bosnia and Herzegovina remains low, although labour migration inflows are gradually increasing due to workforce shortages. According to UNDESA, the stock of migrants residing in BiH stood at 34,120 in 2024. Most of them originate from Croatia (33.2%), Serbia (28%) and Montenegro (12%). In 2024, the authorities issued 12,955 visas, 14,909 temporary residence permits and 430 permanent residence permits to foreign nationals. Compared with 2023, these figures represent a 39.1% decrease in visas, a 10.6% increase in temporary permits, and a 60% decline in permanent permits. The 15% rise in work permits, from 5,293 in 2023 to 6,085 in 2024 – mostly issued to citizens of Serbia, Türkiye, China, India and Croatia – suggest a modest increase in labour migration, yet these inflows remain too limited to significantly alter the country's persistently small foreign-resident base .

Bosnia and Herzegovina remains a key segment of the Western Balkan missed migration route to the EU. In 2024, 11,298 persons were detected crossing the state border illegally, a 17.2% decrease from 2023. Over the past two years, the main countries of origin declared were Syria, Türkiye, and Afghanistan, accounting for around 40% of all detected crossings The predominance of irregular exits (61%) over entries (39%), with 98% of exits occurring along the Croatian border, underscores BiH's role primarily as a transit rather than a destination country.

During 2024, the authorities registered 25,284 illegal migrants, of whom 21,489 expressed an intention to seek asylum. However, only 234 individuals (1.1%) formally lodged asylum applications, and 99 persons were granted refugee status or subsidiary protection. The largest groups of asylum seekers originated from Syria, Türkiye, Palestine, Russia and Afghanistan. While the number of asylum seekers in BiH had been declined from 1,568 in 2018 to 147 2023, it rose again in 2024 to 234.

Since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, thousands of Ukrainian citizens have travelled to BiH, with many transiting further onward. As of September 2025, 321 Ukrainian nationals remain in the country. Of these, 23 hold subsidiary protection, three are asylum seekers, one person has an AISA (attestation of expressed intent to seek asylum), and 294 individuals who applied for temporary residence on humanitarian grounds, which allows stay of up to six months but provides limited rights beyond residency. BiH has not granted Temporary Protection to Ukrainian citizens. Instead, the authorities facilitated their entry and stay through humanitarian residence, which do not grant access to health care, education, or the labour market. As a result, most displaced Ukrainians in the country depend on humanitarian assistance and support from international and local organisations.

In 2024, BiH continued efforts to address trafficking in human beings. Authorities increased the investigations and prosecutions, resulting in 15 convictions, mostly for labour exploitation, and identified 37 victims. Victims were predominantly women, children, and members of the Roma community. In October 2024, the government adopted the 2024-2027 Strategy to Combat Trafficking, aimed at strengthening inter-entity coordination, improving victim identification and protection, and enhancing capacities of law enforcement and judicial authorities. The implementation began in late 2024 under the State Anti-Trafficking Secretariat, though progress slowed after the resignation of the national coordinator.

Rising mixed migration flows has compelled BiH to intensify efforts to strengthen migration, asylum and border management. However, some challenges remain, particularly in institutional cooperation, legislative alignment and budgetary support. The country adopted a Strategy and Action Plan on Migration and Asylum 2021-2025, yet no dedicated budget has been allocated for its implementation. In January 2025, BiH adopted the Law on Border Control aiming to align its legislation with the EU acquis. Later, in July 2025, the Council of Ministers adopted the 2025-2029 Strategy and Action plan for Integrated Border Management. In the same year, BiH signed a status agreement with Frontex and a 2025-2027 Roadmap for Cooperation with EUAA.

BiH has endorsed both the Global Compact for Refugees and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. It participates in several migration dialogues, including the Prague Process, and in the Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling. It has enjoyed visa-free travel to the EU since 2010 and has concluded readmission agreements with the EU, Schengen-associated countries, all Western Balkan countries, Türkiye, Russia, Moldova and Pakistan. In December 2022, the European Council granted Bosnia and Herzegovina EU candidate status, and in March 2024, following a positive assessment by the EC, the Council formally opened accession negotiations.

latest update: 31 December 2025