



Bosnia and Herzegovina

Family Life



Teen Life: Some families and family structures have been affected by the most recent war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where some families have been broken up and are now headed by widows after husbands were lost to the conflict. Following the war, more people moved into the cities from the country side, where they remain today.

Elders are respected in Bosnian culture and are generally considered as extremely important members of the family.

Bosnian culture generally maintains extended family groups, which means that grandparents may live with their adult chil-

dren and care for the grandchildren while the parents are at work. It is not uncommon for families to live in the same building or neighborhood as their relatives. Bosnian teens are often more formal than is the case in the United States in their interactions with their parents and grandparents.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina often both of the parents are professionals and are financially responsible for the family. However, some traditional values remain where outside of working, mothers are also responsible for taking care of the housework, while the father is not. In Bosnian families, both parents may be seen as equal authority figures in household decisions, although this depends upon an individual family; sometimes in more rural areas, men are still seen as heads of the family. Generally, women tend to be more responsible for household tasks like food shopping, household chores, and care of the children, particularly in the rural areas.

Most families do attempt to have at least one meal per day as a family, but may not be able to because of varied schedules. Most activities are pursued together as a family, and some individual time is considered fine, but spending too much time alone in one's room can lead the family to think that something is wrong.

Teen Life: Bosnian teenagers, particularly in their younger years, tend to rely a lot on their parents when it comes to decision making regarding school, after-school activities, college plans, etc.

Responsibilities: Generally speaking, mothers do most of the household chores in a typical Bosnian home. However, daughters (and less frequently, sons) are expected to help with some chores like vacuuming and dusting. Having a housekeeper is a rare occurrence in Bosnia and Herzegovina, unless the family is particularly wealthy, as Bosnian women tend to take pride in how clean and neat they keep their homes.

Siblings in Bosnia and Herzegovina tend to share clothing, accessories, books and electronics. They typically don't ask first before using these items unless they think the other sibling might need it.

Having a part-time job as a teenager in Bosnia and Herzegovina is very rare. Most teenagers get small allowances from their parents and/or grandparents. Bosnian teenagers are not expected to have any budgetary responsibilities, as their parents tend to pay for their clothing, footwear, school supplies, etc. Teenagers in BiH are expected to do well in school and get good grades. Typically, Bosnian parents would expect their child to be responsible, behave properly, and be respectfully towards others.

Parental Involvement: Some families may have a household rule where there is a limit set on how long internet can be used in the home. Generally, though, most Bosnian teens tend to be more knowledgeable about the usage of internet than their parents, and most families do not have such strict rules. It is also typical for Bosnian teens to illegally download content from the internet, which is not considered to be a concern in Bosnia.

Bosnian parents tend to be involved in helping their child decide in which extracurricular activities students will become involved. Parents also finance these activities, which can be costly, as they are not provided by the students' schools. Parents in Bosnia and Herzegovina go every few months to their child's school for parent-teacher meetings and "open doors" nights. Students' grade reports are given to the parents each semester.

Pets: Many Bosnian families do own pets, although these pets (cats and dogs) usually stay outside. Some families do keep pets indoors, as well, but this is not overly common. However, in the more rural communities, keeping dogs inside can be seen by some people as unclean and unsanitary due to cultural and/or religious reasons.

School



General high school in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is known as "gymnasium", but there are also vocational or technical high schools. Depending on the type of school a student attends, students may or may not pick his or her school subjects.

Classes: An average day in a Bosnian high school typically lasts five to seven hours and teaching is organized in 45 minute blocks. Bosnian students tend to stay in the same classroom all day with the same students, while teachers rotate to teach them different subjects. Bosnian students tend to take 13-15 subjects during each year of high school, and these subjects are obligatory.

Students are assigned regular homework and are given both oral and written exams on regular basis in almost all of their classes. Their grades are then averaged out on a three-month basis when students and their parents receive grade updates. At that point, students also get evaluations regarding their behavior during the school year.

The grading system in Bosnia and Herzegovina consists of a five point scale. "1" is the worst possible grade, while "5" is the best. Students enrolled in one of the three schools in the country that offer the International Baccalaureate program follow the standard IB grade scale.

School Relationships: Student-teacher relationships in Bosnia and Herzegovina are more formal than is the case in the U.S. For example, when the teacher enters the classroom, students may be required to stand up as a sign of respect for the teacher. Students also address the teacher formally (Mr./Mrs./Ms. or Prof.), and not by their first name or a nickname. Boys and girls in Bosnia and Herzegovina attend classes and sit together in high schools.

In Madrasas, which are specialized high schools where the syllabus is designed by the Riyasat of the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina and approved by the Ministry of Education of BiH, boys and girls attend separate classes.

Extracurricular Activities: While some private schools do offer after-school activities for students, most public high schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina do not. However, some special clubs or "sections" can be found in few schools such as an English club, theater groups, debate, Model UN etc. Most students, if they are interested in playing music or sports, go to private institutions or join sport teams in their neighborhoods, sport clubs, or play sports with friends in neighborhood parks and stadiums.

School Rules and Attire: "Zero Tolerance" policies do not exist in Bosnian high schools. Students are allowed to carry cell phones with them to school but are discouraged or not allowed to use them during class. Enforcement of this particular rule depends on an individual teacher and school.

If a student gets in a fight, they would likely not be suspended from school, unless the fight is particularly violent, in which case the student would likely be legally prosecuted. Students getting fighting are typically sent to the principal's or pedagogue's office, their parents are called to the school, and their behavior evaluation at the end of the year is given a "poor/low" grade.

Sarajevo

Population
3,861,912

Square Miles
31,812

Currency
Bosnian
Convertible Marka

Literacy rate
97.5%

Literacy rate
99.5%

Bosniak 50.1%
Serb 30.8%
Croat 15.4%
Other 2.7%
Not Declared 1%

Muslim 50.7%
Orthodox 30.7%
Roman Catholic 15.2%
Atheist 0.8%
Agnostic 0.3%
Other 1.2%
Undeclared 1.1%

In public high schools, students typically do not wear school uniforms. There are often dress codes, though, and girls are not allowed to wear short shorts, tube tops or miniskirts. Boys can wear shorts that are below their knees. Generally, teenagers in Bosnia dress similarly to teenagers in the United States. In private schools, students do wear uniforms.

Returning from Exchange: Once YES students return to Bosnia and Herzegovina, they need to take their notarized transcripts to the appropriate Ministry of Education to receive a certification of equivalence. This should make their year in the U.S. on the YES program count towards the student's institutional requirements with no need for them to repeat their year at home. Students who attend vocational schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina may need to catch up on some of the subjects once they return to BiH.

Personal Interactions

Mixed Gender Socializing: Bosnian teenagers tend to socialize in groups, and are very social overall because people in Bosnia tend to be generally social and friendly. Bosnian teenagers also freely socialize with friends of the opposite sex.

Friendships: Bosnian teenagers typically make friends at school or after-school activities. However, the most meaningful and lengthy friendships tend to be made with peers from a student's neighborhood or from elementary school. It is also usual for Bosnian teenagers to be closest with their own siblings and cousins.

Friendship in Bosnia tends to be seen as a very close relationship with a select few people that lasts for a lifetime. Bosnians take pride in having close friends, and having strong friendships is an important part of a typical Bosnian teenager's life.

Communication Styles: Bosnian teenagers are very direct when it comes to communicating certain subjects, including day-to-day events, school, politics, religion, interests etc. However, they may also be very timid when it comes to their personal relationships.

In Bosnia, teenagers are very direct when showing their feelings. However, showing negative emotions can be viewed as somewhat culturally inappropriate, particularly in public or in front of people one does not know well.

Eye Contact: Maintaining eye contact is a sign of respect in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Cultural Norms: The concept of personal space is not as important in Bosnian culture as it is in the U.S. People in Bosnia and Herzegovina are very friendly, and tend to show emotions physically (such as hugging or friendly touching), which could be considered an invasion of personal space in the U.S.

Food and Culture

Bosnia and Herzegovina is one of the most diverse countries in former Yugoslavia, and is made up of three major ethnic groups: Bosniak Muslims, Croat Catholics and Orthodox Serbs, as well as a number of minorities. Most Muslims follow a halal diet, where they do not consume pork or pork byproducts, or meat that is not butchered following halal codes.

Bosnian cuisine is very rich and is made up of a lot of meat, cheese, butter, stewed vegetables and bread. Bosnians also drink a lot of coffee, which is a cultural and frequently a social affair. Fast food is currently not very popular in Bosnia as it is in the U.S. However, the portions served in Bosnia are often very large.

Guest Culture: Bosnians invite only trusted, close friends or neighbors into their home. Being invited to someone's home in Bosnia is considered an honor, and guests are almost always served with food and drinks. Declining to eat or drink may be considered rude by the hosts. Foreigners that are invited into a Bosnian's home may feel as if they are being "pushed" into eating and drinking by their Bosnian hosts.

Lunch and Diets: Students in Bosnia tend to eat more frequently at home than students in the US; Bosnian teens will eat breakfast before going to school, or they might grab something to eat along the way in one of the local bakeries that are found on almost every street corner. Lunch and dinner are eaten at home, and are hot meals. These meals are typically eaten as a family.

Religion: Religious beliefs in Bosnia are dependent on each family. Some families in Bosnia are religious and go to either a mosque or a church, while others are very secular. Some families are a mix of the two, and parents may each believe a different religion.

As in the U.S., religious centers in Bosnia are also considered community centers.

In Bosnia, gifts are given out during major holidays, although these gifts are often simple and not overly expensive or extravagant. Birthdays are marked by gifting each other.

Holidays: Some important holidays in Bosnia and Herzegovina include the Muslim holiday Ramadan, which includes fasting from dawn to sunset. Families usually invite guests to eat together in the evenings when they break their fast during Ramadan. Families then celebrate Eid al-Fitr after 30 days of fasting.

A second major Muslim holiday is Eid al-Adha, which occurs about two months after the first Eid and lasts for three days. This holiday starts with prayers and families visit cemeteries of their relatives and place flowers on the gravesites. Families then gather for meals and spend time together.

Many non-Muslim Bosnians celebrate Christmas on December 25 or the Serb Orthodox Christmas, which occurs on January 7th. Serbs also celebrate a separate new year in mid-January.

Personal Hygiene

Cleanliness and hygiene generally play a vital role in Bosnian culture. For example, pious Muslims pray five times per day, and prior to each prayer they must wash themselves according to the ritual ablution. However, sometimes due to belief that cold weather may cause one to become sick, parents discourage their kids to take showers in the mornings or go outside without drying their hair, because they believe that it may cause students to become ill or get headaches.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is generally thought to be unclean to wear the same clothes two days in a row, although it is not uncommon to wear one's jeans two days in a row if they are visibly not dirty.

If Bosnian students are expected to take care of their own clothes, they will need to be taught how to do their own laundry as mothers in Bosnia usually do laundry for the entire family. Also, washing machines in Bosnia are different than those found in the US.