

## BOSNIA / HERZEGOVINA



### History

From World War I until the end of World War II, Bosnia was part of the newly created country of Yugoslavia (along with Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Kosovo, and Vojvodina). With the fall of Communism in the 1980s, tensions grew among and between the different Yugoslav republics over power and resources. The Serb and Croat extremists promoted “Ethnic Nationalism” as the solution to the country’s problems. With a strong Serb ruler (Slobodan Milosevic), a campaign of ethnic repression was started, causing Bosnia and others to seek independence from the nation

In 1992, following a republic wide referendum, Bosnia and Herzegovina declared independence from Yugoslavia. Bosnia’s new independence was swiftly met with brutal attacks by the Yugoslav National Army, a military power being used to promote Serbian Nationalism. Those opposed to a “Greater Serbia” were cut off from food, utilities, and communication. “Entire villages were destroyed. Thousands were expelled from their homes, held in detention camps, raped, tortured, deported, or summarily executed.”  
*(Center for Balkan Development)*

By the end of this war, which spanned from 1992 to 1995, more than 250,000 Bosnians were dead (of a population of just over four million) and over two million were displaced from their homes.

The 1995 Dayton Peace Accords, international peace talks brokered by the United States, formally halted the war by dividing the country into to 2 separate entities with Bosnian/Croat held territories and Serb held territories loosely joined by a central government. While the war is officially over, this arrangement has left the region unstable. Ethnic tensions in the region remain extremely high and most Bosnian refugees and displaced persons have not been able to return to their original homes or communities.

### **Languages**

Most Bosnians speak a Slavic language classified as Serbo-Croatian.

### **Religion**

Bosnia is largely Muslim in religious make-up (approximately 50%) followed by a mix of Christian and Eastern Orthodox. Islam is often associated with the Bosnians, Eastern Orthodox with the Serbs, and Catholicism with the Croatians.

### **Mental Health Perspectives**

Acute and chronic trauma, 'loss of place,' family disruption and problems of family reunification are issues of concern for civilian Bosnian populations and Bosnian refugees.

The war in Bosnia was characterized by massive violence, displacement, disruption and loss of life, relatives and property. Depression and post traumatic stress, feelings of powerlessness, listlessness, anxiety, nervousness, and self-doubt are all common experiences among refugees who have fled such atrocities.

Bosnian refugees often focus attention on the psycho-social impacts of the war and related displacement, rather than the mental health implications. This, combined with post-trauma symptoms common in refugees from war-torn countries, may prevent Bosnian refugees from seeking needed mental health information, support, and/or treatment.