



## **Weekly Briefing**

**Bosnia-Herzegovina social briefing:**  
**Impact of immigration and population change on economic and  
social development in Bosnia and Herzegovina**  
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# **Impact of immigration and population change on economic and social development in Bosnia and Herzegovina**

## **Summary**

*When comparing the general statistics from the last census (2013), and approximating that Bosnia and Herzegovina now roughly has around three million inhabitants regarding the severe and continuous emigration from the country in the last decade, with the statistics of immigration taken for the period of 2010-2019, one sees that the number of immigrant who can have impact on the economic and social changes in the country is too small. The illegal immigration also has almost no real impact on the economy and society in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as the illegal immigrants are just passing through the territory or are excluded from the everyday structures of the country, contributing only to the occasional political quarrels and media headlines. The most significant impact in the changing economy and society in Bosnia and Herzegovina still lies on the opposite side of the migration coin, its emigration.*

## **Introduction**

In this briefing we will try to point out that the immigration to Bosnia and Herzegovina has very little or no impact on the economic and social development in Bosnia and Herzegovina due to the insignificantly small numbers of people actually moving to the country. We will firstly do this by backing it up with recent statistics. Afterwards we will shortly address the most significant case of recent immigration to Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is illegal immigration that we had already written about in previous briefings, and that holds some political and media reaction that have a limited extent on the general population. Lastly we will also very briefly describe the scope of Bosnia and Herzegovina's emigration, which has a crucial impact on development of the economy and society in the country.

## **Recent immigration statistics**

According to the 2013 census<sup>1</sup>, Bosnia and Herzegovina had 3,531,159 inhabitants, which was 845,874 less than in the previous 1991 census. Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina had

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<sup>1</sup> <<http://www.statistika.ba/>>

2,219,220 inhabitants or 62.8 %, Republika Srpska had 1,228,423 or 34.8 %, whereas the population of Brčko District was 83,516 inhabitants or 2.4 %. When distributed into ethnic groups the results were the following: 1,769,592 persons or 50.1 % declared themselves as Bosniaks, 1,086,733 persons or 31.2 % as Serbs, and 544,780 persons or 15.4 % as Croats. All others ethnicities constituted less than 0.37 % individually.

We are presenting these census statistics in order to compare them to the recent immigration data to Bosnia and Herzegovina provided by the annual Migration profile of Bosnia and Herzegovina report, issued by the Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>2</sup> This important migration report has been issued since 2010, while the last one dates from 2019, as due to the situation with the COVID-19 during 2020, the one for last year has not yet been made public. When it comes to the people who were being issued permanent residence in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the numbers for the last ten years are the following:

YEAR	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
No. of issued permanent residence permits	315	308	401	713	763	808	799	750	815	816

The conditions to acquire permanent residence in Bosnia and Herzegovina are the proof of continuous residence in Bosnia and Herzegovina for at least five years before the applying for the residence, substantial and continuous earnings, housing and healthcare. As we can see from the data, there was an almost double increase in 2013, after which the number of issued permanent residences has been around 800 per year. When summed up, from 2010 to 2019, only 6,488 people had permanently immigrated to Bosnia and Herzegovina, which in comparison to Bosnia and Herzegovina’s total population number is not a significant amount to make a difference on the economic and social development scale. The very last Migration profile of Bosnia and Herzegovina can also be used to gain an insight into the national structure of the people who had been granted permanent residence. In the years 2018 and 2019, as data shows, applicants who were granted permanent residence came mostly from Montenegro,

<sup>2</sup> <<http://www.msb.gov.ba/dokumenti/strateski/default.aspx?id=19432&langTag=en-US>>

Croatia, China and North Macedonia, followed by lower numbers from Austria, Germany and Turkey.

The number of people who were granted short-term residence, valid for a period of one year, is significantly higher, although still not very substantial. The numbers for the short-term residence permit are the following:

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
No. of issues short-term residence permits	8,131	7,661	8,838	9,953	11,022	12,633	11,519	11,372	10,756	10,133

From the available data we can see that after a more significant rise in 2014 and peak in 2015, the numbers were again began to steadily decrease. On average, from 2010 to 2019, there have been around 10,000 short-term residence permits issued yearly in Bosnia and Herzegovina. These are much more relevant numbers than the ones for permanent residence, but given the reasons for acquiring this kind of permit, we can safely conclude, also due to the more or less steady numbers, that the statistics involve a large number of the same individuals reapplying. This is due to family connections, education, work with or without the work permit, owning property, humanitarian reasons and other. This reasoning is further backed up by the number of Serbian applicants in the years 2018 and 2019, which has been more than 2,000 (most of it work permits), or one fifth of the given permits, followed by applicants from Turkey, Croatia and Montenegro, with number of granted permits counted over 500 per country. Serbian nationals had been also topping the number of Bosnia and Herzegovina citizenships given in 2018 and 2019, with 81 % out of 1,385 citizenships granted in those two years.

**Continuous illegal immigration crisis**

The now four year long migrant crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina is still not even close to being resolved. The complexity of the decision-making structure in the country makes

strategic planning and execution of policies difficult to implement and shift of responsibility is obvious when it occurs in such cases as the last year closure of the entire camp Bira. In general, official facilities for hosting migrants are overcrowded, and thousands of migrants are living outdoors or in abandoned buildings. The most alarming condition is in Unsko-sanski kanton, around the city of Bihać in the northwest Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is a popular migrant route to reach the neighboring Croatia. Although the number of illegal immigrants was at its peak counted in tens of thousands per year, Bosnia and Herzegovina was only a transit state, because most of them were only trying to reach Western countries. The several thousand that got “stuck”, stayed (on the margins of society) far too short to make any kind of important changes in the economic or social structures in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The only impact illegal immigrants made belong to the spheres of local daily political quarrels or the short-term burning media topics. The number of people applying for asylum in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 2010-2019 is 3,166. Only 9 had been approved during the same period.

### **Economic and social changes and the severe emigration processes since the 1990s**

According to the data of UNHCR, <sup>3</sup> the war caused permanent and temporary displacement of about 2 million inhabitants. Out of that number, a total of 1.2 million applied for a refugee status, which is approximately 27.3 % out of 4.4 million of population recorded by census in 1991, and of whom only a limited number of inhabitants returned. The highest number of returnees was recorded during the first three years after the war had ended, after which the rate of return started to decrease, practically ending the process by 2002. In addition, there was a strong inter-regional resettlement of population and huge changes in re-distribution of population within the country, as a consequence administrative divisions.

The last, and very debatable, 2013 census showed that population of Bosnia and Herzegovina had decreased in comparison to the 1991 census by about 850,000 inhabitants (around 20 %). However, unofficially, it is considered that this number is significantly higher, also because of the continuous voluntary economic emigration which had been occurring for the last two decades and has not been going below 15,000 people emigrating from Bosnia and Herzegovina on a yearly basis. This severe emigration naturally contributes to the declining number of work force resulting in weaker economic processes and overall social structures.

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<sup>3</sup> <<https://www.unhcr.org/4552f2182.pdf>>

## **Conclusion**

There is no real impact of immigration and population change on economic and social development in Bosnia and Herzegovina as the number of people coming to the country is insignificantly small. The more significant number of illegal immigrants also doesn't contribute to the country's development as they are only passing through the territory, or are effectively excluded for the country's society structures. On the other hand, there is a huge and constant population change and impact on the economic and social development due the long lasting and continuous emigration from Bosnia and Herzegovina.