

# Bosnia and Herzegovina



## Quick facts

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| Number of IDPs                          | 114,000  |
| Percentage of total population          | 3.0%   |
| Start of current displacement situation | 1992   |
| Peak number of IDPs (Year)              | 1,000,000 (1993)   |
| New displacement                        | Undetermined   |
| Causes of displacement                  | Internationalised and internal armed conflict, generalised violence, human rights violations |



In the early 1990s, generalised violence and armed conflict between Yugoslav, Croatian and Bosnian armed forces and militias, accompanied by massive human rights abuses and violations, led to the displacement of over a million people and the creation of ethnically homogeneous areas within the newly independent Bosnia and Herzegovina. By the end of 2009, some 580,000 people had returned to their places of origin, and the government reported that some 114,000 people remained as IDPs.

The vast majority of displaced people moved to areas where they would be among the ethnic majority and therefore not subject to discrimination. However the discrimination which returnees face as members of a local ethnic minority in return areas has continued to affect their livelihood opportunities and access to services. 98 per cent of the displaced people who returned home in 2009 went back to areas where they were living as part of the minority.

Many of the people who have remained displaced are among the most elderly or vulnerable, who still need specific assistance to access adequate housing, income, psychiatric and social care and treatment for chronic diseases. These people are over-represented among the 7,000 who have continued to endure very difficult conditions in collective centres. During 2009 fewer than 1,000 people returned, and remaining IDPs have little prospects of improvements in the absence of measures to facilitate their integration in the place they were displaced to. The government has remained reluctant to develop any such project, despite some initiatives taken by UNHCR and the Council of Europe.

In addition, the fragmentation of the social welfare system in Bosnia has resulted in lower pensions and other social benefits in certain areas, effectively limiting elderly people's ability to choose where to live, while the lack of cooperation between the health insurance schemes in Bosnia's two political entities – the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Sprska – makes it harder for pensioners and returnees in general to access health care.

Under Annex VII of the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement, support to durable solutions has focused almost exclusively on the return of IDPs and refugees to their places of origin. This has been to the exclusion of other settlement options, as support to local integration has been perceived as attempting to cement the effect of the war and the "ethnic cleansing" which

motivated the displacement. This perception still coloured the government's approach to facilitating durable solutions in 2009: the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees drafted a revised version of the National Strategy for the Implementation of Annex VII, which, while still focusing on return, recognised the need to compensate people for lost property (instead of just focusing on restitution) and to assist the most vulnerable who cannot or do not want to return, thereby providing de facto support to local integration; however, at the end of 2009, and despite strong support from the international community, the revised Strategy had still not been adopted by the Parliament's House of Peoples, due to disagreements on whether resources should be dedicated to return projects only, as supported by the Bosniak parties, or shared between return and local integration initiatives.

The Ministry has increased financial support to returns in the past three years and improved the scope of the assistance provided, by adding income-generating activities and rehabilitation of infrastructure to reconstruction aid. In addition, these more comprehensive programmes have been combined with greater support to local integration, and together they are likely to lead to a more effective response.

Despite the impressive international humanitarian commitment which followed the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, only a few organisations remain in support of IDPs, in particular the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), UNHCR and UNDP. The European Union has also played a major role in influencing government policy in favour of IDPs through the accession process. The Council of Europe Development Bank has provided significant loans to UNHCR and Bosnian authorities to facilitate the return and reintegration of IDPs and refugees still accommodated in collective centres.