

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Population	3 772 964
Female population (as % of total population)	51.4
Women's life expectancy (in years)	77.4
Men's life expectancy (in years)	72.2
Fertility rate (average births per female)	1.2



The Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina explicitly prohibits all direct or indirect discrimination, whether on the grounds of sex, race, language, politics, religion or national or social origin. The country ratified the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) in September 2003.

Women in the country, however, are still restricted in the exercise of their fundamental rights and freedoms. Tradition dictates a gender-based division of chores and responsibilities within the family: the main role of women is to raise children and manage family life. Traditionally, girls receive less education than boys and have higher illiteracy rates. Bosnia and Herzegovina is going through a phase of transition and the job market is shrinking; and these factors affect women much more than men.

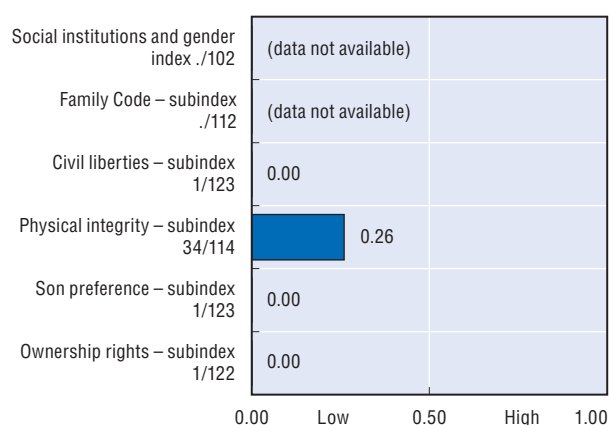
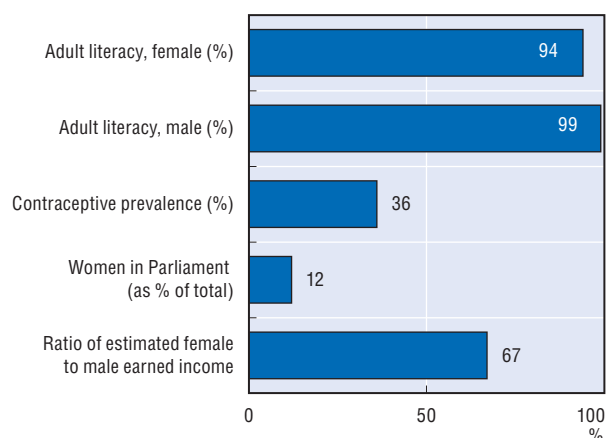
Family code

Women in Bosnian and Herzegovina have some degree of protection within the family context. The minimum legal age for marriage is 18 years for both men and women, and early marriage is rare. The courts can authorise marriage for a minor over 16 years of age if the person is deemed physically and mentally capable of assuming the related responsibilities. Most women marry between the ages of 20 and 24 years.

Polygamy is illegal in Bosnia and Herzegovina and there is no evidence to suggest that it is practised.

Men and women share parental authority over their children (whether born in or out of wedlock), and have equal rights in relation to adoption or child custody (in the case of divorce). A traditional division of household chores remains evident, with financial and technical responsibilities falling to men and the upkeep of the home and children to women, but men do play a significant role in educating their children. In recent years, there seems to be a shift towards more balanced role-sharing; the younger generation is quite opposed to the notion of patriarchal households.

Legally, women and men have equal rights in regard to inheritance and women are free to make a will without their husband's consent. Despite the legislation, tradition can be an obstacle however, and women often surrender their inheritance rights in favour of men.

SIGI ranking**Select indicators of gender equality****Physical integrity**

A more thorough protection of the physical integrity of women in Bosnia and Herzegovina is required as violence against women remains quite common. Current legislation does not specifically address domestic violence; instead it is dealt with indirectly under the country's general criminal law. An estimated one-third of women are victims of domestic abuse, but they are unlikely to report it – in part, because the local police are generally inactive when asked to deal with violence perpetrated against women by their husbands or partners. Rape, including spousal rape, is considered a criminal act, but the legislation is unclear about the evidence required to bring a prosecution. It should not be overlooked that the recent war in Bosnia was marked by a high incidence of rape.

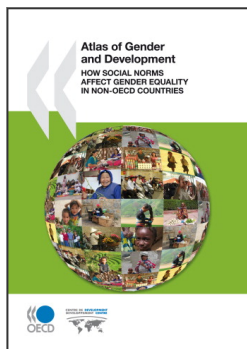
Ownership rights

Theoretically, Bosnian women have the same ownership rights as men, and any assets can be individually or jointly owned. Assets owned by a spouse prior to marriage remain his or her individual property, but those acquired during the marriage are considered joint property. There is no legal discrimination against women in regard to access to land or access to property other than land, but tradition generally favours men over women in these areas. The government has established a programme to help women independently manage small and medium enterprises, whether newly created or already in operation.

In theory, women in Bosnia and Herzegovina have unrestricted access to bank loans, but statistics show that in 1998, women held less than one-third of loans in the country. Women seldom have access to loans that require guarantees because, within couples, husbands often hold a larger share of property than their wives. It does appear, however, that women in Bosnia and Herzegovina have good access to micro-credit schemes.

Civil liberties

There are no reported restrictions on women's civil liberties in Bosnia and Herzegovina.



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