

EASTERN EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

Note: Not all the template categories may be covered in this profile by the community writer—some categories may not have been relevant to this culture.



INTRODUCTION

- Eastern European immigrants have come from Russia and other groups of the former Soviet Union, and from the former Yugoslavia, such as those from Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia. This profile provides information on the Croatian, Bosnian-Herzegovina and Serbian populations, since they comprise the largest number of immigrants and refugees who came to Canada after the civil war in 1991.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- Communism held the different states and ethnic groups together, but when President Tito died in 1980 the Communist Party lost control. Two years later, Croats and Muslims in Bosnia voted for independence.
- Most Serbs living there were opposed to independence because they wished to remain part of Yugoslavia, which Serbia dominated. A fierce civil war broke out in April 1992 after Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats declared independence.
- Within two months, about two-thirds of Bosnia fell under the control of the Bosnian Serbs. In March 1994, Muslims and Croats in Bosnia signed an agreement creating the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- The conflict continued throughout most of 1995, ending with the Dayton Peace Agreement. Today Bosnia consists of two entities: the Bosniaks/Bosnian Croat Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is largely Bosnian and Croatian, and the Republika Srpska, which is primarily Bosnian Serbian.
- It is important to understand that Bosnians and Croats, generally classified as true refugees, were forced to flee their homeland and did not come voluntarily like economic migrants. Bosnia is quite well developed and cosmopolitan.
- After arriving in Canada, the tensions within the Bosnian community between Bosnian Muslims, Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Serbs were evident. In recent years there seems to have been an understanding of the Bosnian identity as including the three main ethnic groups, not just the Bosnian Muslim identity.

Immigration history

- The first main wave of migration was after World War II, when Serbians, Croats and Macedonians, who had been in refugee camps in Western Europe, were resettled in Canada.
- The next wave in the 1960s and early 1970s was a result of an economic crisis in Yugoslavia.
- After the outbreak of the civil war in 1991, people from Russia and the former Yugoslavia came to Canada in larger numbers as refugees. Many recent immigrants experienced expulsion from their homes, imprisonment, torture, rape and life in concentration camps before they reached Canada.
- Recent arrivals often consist of nuclear families and they lack the support of their extended families.

Demographic profile

- For purposes of this cultural profile, reference will be made to Bosnians and Croats because these are the two groups of refugees which settled in Canada from Eastern European countries. The Bosnian population is divided into three different ethnic groups. The largest group is the Bosnian Muslims, followed by the Bosnian Serbs who mostly belong to the Christian Orthodox Church, and the Bosnian Croats, most of whom are Roman Catholic.

- Various languages are spoken in the Bosnian community. The official language is Bosnian but Serbian and Croatian are also spoken.
- Prior to the civil war, Bosnia's urban population aspired to a living standard similar to that of Western Europe, and the different ethnicities were increasingly intermixed by residence, occupation, friendship and marriage. The rural population remained more divided ethnically and was less well off. Following the war, religious identification and adherence to religious rules has risen among Muslims, Croats and Serbs.

Croatia

- The Croats are a people with a long and rich history. They live in their own independent, democratic country of Croatia. Croatia is actually located in Central Europe, but it has bridged the Eastern and Western worlds throughout its history.
- Croatia was ruled by the Yugoslavian monarchy from 1918 to 1944, and was a communist country from 1945 to 1991.
- The Serbs had most of the political power, leaving the Croats and other groups dissatisfied. When a referendum on independence was held in 1991, the vast majority of Croats (97 per cent) voted for independence from Yugoslavia. Croatia's independence was recognized by the world beginning January 1992. Croatia has only known its own borders since 1992. The culture and lifestyle, therefore, are a blend of regional influences and former rulers.
- The cultures that influenced Croatian folk culture through the centuries are Hungarian, Austrian, Venetian, Balkan, ancient Croatian, ancient Mediterranean, and Turkish.
- Although there is little difference in language, Croatia's citizens are differentiated from the rest of former Yugoslavia by religion; 88 per cent of Croatia is Roman Catholic, while Serbia is primarily Orthodox Christian. Slovenia is made up of Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians as well as an increasing Muslim population.
- Bosnia's religious make-up is a complicated and specific mix of Islamic and Christian traditions, a product of Bosnia's unique history and relationship with religion.
- In the northeastern part of Croatia, the cultural influences are decidedly more Ottoman. Dress and appearance are a bigger part of life in the inland parts of the country, where trends move in more quickly.
- Zagreb's title as the "cultural capital of Croatia" refers to its numerous museums, art galleries and concert venues, but because of the regional influences and differences around the region, Zagreb is not necessarily representative of the rest of the country
- Migrants from Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia are ethnically diverse groups, mainly Croatian, Serbian and Bosnia. They belong to different religious faiths such as Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Muslims. A

- significant number of people from the Ukrainian and Hungarian minority groups in Bosnia and Serbia came to Canada after the recent war.
- Due to the complex political, ethnic and religious identities in the countries of the former Yugoslavia, it is advisable to ask people how they prefer to be identified. For example, a Bosnian national may wish to be referred to as a Croatian, a Serbian or simply Bosnian.
 - Many couples are in mixed marriages and they find it difficult to join ethnically distinct community groups due to ongoing ethnic and religious tensions. The majority of the most recent migrants are couples in their late thirties who have children of all ages.

LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

- The official languages are Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian, which are the languages of the main ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Croats speak Croatian, a South Slavic language of the Indo-European family. Croatian is written in the Latin alphabet. It has 30 letters, each of which is pronounced and has a distinct sound. The Croatian language has German (*šarafenziger*), Hungarian (*čizme*), Italian (*pršut, lancun*) and Turkish (*šečer, jastuk*) words.

Communication Styles

- Seniors from this community mainly use oral traditions. They favour open and direction communication, and enjoy intellectual conversations on world history, politics, economics, and culture. An important aspect of interpersonal relations is the use of formal and informal forms of address. The word for "you" can be either the formal *vi* or the familiar *ti*. Elders, professionals, and professors are examples of groups one would address using the formal terms. Friends, colleagues, and family are usually addressed informally
- Bosnians are well known for their sense of humour and positive outlook on life. In order to gain trust from a senior, a professional or a service provider must be aware that they don't like to be identified as refugees.
 - There is stigma attached to it, which destroys their sense of being a part of the general community. Otherwise it might be hard for them to trust you and as result communication would be difficult.
 - A senior may be troubled when healthcare providers ask too many personal questions, take notes of the conversation and fill out forms.
 - For men, talking about suffering may be a sign of weakness and they may be reluctant to talk about psychological dimensions of pain.
 - Due to unfamiliarity with differences in the role of healthcare professionals, for example doctor and nurse roles, some clients may feel discriminated against and will refuse to communicate with junior staff. In their view a doctor is more credible than a nurse, even if they are giving the same information.

- People who are not confident with their English may refuse to disclose themselves to medical professionals. Many find it difficult to follow the legal and welfare procedures in Canada but may not ask for advice.

Greetings

- The Bosnians and Croats are traditionally warm, friendly, sociable people. They greet one another openly and, often, affectionately. Common greetings include saying good day, shaking hands, hugging, and kissing each other once on each cheek. Displays of affection such as holding hands and modest kissing are very acceptable in public. The terms used in greeting include *dobra dan* (good day), *kako ste?* (How are you?), *dobro* (well), and *hvala* (thank you).
- Seniors are held in high esteem. People are greeted formally using proper titles such as Mr. or Mrs. Older individuals and parents' friends are addressed as "Uncle" or "Untie" regardless of blood relationships. Muslims normally greet by saying Salaam, shaking hands, hugging and kissing each other on cheeks.

RELIGION AND FAITH GROUPS

- Forty per cent of the people are Muslim, just over 30 per cent belong to the Orthodox Church, and around 15 per cent are Roman Catholic. The dominant religious tradition of the Croats is Roman Catholicism. For 13 centuries, they have steadfastly maintained their religion. Catholic tradition and values remain among the most important aspects of Croatian national and cultural identity. Religious expression was discouraged in Croatia during the communist period (1945–91). Religious freedom is now guaranteed under the Croatian constitution.

FOOD AND DIETARY GUIDELINES

- The cuisine of Eastern Europeans is influenced by its Balkan neighbours and Mediterranean countries. Traditional food includes bread, soups, stews, kebabs, cevapcici (minced meat sausages), stuffed leaves (dolma and sarma) and stuffed peppers. Pie, for example meat, cheese and spinach, is a favourite dish. Side dishes, such as sour cabbage, tomato and onion salad, and yoghurt are often served. Desserts eaten are fruit, pancakes, cakes and pastries. Coffee is preferred strong, with sugar. Both wine and beer are produced locally.
- Bosnian food can be rich, but not in an unhealthy or unappetizing way. Fresh ingredients and whole foods make meals from Bosnia and Herzegovina appealing.
- If you like meat and potato courses, you'll be thrilled with the options you will find for entree selections in Bosnia and Herzegovina: for example, dishes like the

Bosnian *bosanki lonac*, a slow-roasted pot of meat and vegetables; or *japrak*, made up of cabbage rolls stuffed with a savory filling. If you are traveling in Mostar, the trout is a specialty of the area. A buttery, flaky texture is one option for someone who loves fish.

- Dinner in Bosnia and Herzegovina is generally light. You'll probably have it after 8:00 p.m. Bosnian fast food is ordered when you're out late. This food may be fast but is actually quite traditional, dating back nearly 400 years. The Bosnian *cevaps*, as they are nicknamed, will be made up of small sausages and chopped onions, folded in *pita* bread called *somun*.
- Bosnian Muslims don't eat pork, ham or anything made of by-products of such meat.

Concept of “hot and cold” properties of certain food

- Besides the famous baklava, desserts often have fresh fruit and cream as main ingredients. The tufahijia is a delicious dessert dish made from apples filled with walnuts, and then topped with a rich layer of whipped cream. If you are passionate about puddings, there is the krempita, which has a creamy, soft flavour similar to cheesecake. If you have room to eat more, you'll want to try this delicious Bosnian food.
- What makes Bosnian food even better is the overwhelming sense of hospitality and warmth with which it is served. You'll be offered cookies, cakes, sweets, coffee, meat platters and cheese samplers, and once you start sampling, you won't be able to stop. Just be sure to save room for the main course!

Croatian food

- Croatian food and cooking vary by region. Some traditional Croatian dishes are *sarma* (stuffed cabbage), *bakalar* (cod), *purica i mlinci* (turkey and special pasta), *pasticada* (a marinated beef dish), and *zagrebacki odrezak* (stuffed veal schnitzel). Soup is very common. It is eaten with almost every main meal and throughout the year. Special traditional breads are made for celebrations such as Easter. Fancy, rich pastries and cakes are also very popular.
- Croats eat three to four meals a day. Breakfast is very important and may include bread, spreads, and yogurt. It is also common to eat *marenda*, a light snack at mid-morning, commonly fruit or baked goods. Lunch, usually between 2:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m., is the main meal of the day and can include soup, salad and a main dish. Dinner is eaten in the late evening and is small and light.

FAMILY STRUCTURE

Familial roles, responsibilities and relationships

- The basic Bosnian and Croatian family unit is the nuclear family made up of parents and children living in one home. Bosnian and Croatian families usually have one or two children. Families with three or more children are considered large. But it is not uncommon for extended families of parents, children, and grandparents to share a dwelling.
- In Canada, seniors normally take care of the grandchildren while the parents go to work
- Families socialize together. Weekends are considered family time. Families have a special lunch together, take strolls in town, go for coffee, and visit friends and other family members. Attending family events is an obligation.
- The man is considered head of the household, although the woman tends to have more responsibility for the running of the household. Women have equal rights in society. They may do the same jobs outside the home as men. But they still bear most of the responsibility for childrearing, housework and shopping.
- Families often pool their money in order to achieve a better lifestyle. Parents may take on extra work to support their children's education.
- Divorces are not common. Sometimes, financial dependence on the husband forces a woman to remain in the marriage simply because she has nowhere else to go.
- The extended family is really important. It is expected that the family will care for the elderly at home, as there is no tradition of placing them in nursing homes. In fact, the suggestion of a nursing home may reduce the family's respect. Parents, relatives and friends all put a lot of time and energy into caring for a senior. Programming that incorporates the entire family is valuable

HEALTH BELIEFS, CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES ON HEALTH AND HEALING

- Health is often narrowly defined as only physical well-being. Illness is taken very seriously and sick people receive a great deal of physical and emotional support from family, relatives and friends. Treatment is often not considered complete without a prescription for medication.
- Counseling, psychotherapy or group therapy may be rejected. Clients may have a great deal of fear of serious disease and some may even develop phobias about becoming ill.
- The health provider is expected to be attentive, especially during discussions of symptoms and complaints. The client is likely to want detailed explanations of tests and procedures.

Traditional medicine, herbal medicine and home remedies

- The people have a long history of using traditional herbal remedies for care, along with standard Western medical treatment. If there is a health problem, they may not disclose it. But if they have a trusting relationship with you, they might share the information when asked. Elderly Eastern Europeans continue to use herbal

- teas, alcoholic tinctures, and other methods to treat disease and promote health. Self-care may include homeopathic remedies contained in medical kits from their homeland that contain “over-the-counter” drugs.
- Herbal medicine is very popular, particularly in Bosnia and Serbia.
 - Many people believe in the value of medicinal mud baths, mineral springs and healing spas to treat ailments such as rheumatism, chronic inflammation, arthritis and respiratory problems.
 - The main goal of the healthcare system back home is to find the root cause of diseases or conditions, rather than treating the symptoms.
 - It is estimated that about 1/3 of the people in Canada who were born in the former Yugoslavia are over the age of 60. Many of these seniors are in need of health and welfare services but are not accessing them either because they don’t qualify or because of poor English, a lack of mobility and a lack of knowledge about the services.
 - Some former Yugoslavian women prefer to see only female healthcare providers, and refuse gynaecological examination by males. This may extend to male interpreters being present during consultations. Women had easy access to gynaecologists back home so for women’s health issues, they may refuse to talk to a general practitioner.

Caring for a senior

- The seniors who are recent immigrants and refugees from the former Yugoslavia may have had little health and dental care in the past few years and may initially require intensive medical and health services. Tooth decay is common in all ages, thus dental care is a priority. Those coming from refugee camps and other difficult circumstances may have a higher incidence of TB.
- Unhealthy habits are common, even if there is high awareness of the risks to one’s health. Exercise is uncommon, and there is a tendency towards being overweight. Smoking amongst male seniors is relatively common.
- The effects of displacement, witnessing horrific events and in some cases torture and rape, may present as post-traumatic stress disorder. If not victims themselves, recent immigrants and refugees from Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina may have witnessed these events. They may tend to keep these problems hidden. This can contribute to marital problems, domestic violence, alcoholism and attempted suicide. Clients may also have survivor guilt, and be worried about those left behind in their homeland.
- Unemployment of a family member, in men particularly, may be associated with depressive illness among seniors. Alcohol may be used to compensate for feelings of inadequacy.
- Psychological distress may be expressed as somatic symptoms, particularly gastro-intestinal or respiratory symptoms. Depression may be identified as “sinking heart”.

- Seniors may experience isolation, due to lack of community networks and adult family members working, resulting in seniors being left at home alone or being required to care for grandchildren. Seniors are dependent on family members for transportation. If the family members are not available, the seniors are left alone and may not get out of the home for several days.
- Service delivery hours are inconvenient. Many of the specialized health services are not available on weekends or evenings, when family members could drive them to appointments.
- Alcohol consumption and high smoking rates are a big concern. This is taken as a coping strategy. Diabetes and mental illnesses carry strong negative stigma. There is reluctance to admit signs of mental health challenges.
- Russian immigrants do not typically seek formal medical care. Some of the Bosnian refugees aren't qualified for provincial and federal government financial assistance programs

SOCIALIZATION AND HOSPITALITY

Cultural celebrations and their significance

- Bosnians and Croats celebrate a number of holidays. Many of these are associated with Catholic traditions and Muslim celebrations.

Croatians

- The Croatians celebrate days that include Easter Monday, the Feast of the Assumption of Mary, All Saints' Christmas Day December 26, Epiphany, New Year's Day and International Labour Day.

Bosnian Muslims

- The Bosnians Muslims celebrate *Ramadan*. People are expected to fast for one month each year according to the Muslim lunar calendar. They only eat at dawn and sunset. There should be no food or drink in between. Fasting is an obligatory act. Other cultural celebrations include,
- *Eid-ul-Fitr*: the following day after the last fast. It is a Christmas-like feast for Muslims
- *Eid-ul-Adha*: Muslims from all over the world go to Mecca for *Hajj*. It is an obligatory act if you have fulfilled all your family's responsibilities and obligations.

DEATH AND DYING

- Russians have a sense of naturalism about the end of life.
- Living a naturally healthy life = the best life

- Strive for peaceful end-of-life
- Orthodox immigrants believe that death is a necessary consequence of life. The good people ultimately achieve eternal life in heaven. Religious leaders hold special vigil over the deceased (panikhida). Prayers, hymns, chants, frequent repetition of the name of the deceased, and readings from the Gospels are used at death. Among Bosnian Croats, death is usually marked by Roman Catholic rituals. These include a funeral Mass, graveside service, the laying of flowers, and the marking of gravesites with headstones. The ‘wake’ takes place just hours before the burial in a building on the cemetery grounds. Then the mourners walk in procession behind the casket to the grave. After the funeral, family and friends attend a lunch called a *karmin*.
- Muslims believe that life on earth is to be spent preparing for another world after death. They prefer to be buried in special cemeteries, set aside for Muslims. They prefer the body of the deceased to be buried as soon as possible.
- In the case of both Bosnians and Croats large numbers of family and friends will visit the ill and deceased. They may offer special prayers for the dead. Burial of a body is common and each group has specific rituals.
- Cremation is performed and many Russian immigrants opt to be cremated so that their ashes can ultimately be transported back home.

Autopsy and organ donation

- There is no one set of rules about this concept. The decision is left to the individual and family members.

DOS AND DONTS

- Speaking negatively about Bosnia or making distasteful implications about the country is resented.