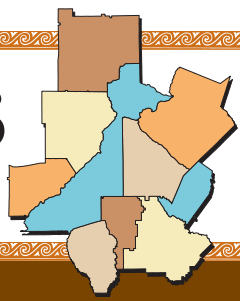


# GLOBAL ATLANTA SnapSHOTS

A LOOK AT ETHNIC COMMUNITIES IN THE ATLANTA REGION



## B O S N I A N S

The Global Atlanta Snapshots were created to foster understanding among all people of the Atlanta region. The Snapshots show the rich ethnic and cultural diversity that our region now enjoys. The residents of Atlanta's ethnic communities may have lived in the region for a long time or may have recently arrived. They may come from cultures and have customs significantly different from each other's, and from those of the general population of the Atlanta region. What they have in common with the rest of the region is that they make it their home, and they share in and contribute to its success. The Snapshots introduce and portray selected communities in terms of their backgrounds, their customs and cultures, their roles in the regional economy, and specific local resources available throughout the region.

### Bosnian-Americans in the Atlanta Economy



Some 3,250 persons listing Yugoslavian ancestry were part of greater Atlanta's workforce at the time of the 2000 census. This number would include not only recent Bosnian arrivals, but also others of Yugoslavian ancestry (Serbs, Croats,

Bosnians and others) who may have arrived at an earlier period of time. Based on the size of the region's Bosnian foreign-born population in 2000, at least two-thirds of the workforce with Yugoslavian roots is estimated to be Bosnian in origin.

This Yugoslavian-heritage workforce included 1,840 men and 1,410 women. While these workers were found in a range of occupational settings, there were a few concentrations worth noting. The largest group of male workers is found in production and assembly occupations (400 jobs), followed by construction and maintenance jobs (330). Other occupations in which at least 100 men were working included management, sales, food preparation and computer-related jobs.

While women are found in some of the same occupations, office and administrative support positions led the list with 250 jobs. Other occupations with at least 100 women of Yugoslavian background were production and assembly (240), sales (220), buildings and ground maintenance (150) and food preparation (100).

### Bosnian Life in Metro Atlanta



Although the 2000 census recorded 4,500 Bosnians in metropolitan Atlanta, the continuing arrival of new refugees has certainly increased that number. Community leaders believe that there are 8,000 to 10,000 Bosnians in the region today. Based on census figures, the Bosnian community is centered in DeKalb County (2,400 residents) and Gwinnett County (1,200). A few hundred more live in Fulton County (460) and Cobb County (330). As Bosnian families adjust to their new environment and are able to save to purchase their first home in America, the reported preference is to live in Gwinnett County, among their countrymen and other eastern European residents. There they are able to patronize the Bosnian Market and obtain some of their favorite foods and drinks.

The successful assimilation of Bosnian refugees depends largely on age. Older members of the community typically have not learned English, which presents barriers to gaining employment and accessing services. Younger people have an easier time learning the language and, in general, have a better chance at successful assimilation.

There has been a record of both successes and failures in the Bosnian community. There are a few doctors who came to the US and worked hard to get the certification required for them to practice medicine in the U.S., but many don't have the energy and desire to be re-certified. On the other hand, a community member notes, "younger people are willing to take a risk, they have ideas. They try again and again and again." Overall, the Bosnian community has had many successes, but it counts among the failures the two suicides that occurred in April 2004. The necessary focus on survival, paying rent, getting a house and a car, prevent people from really caring for their

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## A PERSONAL STORY

Nermina Silnovic grew up in Kotor Varos, a small town near Banja Luka in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In 1993, she and her parents moved to Atlanta as refugees from the war then raging in Bosnia. The family's move was facilitated with the help of the International Rescue Committee.

Before the war started in 1992, Nermina was in her fourth year of college. The war prevented her from graduating. Her town, which had a mixture of three major religions, was caught by surprise when the war broke out. Nermina and her parents, who are Muslim, stayed in Bosnia for almost a year and a half after the war started even though many people, especially younger ones, left. Nermina's father was held in a concentration camp for 51 weeks. He registered, like other prisoners, with the Red Cross, which ended up arranging to have him transferred to another concentration camp in Croatia, where conditions were somewhat better. In the fall of 1993, with Red Cross assistance, Nermina and her mother joined her father in Croatia and together they applied to be transferred to the US. They did not know where in the US they would be resettled. They knew of people who were transferred to Texas, California, and St. Louis. All they knew about Georgia was that it was "nice, warm, and sunny".

Upon their arrival in Atlanta in December 1993, the Silnovic family was taken from the airport directly to Jubilee Partners. They were transferred to a rural community, in living conditions that Nermina now describes as "primitive". After two months at Jubilee Partners, a representative of Refugee and Family Services came and helped the Silnovics settle into a rented apartment in Clarkston that had one chair in it. Nermina laughs when she recalls how the agency gave them three of everything – three chairs, three spoons, three forks, and three mattresses. The day after their move, all men were taken to apply for a job. Her father got a job doing hard physical labor that earned him \$5 per hour. Because her father, who was 48 at the time, was working, he was not eligible for public assistance either in the form of financial assistance or via Medicaid.

Nermina said this was very difficult because the year he spent in a concentration camp meant his health needs had not been taken care of in some time. Nermina said her caseworker's response was "welcome to America".

Nermina spent much of her time going to a local Baptist church that provided free English classes. In April 1994, she also started working at a factory that made bed frames and other bed parts. She worked on the assembly line and made about \$5.40 per hour. Since her English was a little better than that of others working at the factory, she often found herself helping new immigrants in various ways.

After working at the factory for a while, Nermina learned of a position as a housekeeper at a hotel that promised higher pay. Upon starting the new job, however, she learned that the pay was not as good as she had expected, even though she worked extremely hard, putting in extra hours and cleaning about 20 rooms a day. Often she would work three weeks straight without a day off. She said she was so tired "she couldn't move" but she also couldn't quit because she had to work to survive.

Eventually, Nermina decided she did not want to spend her whole life working in low wage, hard labor jobs. She decided to go back to school to complete her studies. She interviewed at Georgia State University, Georgia Tech and DeKalb Tech and was getting ready to prepare for the SAT when she heard of an open caseworker position at Save the Children. She applied and got the job in May 1995. Nermina spent four and a half years in that position, helping newcomers, organizing educational workshops and providing support for the Bosnian community.

In December 1999, Nermina became Program Manager at Refugee Family Services. In that capacity, Nermina now heads three programs – one that focuses on women's support, one focused on women's employment, and one dedicated to family violence prevention.

## Who are the Bosnian-Americans?



Bosnia-Herzegovina was one of the six socialist republics that together made up Yugoslavia, during Yugoslavia's half century of communist rule following World War II. In this post-war period, Yugoslavia was ruled by its independent-minded, Communist dictator, Marshal

Josep Broz Tito. With Tito's death in 1980 and the subsequent breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, the underlying ethnic tensions in Yugoslavia led to declarations of independence by several of its republics, including Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia. These moves towards independence were soon met with responses by armed forces of the central Yugoslav government.

The Yugoslav state under Tito had been a fragile amalgam of communities marked by different languages, religions, and regional loyalties. The dominant group in Serbia followed Eastern Orthodox traditions. The people of Croatia and Slovenia were predominantly Roman Catholic. Bosnia-Herzegovina was the only Yugoslavic republic founded along geographic/historical lines rather than on an ethnic/religious basis. Bosnia's pre-war (1991) population of 4.37 million included 1.9 million Muslims, 1.3 million Serbs, 755,000 Croats and the remaining 350,000 were members of various ethnic minorities. Starting in the 16th century, Bosnia had a significant Sephardic Jewish minority (descendants of Jews expelled from Spain and Portugal); prior to World War II, Jews accounted for nearly 20 percent of the

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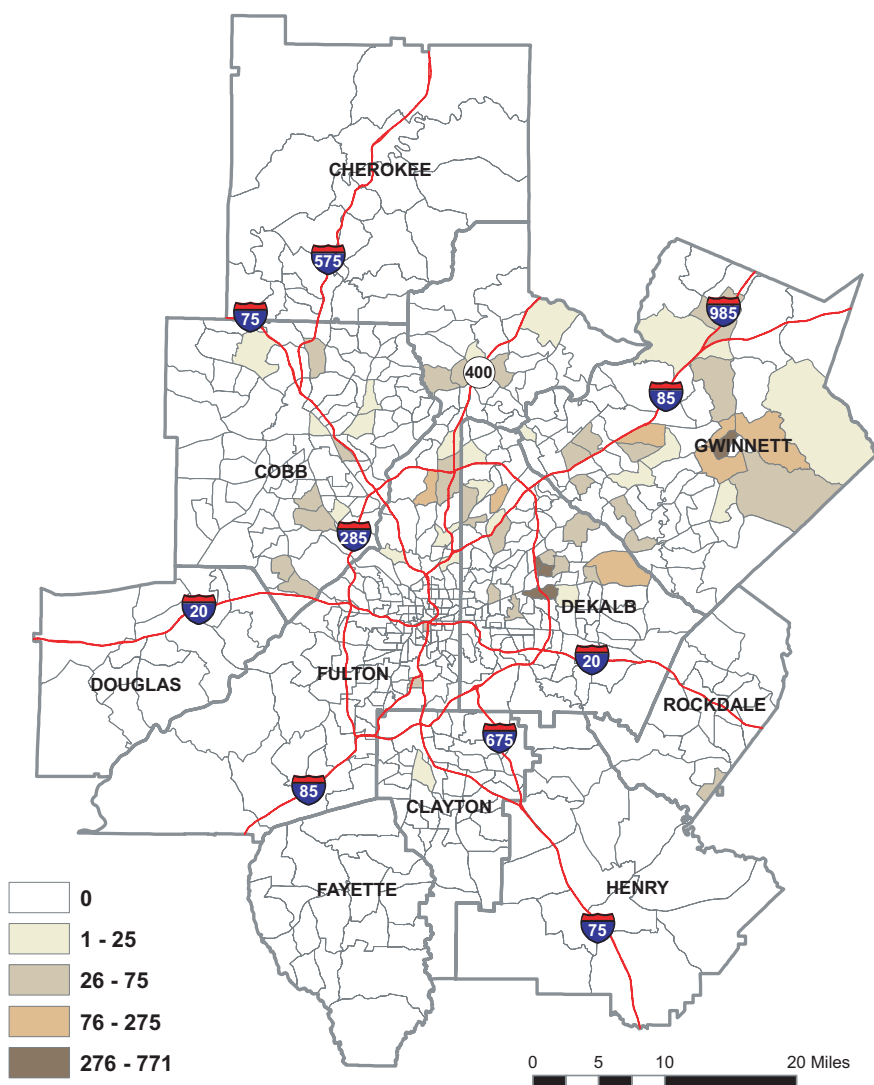
## Bosnians in the Atlanta Region: By the Numbers

Cherokee: 0	Clayton: 23
Cobb: 330	DeKalb: 2,419
Douglas: 0	Fayette: 0
Fulton: 459	Gwinnett: 1,225
Henry: 0	Rockdale: 60

**Total 10-county Region: 4,516**

- **DeKalb County** is home the largest population of Bosnians with 2,419. This is **by far the largest concentration** of persons born in Bosnia and Herzegovina. **Gwinnett County** is second with 1,225.
- **DeKalb County** is home to **53 percent** of the Bosnians in the Atlanta region and **51 percent** of the Bosnians living in Georgia.
- The 10-county Atlanta region is home to approximately **42 percent of Georgia's total population**, but represents **95 percent of the state's Bosnian population**.
- Unlike other ethnic communities, **Bosnians are not concentrated almost exclusively along the interstates**. While some of the largest concentrations are located along I-285 in DeKalb County, some other large concentrations are found in Gwinnett County around Lawrenceville.

## BOSNIAN POPULATION IN ATLANTA Atlanta Region, 2000



Source: 2000 Census Data on Foreign-Born Population by Region, Country or Area of Birth

### Celebrated Holidays

#### New Year's Day

January 1

#### Easter

March or April

#### International Labor Day

May 1

#### Ramadan (a month-long observance)

Usually October to November

#### Idul Fitr

(a 3-day feast at the end of the month of Ramadan)

November

#### Idul Adha (the Feast of Sacrifice)

Two months and 10 days after Idul Fitr

#### Maulid an-Nabi (Muhammad's birthday)

Varies from year to year

#### Christmas

December 25

Both Christian and Muslim holy days are celebrated. Muslim holidays vary according to the lunar calendar. In addition to other Western holidays, Bosnians may celebrate the following:

## Bosnian Life in Metro Atlanta (cont'd)

well-being and their health. In many cases, the harsh and cruel life in the recent war's concentration camps that they left behind in Bosnia has led to mental health problems and nervous breakdowns.

At its core, the Bosnian community is a religious one, so religious institutions play an important role in helping people to adjust to their new life in Atlanta. There is a mosque and an Imam serving the

**"...RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN HELPING PEOPLE TO ADJUST TO THEIR NEW LIFE IN ATLANTA."**

Bosnians. The Imam takes care of weddings, funerals, and other life-cycle events. During holidays, such as the month-long Ramadan observance, people get together at the mosque. That is also a place many turn to when in need. After the two suicides that took place the spring of 2004, some of the caseworkers started a women's support group. Also, the mosque has classes for children that emphasize religion and tradition.

One of the things that was lost in the move to the U.S. is the bond between women. An observer noted that "back home women would get together to do things together." Survival, working, taking care of rent have all made it difficult to maintain that bond in Atlanta.

## Serbo-Croatian Language

The official language of Bosnia is Serbo-Croat, although the name of the language is controversial. Serbs and Croats living in Bosnia may refer to their language as Serbian or Croatian, respectively. Serbo-Croatian is part of the Slavic branch of the Indo-European family. Other related South Slavic languages are Bulgarian, Macedonian and Slovenian.

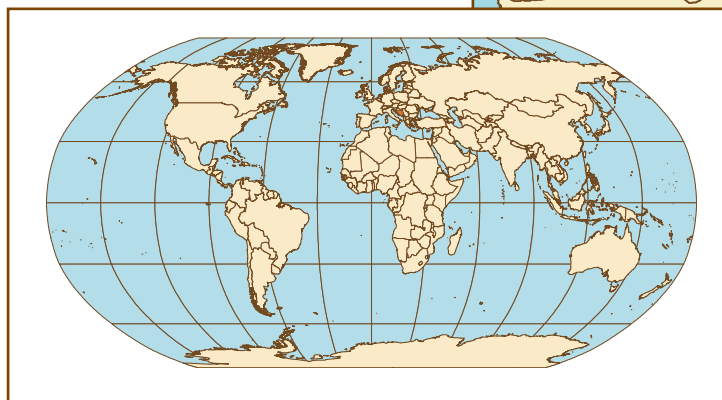
The language may be written in either the Cyrillic or Latin alphabets. Given the history of Bosnia, it is not surprising that the language has borrowed many words from other European languages, as well as Turkish, Arabic and Persian. Speakers of Serbo-Croatian generally are comfortable with English pronunciation, although they may have some trouble with the "th" and "w" sounds. On the other hand, English grammar and, in particular, the use of some auxiliary English verbs, such as might, could, should, would, seem to be particularly troublesome. Some common phrases are presented below:

**Dobar dan**  
Hello (good day)

**Dovidjenja**  
Goodbye

**Kako ste**  
How are you?

**Hvala, dobro, a vi**  
Thanks, fine, and you?





## Sarajevo 1984 XIV Olympic Winter Games



Sarajevo 84

In 1984, the Winter Olympic Games were held in the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo. This multi-ethnic city with a population of about 450,000 in the mid-1980s, was given high marks for its hospitality. There was no hint of the tragic war and ethnic strife that would ravage the city in just a few years.

The emblem for the 1984 Winter Games represented a stylized snowflake with the Olympic rings above. The design also reflects a traditional embroidery pattern produced in the Sarajevo region.

Credit: IOC/Olympic Museum Collections

## Who are the Bosnian-Americans? (cont'd)

population of the Bosnian capital, Sarajevo. A recent report notes that "Sarajevo is still the only major city in Europe where you can find a synagogue, a mosque and Catholic and Orthodox churches virtually on the same street."

Throughout its history Bosnia-Herzegovina found itself on the frontier between empires. Settled by Slavic people in the 7th century, Bosnia was conquered by the Ottoman Empire in the mid-15th century. Much of the Bosnian population gradually converted from Christianity to Islam. For some 400 years the land was subject to Turkish rule, until the Congress of Berlin in 1878 assigned Bosnia to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This annexation of Bosnia to Austria-Hungary and the lingering resentments contributed to Bosnia's role as a flashpoint throughout much of Europe's 20th century. It was in Sarajevo that Austria's Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated in 1914, an event which sparked the start of World War I.

With Bosnia's 1991 declaration of independence from Yugoslavia, the Serbian population of Bosnia, backed by the central

government in Belgrade, launched an armed offensive with the aim of retaining their ties to Serbia. The resulting civil war produced levels of violence and brutality not seen in Europe since the end of World War II. The extent of the casualties and destruction eventually forced the international community to intervene. That intervention, including air strikes by United States and NATO military forces, ultimately led to peace talks in Dayton, Ohio in 1995. The Dayton Accord led to the end of open warfare, but not the end of simmering inter-ethnic hostilities.

Today, Bosnia-Herzegovina exists in an uneasy peace, with NATO still maintaining a military presence. An international civil servant, appointed by the European Community and other powers with a direct stake in Bosnia's stability, has, in effect, a veto power over local and national elected officials. With these unsettled conditions, Western Europe and the United States are likely to see a continuing migration of Bosnians in the years ahead.

## What are Bosnian Customs and Culture?



Music plays an important role in Bosnian culture. Given a turbulent past, marked by invasions and occupations, it is not surprising that Bosnian music is a mixture of many musical traditions: ethnic Albanian, Gypsy, Turkish, Hungarian, as well as Serbian, Macedonian and Croatian. In addition, Bosnia's Jewish heritage is still found in folk songs sung in *Ladino*, a dialect derived from 15th century Spanish.

Bosnia's three major ethnic groups have also contributed to a rich tradition in dance, literature and poetry. Its art and architectural heritage reflects the influence of both the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires. Islamic arts, including intricate calligraphy, fine metalworking, carved wooden gates and screens, all found a place in Bosnian homes, churches and

other public buildings. Hand-woven carpets (*kilims*) and knotted rugs are highly prized. When made to commemorate a marriage, the couple's initials and wedding date are included in the woven design.

Bosnia's cuisine is influenced by that of its Balkan neighbors, Central Europe and the Middle East. Grilled dishes based on lamb, pork and beef, often in the form of sausages (*cevapcici*) or patties (*pleskavica*), and served on a thick pita bread (*somon*) are staples. Turkish dishes featuring *kebabs*, salads and *baklava* for dessert are also typical.

Bosnians celebrate a combination of religious, secular and family holidays. In urban areas, where intermarriage was more common, families might very well celebrate the state New Year holiday, along with both Christian and Muslim religious holidays. Eastern Orthodox Christians are likely to observe the *slava*, the particular family saint's name day.

# Bosnian Organizations, Associations and Resources

Below is a listing of selected organizations who work with the Bosnian Community. Additional resources are available at [www.atlantaregional.com](http://www.atlantaregional.com)

## GENERAL INFORMATION

### International Rescue Committee

4151 Memorial Drive, Suite 201-C  
Decatur, GA 30032  
(404) 292-7731  
Contact: Ellen Beatty, Regional Director  
Elhamija Kadic, Bosnian Caseworker

### Jewish Family and Career Services

4549 Chamblee-Dunwoody Road  
Atlanta, GA 30338  
(770) 677-9300 or (770) 677-9447  
[www.jfcs-atlanta.org](http://www.jfcs-atlanta.org)  
e-mail: [info@jfcs-atlanta.org](mailto:info@jfcs-atlanta.org)

Nada Karaula, Bosnian Career  
Services (770) 677-9447

Irina Nikishin, Immigration  
Resettlement  
(770) 677-9347

### Jubilee Partners

Services: Refugee Resettlement  
P.O. Box 68, Comer, GA 30629  
(706) 783-5131  
e-mail: [jubileep@eigc.org](mailto:jubileep@eigc.org)  
Contact: Blake Ortman  
[www.jubileepartners.org](http://www.jubileepartners.org)

### Refugee Family Services

3647 Market Street  
Clarkston, GA 30021-1244  
(404) 299-6217  
Contact: Nermina Silnovic,  
Program Manager  
Katherine Sanford, Volunteer Match  
[www.refugeefamilyservices.org](http://www.refugeefamilyservices.org)

### Refugee Resettlement and Immigration Services of Atlanta

4151 Memorial Drive, Suite 205-D  
Decatur, GA 30032  
(404) 622-2235  
Contact: Milijana Trobradovic

### Save the Children

Services: Childcare Referral  
(404) 479-4240  
Contact: Pamela Runkle, Director

### Tapestri, Inc.

#### Immigrant & Refugee Coalition

Services: Domestic violence, sexual  
assault, human trafficking  
3939 Lavista Road, Suite E  
Tucker, Georgia 30084  
(404) 299-2185  
Contact: Vanisa Karic  
[www.tapestri.org](http://www.tapestri.org)

## EDUCATION

### International Community School (ICS)

3260 Covington Highway  
Decatur, GA 30032  
(404) 499-8969  
Contact: Bill Moon, Principal

## RELIGIOUS

### Bosnian Mosque

(Islamic Community of Bosnians)  
803 Jolly Ave. S., Clarkston GA 30021  
(404) 508-0280  
Contact: Imam Ismet ef. Zejnelovic

## SPORTS

### Bosnia and Herzegovina Soccer League

(678) 377-0098 or (678) 300-6495  
Contact: Mustic, Dzermaludin, Manager  
e-mail: [dmustic@eorogourmet1.com](mailto:dmustic@eorogourmet1.com)  
(678) 697-2390  
Contact: Refik Mujagic  
e-mail: [Kiferoo@aol.com](mailto:Kiferoo@aol.com)

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Charles Krautler, Executive Director

Darlene Daly, Project Coordinator

The Atlanta Regional Commission is the official planning agency for the ten-county Atlanta Region including Cherokee, Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Douglas, Fayette, Fulton, Gwinnett, Henry, and Rockdale, as well as the City of Atlanta and 63 other cities. ARC provides a forum where leaders come together to discuss and act on issues of regionwide consequence.

The Community Foundation • 50 Hurt Plaza, Suite 449, Atlanta, Georgia 30303 • 404.688.5525 • [www.atlcf.org](http://www.atlcf.org)

Global Atlanta Snapshots are the result of past and ongoing collaborative partnerships of the Atlanta Regional Commission and many other agencies. We extend our sincere appreciation Georgia State University's Department of Anthropology and Geography and to every organization, agency and individual that participated in the research and development of this publication. This series of 10 Global Atlanta Snapshots was financed in part by a grant from the William Glenn Family Fund of The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta. Recognized as one of the largest and fastest growing community foundations in the country, with more than \$400 millions in assets, The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta manages and administers the charitable funds of 650 donors and their families. It serves 22 metro area counties and awards approximately \$29 million a year to more than 1,300 nonprofit organizations. The Foundation educates donors and their families about critical issues facing the Atlanta region and connects them with nonprofit organizations and their interests.