

## Bosniaks

### Profile

According to the 2002 census, there were 136,067 Bosniaks in Serbia where they make up 1.8 per cent of the population. Most are concentrated in the Sandzak in Southern Serbia, where Bosniaks make up the majority in three municipalities. Most Bosniaks are Muslim and they speak Bosnian. Some people within the same community do not identify as Bosniaks, but as Muslims.

### Historical context

Bosniaks converted to Islam during the Ottoman Empire. They have traditionally lived in the Sandzak, which straddles across the border between Serbia and Montenegro. Approximately 75,000 Bosniaks left the Sandzak in 1992-1993 as a result of intimidation and ethnic cleansing. In the 1990s the group began to self-identify as Bosniaks, although some people within this community do not identify as Bosniaks but as Muslims.

### Current issues

Non-governmental election observers and analysts noted very low levels of Bosniak participation in the October 2006 referendum on Serbia's new constitution. Indeed, many Bosniak politicians and civic organizations openly opposed the draft constitution. However, official results from such areas of Bosniak concentration in Sandzak as Novi Pazar showed turnout well above 50 per cent, feeding suspicions of voting irregularities.

The Bosniak community continues to confront problems of intolerance from the majority at the national level and limited participation in public life, including under-representation in the police and judiciary. Unemployment is higher among Bosniaks than the majority for a range of reasons including their concentration in the underdeveloped region of Sandzak and the legacy of targeted job dismissals during the Milosevic regime. Views within the community differ regarding a lack of teaching in the Bosnian language in public schools, a language that was formerly considered part of a common language with Serbian. Also, there are conflicts within the community in the Sandzak over whether to aim for autonomy or cooperation within Serbia.