

Education system

Bosnia and Herzegovina

described and compared with
the Dutch system

Education system Bosnia and Herzegovina

This document contains information on the education system in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We explain the Dutch equivalent of the most common qualifications from Bosnia and Herzegovina for the purpose of admission to Dutch higher education.

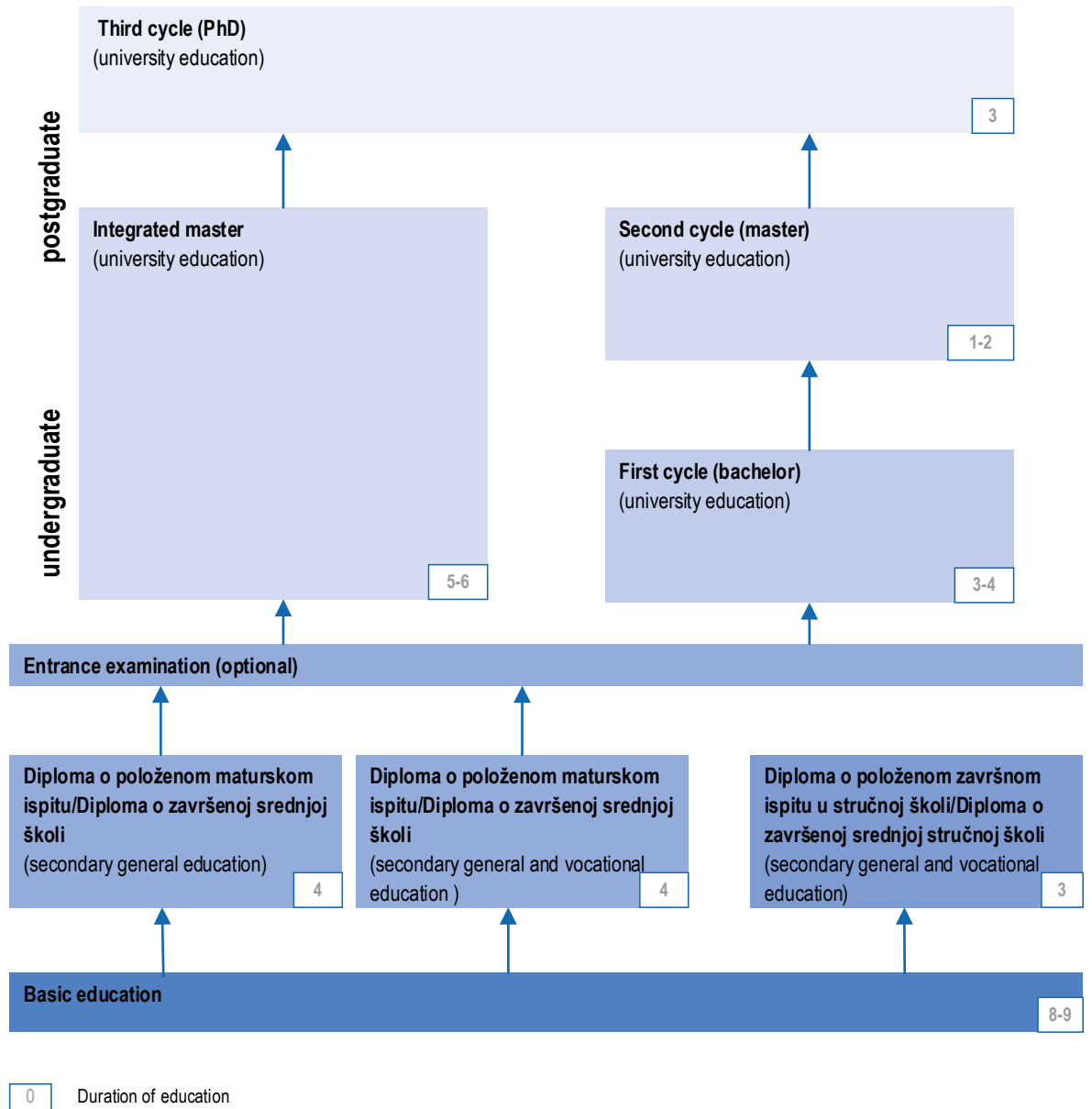
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We assemble the information for these descriptions of education systems with the greatest care. However, we cannot be held responsible for the consequences of errors or incomplete information in this document.



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Education system Bosnia and Herzegovina



Evaluation chart

The left-hand column in the table below lists the most common foreign qualifications applicable to admission to higher education. The other columns show the Dutch equivalent along with the comparable levels in the Dutch and European qualifications frameworks.

Foreign degree or qualification	Dutch equivalent and NLQF level		EQF level
<i>Diploma o položenom maturalnom ispitu/Diploma o završenoj srednjoj školi</i> Diploma of general and vocational secondary education (4 years)	VWO diploma for the general education part	4+	4
<i>Diploma o položenom maturalnom ispitu/Diploma o završenoj srednjoj školi</i> Diploma of general secondary education (4 years)	VWO diploma	4+	4
First cycle diploma	HBO or WO bachelor's degree	6	6
<i>Diplomirani + specialisation</i> (before 2007-2008)	HBO or WO bachelor's degree	6	6
Second cycle diploma	HBO WO or master's degree	7	7

NB

- The information provided in the table is a general recommendation from which no rights may be derived.
- NLQF = Dutch Qualifications Framework; EQF = European Qualifications Framework
- The EQF/[NLQF level](#) is not so much a reflection of study load or content; rather, it is an indication of a person's knowledge and skills after having completed a certain programme of study.
- Information about Dutch equivalent qualifications can be found on our website: [education and diplomas the Netherlands](#).
- [The Cooperation Organisation for Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market \(SBB\)](#), evaluates statements on foreign qualifications and training at VMBO and MBO level. The evaluation may vary if SBB evaluates the diploma for admission to VET schools or the labour market in the Netherlands.

■ Introduction

The official name for Bosnia and Herzegovina is *Bosna i Hercegovina* (BiH). For convenience, the following text refers to it simply as BiH. This Balkan country emerged after the former Yugoslavia split in 1992.

Political structure

After the war in 1992-1995 BiH adopted the following administrative structure:

- the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina ('the Federation' for short);
- the Republic of Srpska, *Republika Srpska* (abbreviated as RS), not to be confused with the independent Republic of Serbia, *Republika Srbija*.

In 2000, the following entity was added:

- the independent Brčko District of BiH.

These three regions have an over-arching government. The country has a parliament and a three-member Presidency, with one Bosnian, one Serbian and one Croatian member.

European Union

BiH submitted an application to join the European Union (EU) in 2016. The European Commission is currently determining what BiH still needs to do before being allowed to accede.

Language

The official languages are Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian. Speakers of these languages can easily understand one another. People usually use the Cyrillic alphabet when writing Serbian and the Latin script when writing Bosnian or Croatian.

Education

The Ministry of Civil Affairs of BiH (*Ministarstvo civilnih poslova Bosne i Hercegovine*) coordinates education at national level. There are also 12 educational authorities:

- Each of the Federation's 10 cantons have a Ministry of Education, and there is also an over-arching Ministry of Education and Science whose role is purely to coordinate.
- The RS has a centralised Ministry of Education and Culture.
- Brčko has its own Department of Education of the Government of the Brčko District of BiH.

National Framework Laws exist for all types of education. They set out the broad policy strokes, and local government authorities and schools themselves fill in the details. Education systems therefore vary from region to region.

Some general characteristics are:

- Compulsory school age: from age 6 to age 15.

- Language of education: Bosnian, Serbian or Croatian, depending on the region or school.
- Length of the school year: early September to June.
- Length of the academic year: September to July.

■ Primary and secondary education

Primary education

Since 2003, the length of primary education (basic education) has been 9 years instead of 8. Because the schools in the various regions did not all introduce the reforms at the same time, both 8 and 9-year curricula were in use until 2013. Since then only the 9-year curriculum exists. Children therefore start school when they are 6 years old.

Primary school is called *osnovna škola*.

- Years 1-3: class teachers give instruction.
- Years 4-5: class teachers and subject teachers give instruction.
- Years 6-9: only subject teachers give instruction.

Secondary education

Secondary education is not compulsory. Students are usually 15 years old when they start. There are various types of secondary schooling.

- A *gimnazijum* offers general secondary education.
- A *stručna škola* offers a combination of general and vocational secondary education.
- Specialist institutions, such as art colleges and less common types of schools (such as religious schools).

General secondary education

Students complete secondary general education at a *gimnazijum*.

- Duration: 4 years.
- Content: the curriculum always includes mathematics, their first language (Bosnian, Croatian or Serbian) and one or two foreign languages. The programme prepares students for the final exam, consisting of 1 general exam that tests knowledge of language, the exact sciences, social sciences and culture, and 2 examinations in elective subjects.

If they pass, students receive one of the following qualifications:

- *Diploma o položenom maturalnom ispitu* (Diploma of completion of the *matura* exam) in RS;
- *Diploma o završenoj srednjoj školi* (Secondary school diploma) or *Diploma o završenoj gimnaziji* (*Gymnasium* diploma) in the Federation.

NB There are many versions of comparable qualifications (due to the regional differences), however the names listed here are quite common.

Students who do not take the final exam (or who do not pass) will receive:

- *Svjedočanstvo o završenom srednjem obrazovaju* (Secondary school diploma), or a qualification with a similar name.

NB This diploma does NOT grant entry to higher education.

Students receive a *Svjedočanstvo o završenom razredu* (Class certificate) upon completion of each school year.

In terms of level, a *Diploma o položenom maturalnom ispitu* is comparable to a VWO diploma.

In terms of level, a *Diploma o završenoj srednjoj školi* or *Diploma o završenoj gimnaziji* is comparable to a VWO diploma.

General and vocational secondary education

Schools can offer secondary general and vocational education either as a 3 or 4-year programme.

- Duration: 3 years.
- Content: fixed general curriculum, schools tailor the vocational component themselves.

After completion, students receive one of the following qualifications:

- *Svjedočanstvo o završenom trogodišnjem obrazovanju* (Diploma of completion of 3-year programme).
- *Diploma o položenom završnom ispitu u stručnoj školi* (Diploma of a completed examination from a vocational college).
- *Diploma o završenoj srednjoj stručnoj školi* (Diploma of completion of secondary vocational college).

NB These diplomas do NOT grant admission to higher education.

- Duration: 4 years.
- Content: fixed general curriculum, schools are free to tailor the vocational component.

After completing the final exam or *matura*, students receive the same diplomas as for general education:

- *Diploma o položenom maturalnom ispitu* (Diploma of completion of the matura exam)
- *Diploma o završenoj srednjoj školi* (Diploma of completion of secondary school).

In terms of level, a *Diploma o položenom maturalnom ispitu* and *Diploma o završenoj srednjoj školi* of the 4-year general and vocational secondary education are comparable to that of a VWO diploma for the general education part.

■ Admission to higher education

Higher education is open to all students who complete the 4-year secondary education i.e. those with one of the following qualifications (or one with a similar name):

- *Diploma o položenom maturalnom ispitu* (following 4-year secondary school and the final exam).
- *Diploma o završenoj srednjoj školi* (after 4-year general and vocational secondary education).

Most students of the latter type do indeed continue on to higher education, even in specialisations other than those taken in secondary school.

Admission exam

In principle, any student can be admitted to any study programme. Students need to take an admission exam (*prijemni ispit*) at their chosen higher-education institution if there are more applicants than approved admission quotas (set out by the ministry). When more candidates have passed the exam than the approved admission quotas, secondary school results are taken into consideration.

■ Higher education

Universities and higher schools offer both academic and higher professional education.

In 2015, BiH had 47 research universities and higher schools, including:

- 10 state-run institutions (8 public universities & 2 higher schools);
- 37 private institutions.

A university (*univerzitet*) offers programmes at 3 levels:

- *prvi ciklus*: 'first cycle', or undergraduate (bachelor)
- *drugi ciklus*: 'second cycle', or postgraduate (master)
- *treći ciklus*: 'third cycle', or PhD (doctorate)

A faculty (*fakultet*) is the most common organisational unit of a university, and it operates as an independent unit. The faculties most commonly issue diplomas. All faculties offer at least 5 study programmes in 3 subject areas.

A higher school (*visoka škola*) only offers first cycle (bachelor) programmes. The level of education is the same as at a university.

In 2007, all higher education institutions were made to introduce the bachelor's-master's structure due to legislative changes. Some institutions had already initiated this process 1 or 2 years prior.

■ University education

Universities and higher schools offer both academic and higher professional education.

First cycle

- Duration: 3 or 4 years (180 or 240 ECTS), depending on the specialisation: education, management and social studies programmes are often 3 years, and other fields 4 years.
- Content: variable curriculum with compulsory and elective subjects; a thesis is not always compulsory.
- Objective: further study or entry to the labour market.
- Qualification: often titled *Diploma o završenom prvom ciklusu studija* (Diploma of a completed first cycle). All students also receive a list of subjects or a diploma supplement, and the *indeks* (exam booklet) in which the faculty has recorded all subjects and exams.

The diploma may have a different names, due to the complicated organisational structure. The most common names are:

- *Diploma o stečenoj akademskoj tituli i stručnom zvanju bakalaureat* (Diploma of academic title and professional bachelor).
- *Diploma o završenom stepenu prvog ciklusa studija* (Diploma of a completed first cycle).

In terms of level, first cycle diplomas are comparable to an HBO or WO bachelor's degree, depending on the type of study programme.

Second cycle

- Duration: either 1 or 2 years (60 or 120 ECTS), depending on the length of the preceding first cycle programme. Together, the first and second cycle programmes total 300 ECTS.
- Content: variable curriculum including compulsory and elective subjects; usually involves a thesis.
- Admission: students are admitted to second cycle programmes based on a first cycle qualification. Only research universities offer second cycle programmes.

Again, the diplomas can have various names. For example:

- *Diploma o stečenoj akademskoj tituli i zvanju magistar* (Diploma of a completed academic title and master's degree).
- *Diploma o sticanju naučnog stepena magistra* (Diploma of an achieved academic master's).
- *Diploma o završenom drugom ciklusu studija* (Diploma of a completed second cycle).

NB The names of academic programme diplomas often include the word *akademski* (academic) or *naučni* (scientific), but not always. The curriculum will also clarify whether the programme is academic or professional in nature.

In terms of level, a second cycle diploma is comparable to an academic or higher professional master's, depending on the type of study programme.

Integrated master's

The medical sciences are integrated master's programmes.

- Duration: 5 or 6 years (300 or 360 ECTS), such as veterinary science and pharmacy (5 years), or medicine and dentistry (6 years).
- Content: variable curriculum, a thesis, internships.
- Integrated master's diplomas can have various names; the integrated nature of the programme will not necessarily be stated in the name.

The final qualification is comparable to an academic master's degree (WO).

Third cycle

Only research universities can offer third cycle programmes (PhD).

- Duration: 3 years (180 ECTS).
- Content: coursework (60 ECTS), research, writing and defending a dissertation (120 ECTS). Compulsory: at least 1 publication in an academic journal.
- Admission: a completed postgraduate or integrated master's programme.
- Qualification: *Doktor Nauka* or *Doktor Znanosti* (Doctor of Science).

Pre-Bologna

The qualifications of students who started studying before the 2007-2008 academic year do not qualify as either first or second cycle. Some students are still finishing pre-Bologna study programmes (due to delay).

- Duration: 4 to 6 years; social sciences: 4 years, technical sciences: 5 years, medical sciences: 6 years.
- Qualification: graduates are conferred the title of '*diplomirani* (graduated) + specialisation', e.g. 'graduated economist'. These qualifications count as first cycle qualifications.

In terms of level, '*Diplomirani* (+ specialisation)' qualifications are comparable to an HBO or WO bachelor's degree, depending on the type of study programme.

Important: Retroactively, BiH has made all *diplomirani* qualifications equal to master's degrees. In the Netherlands, however, they count as bachelor's degrees, as they are of initial level.

After these initial programmes, students could continue to complete *Specialist* or master's programmes:

- 1-year programmes, usually professionally-oriented, granting the qualification of *Specialist*;
- 2-year master's programmes, granting a master's qualification.

■ Higher professional education

BiH does not have a binary system. In comparison with the Netherlands, there are no separate institutions that provide higher professional education. Even the names of programmes or qualifications are often unclear as to whether the instruction is academic or professional in nature.

- Qualification: sometimes the certificate will say '*stručno zvanje/stručni naziv*' (professional title) or '*stručno + ...*' (professional + name of profession or specialisation). However this is not always a guarantee, as 'bachelor' is also a valid professional title in BiH.

NB Check the diploma supplement, list of subjects or the *indeks* to ascertain whether the study programme was academic or professional in nature.

■ Assessment systems

Primary and secondary schools use a 1-5 grading system:

	Description	Definition
5	<i>Odličan</i>	Excellent
4	<i>Vrlo Dobar</i>	Very good
3	<i>Dobar</i>	Good
2	<i>Zadovoljan</i>	Satisfactory
1	<i>Nedovoljan</i>	Unsatisfactory

Higher education institutions use a 5-10 system (the descriptions often vary):

	Description	Definition	No. of points
10	<i>Odličan / Izvanredan uspjeh</i>	Excellent/excellent result	95-100
9	<i>Izvanredan / Iznad prosjeka</i>	Extremely good/above average	85-94
8	<i>Vrlo dobar / Prosječno sa manjim greškama</i>	Very good/average with minor errors	75-84
7	<i>Dobar / Dobro sa značajnim nedostacima</i>	Good/good with some major shortcomings	65-74
6	<i>Dovoljan / Zadovoljava minimalne kriterije</i>	Satisfactory/satisfies the minimum criteria	55-64
5	<i>Ne zadovoljava</i>	Unsatisfactory	0-54

NB

- The University of Mostar uses a 5-1 system (where 5 is the highest achievable mark, and 1 = unsatisfactory).
- The descriptions and exact point amounts can vary due to the complex organisational structure of the Bosnian education system.

In 2007, all institutions introduced the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation system (ECTS):

- 1 ECTS represents 25-30 hours of work (usually 25, or 30 in medical programmes).
- 1 year is made up of 60 credits.

More information on ECTS is available from the [ECTS Users' Guide](#) by the European Commission.

■ Qualification frameworks

In 2011, BiH adopted the Decision of Adoption of the Baseline of the Qualifications Framework in BiH and Action Plan in 2015. The levels of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (QF-BiH) correspond to those in the European Qualifications Framework.

This table (see next page) states the QF-BiH qualification in the right-hand column, under *nivo*:

Odnos prema ISCED nivoima i EKO-u (EQF)		Osnove kvalifikacijskog okvira		
ISCED nivo	EKO (EQF)	Kvalifikacija	Završeno obrazovanje	Nivo
1 i 2A	1	Nekvalificirani radnik	Osnovno obrazovanje	1
2B	2	Niskokvalificirani radnik	Programi stručnog osposobljavanja	2
3C	3	Kvalificirani radnik	Srednje stručno obrazovanje i obuka	3
3A 3B	4	Opće ili specijalizirani kvalificirani radnik	Srednje opće i tehničko obrazovanje	4
4A 4B	5	Visokokvalificirani radnik specijaliziran za određeno zanimanje	Postsekundarno obrazovanje uključujući majstorske i srodne ispite	5
5B	6	Bachelor ili Baccalaureat	Prvi ciklus visokog obrazovanja	6
5A	7	Master	Drugi ciklus visokog obrazovanja	7
5	8	Doktorat	Treći ciklus visokog obrazovanja	8
6				

More information is available in [a document](#) (in Bosnian only) that the Council of Ministers in BiH has adopted.

■ Accreditation and quality assurance

Various over-arching, national organisations are responsible for accreditation and quality assurance.

Primary and secondary education:

- [Agencija za predškolsko, osnovno i srednje obrazovanje](#) (Agency for Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education) develops curricula, standards and learning outcomes.

Higher education:

- [Agencija za razvoj visokog obrazovanja i osiguranje kvaliteta](#) (Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance of Bosnia and Herzegovina), or HEA for short, is responsible for accreditation at higher education institutions. There is no accreditation at programme level.
- [Centar za informiranje i priznavanje dokumenata iz oblasti visokog obrazovanja](#) (Centre for Information and Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education), or CIP for short, is the ENIC-NARIC for Bosnia, and is the authority on recognition of foreign qualifications.

■ Bologna Process

BiH signed the Bologna Declaration in 2003, and has been a full member since then.

For more information, please see [Bologna Process/European higher education area](#).

■ International treaties

BiH signed and ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention in 2003.

BiH has bilateral higher education treaties with 27 countries, including separate agreements at institutional level, some of which also cover joint or double degrees. The Serbian Republic (in BiH) has a treaty with Serbia that automatically recognises Serbian higher education qualifications.

■ Diploma supplement

The diploma supplement was introduced gradually after the Bologna Process. The first supplements were issued in the 2005-2006 academic year.

The supplement is drawn up in both Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian and English. Older diplomas are often missing the supplement, however a list of completed exams and marks can be found in the list of subjects or the *indeks*.

■ Composition of file

Every Bosnian file must include:

- a certified copy of the diploma and list of subjects;
- a sworn translation of both documents (unless the education institution has supplied its own English translation).

Graduates of higher-education programmes usually receive 2 documents:

- the diploma stating the degree conferred;
- the diploma supplement.

Sometimes institutions will not issue the diploma until one year after graduation, because they give diplomas only once a year during a special ceremony. In such cases, students receive a graduation statement, often titled *Uverenje* (statement) that gives the list of subjects and the graduation date.

In addition to the certificate itself, secondary school qualifications often include statements of results from the final year or the last 4 years.

Names on diplomas

Diplomas generally state the student's given name and surname, with the father's given name between parentheses or commas (or without any special markings). The father's name is not given in students' passports.

■ Overview of higher education institutions

- [The Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance of Bosnia and Herzegovina \(HEA\)](#) offers an overview of accredited higher education institutions. This list is constantly growing, due to the regular accreditation of new institutions.
- [The Centre for Information and Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education \(CIP\)](#) gives an overview of higher education institutions with a licence to provide education programmes and issue diplomas. The list is divided into public and private institutions; these may be accredited, but are not always. Accreditation is an ongoing process.

■ Useful links

- [The Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina](#) provides information on education in BiH and how it is organised, and on studying abroad (in Bosnian only).
- [The Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance \(HEA\)](#) offers plenty of information on quality assurance and accreditation, along with a list of accredited institutions.
- [The Centre for Information and Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education \(CIP\)](#) provides overviews of higher education institutions, legislative texts and other relevant documents.
- [Agency for Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education \(APOSO\)](#) offers information on primary and secondary information in BiH.