



Global Campus
South East Europe

European Regional Master's Programme in Democracy and Human
Rights in South East Europe

Navigating the Residence Permit Process in Bosnia and Herzegovina

A Practical Guide for International Students

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This guide has been developed voluntarily by students within the framework of an academic programme. It is intended solely for informational and educational purposes, with the aim of providing a general overview of the residence permit process in Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly from the perspective of international students.

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Foreword

As students of the European Regional Master's Programme in Democracy and Human Rights in South East Europe (ERMA), we regard this programme not merely as an academic pursuit, but as a rare and transformative opportunity, one that shapes us as scholars, practitioners, and advocates. It is a privilege that few are afforded, and with that privilege comes an obligation: to give something back, to leave behind something of lasting value for those who will come after us.

We believe that the knowledge and experience we have gained through navigating the administrative realities of studying in Bosnia and Herzegovina should not remain confined to our generation alone. The challenges we faced, the confusion, the unexpected costs, the bureaucratic obstacles, are challenges that every future cohort of international students will inevitably encounter. By documenting our collective journey in this guidebook, we seek to create a practical legacy: a resource that transforms uncertainty into clarity and isolation into solidarity.

As human rights defenders in training, we also recognise a deeper imperative. Access to education is a fundamental human right, enshrined in international law and central to the values we study every day. Yet the bureaucratic processes that govern residence status, processes that determine whether a student can lawfully remain in the country to pursue their studies, can themselves become barriers to that right. **When procedures are opaque, information is scattered, and institutions are difficult to access, the promise of equal access to education is undermined in practice, even where it is guaranteed in principle.**

It is therefore both a professional and a moral obligation for us to document these processes, to make them transparent, and to advocate for their improvement. This guidebook is an act of solidarity with future students, but it is also a contribution to the broader conversation about how administrative systems can better serve the people they are designed to protect. We hope it will be read not only as a practical manual, but as a call for greater institutional accountability and support.

We wish to express our sincere gratitude to those who supported us throughout this process. **Mariana Hadzijasufovic, Alina Trkulja, Prof. Marco Borraccetti, Nejira Pasic, and Marija Ivanovic.** Their guidance, patience, and dedication to the success of international students have been indispensable, and this guidebook would not exist without their support.

Authors

Who Needs to Regulate Their Residence Status?

If you are an international student planning to study in Bosnia and Herzegovina, one of the first things you need to understand is that simply entering the country does not give you the right to stay indefinitely. Bosnia and Herzegovina, like most countries, has specific rules about how long foreign nationals can remain on its territory and under what conditions. These rules apply to everyone – regardless of your nationality, your university, or the programme you are enrolled in.

For citizens of most European Union member states, as well as many other countries, entry into Bosnia and Herzegovina is visa-free. This means you do not need to obtain a visa before travelling, and you will be allowed to enter the country simply by presenting your valid passport at the border. **However, this visa-free entry only permits you to stay for a maximum of 90 days within any 180-day period.** This is a short-term tourist stay, and it does not authorise you to live in the country for the duration of an academic year. If your studies last longer than 90 days – which they almost certainly will – **you are legally required to regulate your residence status by obtaining a formal residence permit.**

It is important to understand that even if you come from a country with a visa-free agreement, you are not exempt from this requirement. The visa-free regime allows you to enter the country without prior authorisation, but it does not replace the obligation to register your address and apply for a temporary residence permit once you are here. **Many students mistakenly assume that because they entered without a visa, they can simply remain for the entire academic year without additional paperwork.** This is incorrect, and failing to act can result in serious legal consequences, including fines, deportation, and a ban on re-entering the country.

The legal basis for all of these requirements is the **Law on Aliens of Bosnia and Herzegovina** (Zakon o strancima Bosne i Hercegovine), which is the primary piece of legislation governing the entry, movement, stay, and removal of foreign nationals in the country. The institution responsible for implementing this law and processing all residence-related applications is the **Service for Foreigners' Affairs** (Služba za poslove sa strancima), a state-level agency operating under the Ministry of Security. For students based in Sarajevo, the relevant office is the Field Centre Sarajevo (Terenski centar Sarajevo), which is the local branch where you will submit your documents, obtain your White Card, and apply for your residence permit. The address and working hours of this office can be found on the official website at **sps.gov.ba**, and it is strongly recommended that you identify its location and confirm its schedule before your arrival, as several students have reported that the office operates during very limited hours that can conflict with class schedules.

The Two-Step Process

Once you arrive in Bosnia and Herzegovina, regulating your residence status is not a single action but a process that unfolds in two distinct and sequential steps. Each step has its own set of required documents, its own deadline, and its own purpose. Understanding the logic behind these two steps – and the relationship between them – is essential before you begin gathering any paperwork.

Step One: The White Card (Bijela Karta) – Registering Your Address

The first thing you must do after arriving in Bosnia and Herzegovina is register the address where you will be living. This registration is known as the **White Card**, or *bijela karta* in Bosnian. Think of it as the government's way of knowing where you are staying while you are in the country. It is not a residence permit and it does not give you the right to stay beyond your initial visa-free period, but it is a mandatory legal requirement for every foreigner who is not staying in a hotel or registered hostel.

You are required to complete this registration within 48 hours of your arrival – not 48 hours from when you find an apartment or settle in, but from the moment you cross the border into Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is an extremely tight deadline, and it means that you should ideally have your accommodation arranged before you arrive, and your landlord should already be aware that they will need to assist you with this process.

The White Card is obtained at the Foreigners' Affairs Office (FAO), Field Centre Sarajevo. You must go there in person, together with the required documents from your landlord, and the card is issued on the spot once your paperwork is verified. If address is changed during stay, it must be updated with the FAO. Hotels and hostels will register your stay within first 48 hours.

Step Two: The Temporary Residence Permit – Your Legal Right to Stay

The second step is the one that actually authorises you to remain in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the duration of your studies. The Temporary Residence Permit is a formal document, issued as a sticker placed inside your passport, that confirms you have been granted permission to reside in the country for a specific period – typically one academic year. **You are expected to apply for this permit within 60 days of your arrival, although it is strongly recommended that you begin the process as early as possible, ideally within your first month.**

The reason for this urgency is that the processing time at the FAO can be unpredictable – some students have waited two months, others have waited six – and you want to ensure your application is submitted well before your 90-day visa-free period expires.

This permit is also obtained at the same Foreigners' Affairs Office where you registered your White Card. However, the documentation required is far more extensive and includes items that must be obtained from your home country before you travel, items that must be obtained

locally in Sarajevo, and items that must be officially translated and certified. The full list of required documents is explained in detail in Part III of this guide.

Why the Order Matters

These two steps must be completed in strict sequence. You cannot apply for a Temporary Residence Permit without first having obtained your White Card. The White Card is, in fact, one of the documents you must submit as part of your residence permit application. If you skip the first step or delay it, the entire process stalls, and you risk falling into an irregular status – meaning you are in the country without the legal authorisation to be there.

Equally important is understanding what happens if you fail to complete the second step in time. Your initial visa-free entry allows you to stay for up to 90 days. If those 90 days pass and you have not yet received your residence permit – or at least submitted a complete application – you are technically overstaying your legal welcome. While the FAO is generally aware that processing delays are common and that students are waiting for their permits, the legal responsibility still falls on you to demonstrate that you have initiated the process in good faith and within the required timeframe. This is why submitting your application as early as possible is not just practical advice – it is your legal protection.

Consequences of Non-Compliance

The consequences of failing to comply with these requirements are serious and should not be underestimated. Under the Law on Aliens, failing to register your address (White Card) can result in a fine of 100 to 500 BAM. Overstaying your permitted period without a valid residence permit can lead to fines of 300 to 1,500 BAM, deportation from Bosnia and Herzegovina, and a ban on re-entering the country for up to five years.

One student experienced this firsthand: *"I had issues with my white card due to issues getting the proper documentation from my landlord. I was a week late and was fined about 100 KM. I needed items such as my ID and a declaration from my landlord. I had to pay for the white card and then pay for the fine on top of it, but it was eventually approved."*

This experience underscores the importance of acting immediately upon arrival and ensuring your landlord is prepared in advance.

Step One – The White Card (Address Registration)

What Is the White Card?

The White Card (bijela karta) is an official document that notifies the Foreigners' Affairs Office of your residential address in Sarajevo during your stay. It is not a residence permit in itself; rather, it is a mandatory registration that confirms where you are living. The card is a small white cardboard document containing your personal information, and you must carry it with you at all times until your full residence permit is issued.

When and Where to Obtain It

You have 48 hours from the moment you arrive in BiH to obtain your White Card. The office responsible for issuing it is the Foreigners' Affairs Office – Field Centre Sarajevo (Služba za poslove sa strancima – Terenski centar Sarajevo). Its address can be found on the official website at sps.gov.ba.

If you are staying in a hotel or registered hostel, the accommodation provider will automatically register you and issue the White Card; simply request a copy for your own records. If you are staying in a private apartment or student dormitory, you must go in person to the FAO.

Several students noted that the location of the FAO is not immediately obvious and can be difficult to find. Rachael Fogarty observed that “the Foreigners' Office is far away, not easy to access, and the people there are generally unhelpful... they are rarely open during easily accessible hours, making us often have to miss class to visit it”. It is strongly recommended that you identify the office location and verify its opening hours before your arrival.

Documents Required for the White Card

Before visiting the FAO, you must prepare the following documents:

Documents you bring from home: Your passport is the central document. You will need a photocopy of the page containing your personal data and photograph, as well as a photocopy of the page bearing your entry stamp into BiH.

Documents from your landlord: Your landlord must provide a copy of their ID card (lična karta) and their “CIPS” document (an official document proving their registered residence at the property). In addition, your landlord must provide a formal Proof of Accommodation – a signed statement confirming that you will be staying at their property. This statement must include the landlord's full name, address, ID number (JMBG), phone number, and a declaration in Bosnian language confirming they accept your stay. If your landlord accompanies you to the FAO, the statement can be signed in front of officials there. If they cannot accompany you, the statement must first be verified at the local Municipality Office (Opština).

One of the respondents in our research noted a practical difficulty with this arrangement: “As I observed, landladies/lords are not usually willing to have a contract, or if they have one, it's not written with the exact amount of money you're paying. As I understand, you have to get the contract stamped from the municipality, which means the host should pay taxes for the

money they are receiving. And they try to show a small amount on the contract". **This tension between the landlord's tax obligations and the student's documentation needs is a recurring challenge.** Students are strongly advised to discuss this openly with their landlord before signing any rental agreement.

Administrative fee: A fee of 10 BAM must be paid before your visit. This cannot be paid in cash or by card at the FAO; it must be paid via a bank note (*uplatnica*) at any post office or bank. The total cost including the post office service charge is 11 KM. After payment, you will receive two stamped copies of the slip; bring one to the FAO.

When filling out the bank note for the White Card, use the following details (MAKE SURE YOU COMPARE THIS WITH UP-TO-DATE OFFICIAL INSTRUCTIONS):

UPLATIO JE (payment by)	Your full name, address in Sarajevo, contact
SVRHA UPLATE (reason for payment)	Za prijavu boravišta (White card)
PRIMALAC (payment to)	JRT Trezor BiH
RAČUN PRIMAOCA (account number)	3380002210018390
IZNOS (amount)	10,00 KM
BROJ PORESKOG OBVEZNIKA	111111111111 (thirteen 1s – non-residents)
VRSTA PRIHODA	722101
OPŠTINA (municipality)	Stari Grad: 109 / Centar: 077 / Novo Sarajevo: 079 / Novi Grad: 108
BUDŽETSKA ORGANIZACIJA	2704999
POZIV NA BROJ	0000000000

Step Two – The Temporary Residence Permit

What Is the Residence Permit?

Once you have your White Card, you have completed only the first half of the process. The White Card tells the authorities where you live, but it does not give you the legal right to stay in Bosnia and Herzegovina beyond your initial 90-day visa-free period. For that, you need a completely separate document: the Temporary Residence Permit.

The Temporary Residence Permit is an official sticker that gets placed inside your passport by the Foreigners' Affairs Office. It is the document that formally authorises you to live in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the purpose and duration of your studies. Without it, once your 90 days run out, you are technically in the country illegally – even if you are enrolled at a university and attending classes every day. You are expected to apply for this permit within 60 days of arriving in the country, but given how long the process can take, it is strongly recommended that you begin gathering your documents and submit your application as early as possible – ideally within your first month.

Preparing Your Application Dossier

Here is where things get serious. The residence permit application requires you to assemble a large collection of documents – fifteen items in total, according to the official checklist (Form PB-2.3) published by the Service for Foreigners' Affairs. Some of these documents must be obtained from your home country before you even board the plane to Sarajevo. Others can only be obtained once you arrive. And nearly all foreign-language documents must be officially translated into Bosnian, Croatian, or Serbian by a certified court translator before the Foreigners' Affairs Office will accept them.

Below is a detailed explanation of every single document on the list, written so that even if you have never dealt with any kind of immigration paperwork before, you will understand exactly what is needed, where to get it, and what mistakes to avoid.

Document 1: Application Form

The very first thing you need is the official application form. Its full name in Bosnian is *Obrazac zahtjeva za privremeni boravak*, which translates to "Request Form for Temporary Residence." You can download it from the website of the Service for Foreigners' Affairs at sps.gov.ba – look under the section called "Documents" and then "E-documents." You can fill it out either by hand or by typing on your computer, but either way, you must print it out and sign it by hand.

There is one very specific formatting rule that catches many people off guard: the form must be printed double-sided on a single sheet of paper – meaning the front of the form is on one side and the back is on the other side of the same page. If you print it on two separate sheets, the FAO will reject it. **This may seem like a trivial detail, but it is exactly the kind of thing that can send you back home empty-handed and force you to return another day.**

One respondent noted that the link to the official checklist was included in her acceptance email from the university, which helped her find the form in advance. If you received a similar email, check it carefully – the link may already be there.

Document 2: Administrative Fee – 150 BAM

Before you can submit your application, you must pay an administrative fee of 150 BAM (approximately 76 EUR). This is the government's processing fee for reviewing your application and issuing the permit.

Now, here is something that confuses almost every international student: you cannot pay this fee at the Foreigners' Affairs Office itself. There is no cash register, no card reader, no payment terminal. Instead, you must go to a post office (*pošta*) or a bank and pay using a specific paper form called a *uplatnica* – a bank payment slip. You fill in the form with very specific codes and account numbers, hand it to the clerk along with your cash, and they process the payment. You will receive two stamped copies of the slip as proof of payment, and you must bring one of those copies to the FAO when you submit your application.

When filling out the bank note for the Residence Permit, you must use these exact details (MAKE SURE YOU COMPARE THIS WITH UP-TO-DATE OFFICIAL INSTRUCTIONS):

UPLATIO JE (paid by): Full name, your address in Sarajevo, your phone number
SVRHA UPLATE (purpose of payment): Odobrenje privremenog boravka
PRIMALAC (recipient): JRT Trezor BiH
RAČUN PRIMAOCA (account number): 3380002210018390
IZNOS (amount): 150,00 KM
BROJ PORESKOG OBVEZNIKA (tax ID): 1111111111111111 (write the number 1 thirteen times – this is the code used for non-residents)

VRSTA PRIHODA (revenue type): 722191
OPŠTINA (municipality): The code for the municipality where you live: Stari Grad = 109, Centar = 077, Novo Sarajevo = 079, Novi Grad = 108.
Ask your landlord which one applies to your address.

Be very careful: the payment code for the Residence Permit (722191) is different from the payment code for the White Card (722101). If you mix them up, the payment will not be accepted and you will have to do it again.

This system is genuinely bewildering for newcomers. One respondent put it bluntly: "I understood the purpose, but I had no idea how to do it. Luckily, a Bosnian friend of mine, who in the past worked with these kinds of processes for foreigners, told me where to go and what to do. Without him, I would have been completely lost." Another respondent added: "I learned where and how to pay it from other students. I didn't know the only way is to get to the post office, which means you can't pay it by card." The lesson here is simple: ask someone who has done it before, or go to the post office with a printed copy instructions above and point to it.

Document 3: Passport Photo

You need one recent passport-style photograph in 35x45 mm format. This is a standard passport photo size used across Europe. You can get these taken at virtually any photo shop in Sarajevo for around 5–8 EUR – just walk in and ask for "slike za pasoš" (passport photos). Alternatively, you can bring photos from your home country. One respondent had a smart approach: "I obtained a bulk amount of them before I even arrived (10 or so), which made it even easier for me." Having extra passport photos on hand is always useful in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as you will need them for various administrative procedures throughout your stay.

Document 4: Passport Copy

You must provide two copies of your passport. One must be a certified copy (ovjerena kopija) and the other can be a regular photocopy. Both copies must include two specific pages: the page with your personal data and photograph, and the page with your most recent entry stamp into Bosnia and Herzegovina. Additionally, your passport must be valid for at least

three months beyond the end date of the residence period you are requesting – so if you are asking for a permit until July, your passport must be valid until at least October.

Now, what is a "certified copy"? This is not just a photocopy – it is a photocopy that has been officially stamped and verified by a public authority as being a true copy of the original. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, you get copies certified at the Municipality Office (Opština). You walk in, hand them your original passport and a photocopy, they compare the two, stamp the copy, and charge you a small fee. This is a routine procedure, but you need to know that it exists and that a regular photocopy from your home printer will not be accepted.

One respondent learned this the hard way: "I came to BiH with docs printed at home, but they were not good for the immigration office and for ERMA. I had to request the hard copy sent from Italy, and here I had to get officially stamped translations and stamped docs from the municipality office." Save yourself this trouble – always carry extra copies and get them certified locally as soon as you arrive.

Document 5: White Card Copy

This one is simple. You need a photocopy of the White Card you obtained within 48 hours of your arrival (as described in the previous section of this guide). Keep your original White Card safe and make several copies. You will need at least one for this application.

Document 6: Previous Residence Permit (Extension Only)

This document is only relevant if you are applying for an extension of an existing residence permit – for example, if you studied in BiH last year and are continuing for a second year. In that case, you must provide a copy of your previous permit or the official decision that approved it. If this is your first time applying, you can skip this item entirely.

Document 7: Certificate of Enrollment

You need an official document from your university confirming that you are enrolled as a student for the current academic year. At the University of Sarajevo, this certificate is issued by your host unit coordinator – for ERMA students, this has typically been Mariana Hadzijasufovic. The certificate is issued in Bosnian language and is a single document that combines your enrollment confirmation, details of your student exchange, and proof of funding.

The timing of this document depends on when your coordinator is available. The takeaway is: ask for this document as soon as classes begin, and do not assume it will be handed to you automatically.

Document 8: Certificate of Student Exchange/Mobility

If you are studying in Bosnia and Herzegovina through a student exchange programme – such as Erasmus+ or a similar mobility scheme – you need a certificate confirming your

participation in that programme. For Erasmus+ students, this is typically a document provided by your home university (the one that sent you), not the University of Sarajevo. Make sure you obtain this before you leave your home country, or at least confirm with your home university's international office that they can send it to you electronically once you arrive.

Document 9: Certificate of Passed Exams (Extension Only)

Like Document 6, this is only needed if you are applying for an extension of your residence permit. It is a transcript of records showing the exams you have passed during your studies. For first-time applicants, this document is not required. If you do need it later, the transcript is issued by the host unit coordinator at the University of Sarajevo.

Document 10: Proof of Means of Subsistence

The government needs to see evidence that you can financially support yourself during your stay. They want to know that you will not become a burden on the state. There are three ways to prove this:

The first option is a bank statement showing that you have at least 400 BAM per month for the duration of your requested stay. So if you are applying for a 10-month permit, you would need to show at least 4,000 BAM (roughly 2,000 EUR) in your account. This can be a statement from a Bosnian bank or, in some cases, from your home country bank – though a local bank statement is generally preferred. This is especially relevant for 3rd country students.

The second option is a scholarship certificate – a letter from your university or programme confirming that your tuition, accommodation, and/or living expenses are covered by a scholarship. For ERMA scholarship recipients, the attestation issued by the programme serves this purpose. However, one respondent highlighted a practical problem: "Coordinator gave the proof of scholarship in the first week of class, but I realized I did not have it in December when the immigration office called me back to get it from me. So I had to ask for it again from ERMA. It would be good to give students 2 or 3 copies of this scholarship attestation for their procedures." The lesson: when you receive your scholarship letter, make multiple copies immediately and store them safely.

The third option is a guarantee statement from a person living in Bosnia and Herzegovina – either a BiH citizen or a foreign resident – who formally commits to covering your expenses. This statement must be certified at the municipality or a notary, and the guarantor must provide evidence of their own income.

For students relying on personal funds, one respondent offered this practical advice: "If you are going the same route as I am – via 3rd country – open up a bank account ASAP, transfer money ASAP, and get the proof right away."

Document 11: Medical Attestation

Every international student must undergo a medical examination at a clinic in Sarajevo as part of the residence permit application. The purpose of this exam is to confirm that you do not

suffer from any disease that could present a threat to public health in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The certificate must be issued no later than three months before the date you submit your application – so do not get it too early, or it may expire before you apply.

Two clinics are recommended by both the university and by students who have been through the process: Poliklinic SaNaSa and J.U. Zavod ZZ Mup Ambulanta (located near the central bank in Sarajevo). Both are familiar with the specific requirements for international students. The examination costs approximately 40–50 EUR, and the certificate is issued in Bosnian language, so no translation is needed.

Be warned, however, that the medical system in Sarajevo is not always familiar with the sequence of the residence permit process. One respondent encountered a frustrating situation: "When I asked for the medical attestation in the hospital, they asked me for my residence permit – which you should have a medical document before you apply for the residence permit. It took me 5–6 minutes to explain that I don't need to have a residence permit just for getting a medical document." This is a classic example of circular bureaucracy. If it happens to you, calmly explain that the medical certificate is a prerequisite for the residence permit, not the other way around.

Document 12: Evidence of Health Insurance

Separately from the medical examination, you must also prove that you have health insurance that covers you during your stay in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This can be a health insurance policy, a health card, evidence of registration with the local Health Fund, or proof of paid travel health insurance. The key requirement is that the document must be an original – physically signed and stamped. Digital signatures and electronic documents are not accepted by the FAO.

If your insurance document is in a language other than Bosnian, Croatian, or Serbian, it must be officially translated by a certified court translator before submission. One convenient option is to get both your medical examination and health insurance at the same place: Poliklinic SaNaSa offers a combined package for approximately 80–100 EUR that covers both the medical attestation and a health insurance policy, saving you the trouble of dealing with two separate institutions.

Document 13: Criminal Record Certificate from Your Home Country

This is, without question, the most complicated and most commonly misunderstood document in the entire process. Read this section carefully.

You must obtain an official certificate from the competent authority in your home country confirming that you have no criminal record – meaning no criminal proceedings have been conducted against you and no criminal penalty has been imposed. The exact name of this document varies depending on where you are from. In Italy, it is called the Certificato del Casellario Giudiziale. In the United States, it could be an FBI background check or a state-level police clearance. In Azerbaijan, it is issued by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Whatever it is called in your country, you need to find out the correct name, the correct issuing authority,

and the correct procedure for obtaining it – and you need to do all of this before you leave home.

This is not a document you can obtain in Sarajevo. It must come from your home country, and it must be a physical original with real ink signatures and real stamps. Bosnia and Herzegovina does not accept documents with digital or electronic signatures. The document must also be issued no later than six months before the date of your application, so do not get it too far in advance either.

Once you have the original, it must be officially translated into Bosnian, Croatian, or Serbian by a certified court translator. You can either have this translation done in your home country before you leave (if you can find a certified translator for Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian) or have it done in Sarajevo after you arrive.

One respondent described the confusion she faced: "There was unclear information on what exactly the government wanted from me, so I reached out to the Bosnian embassy in the US. They were unsure as well, but just said a local police criminal check should be sufficient. I however was paranoid about that not being enough so I also did a basic one with the FBI." Her instinct to get both was wise – when in doubt, it is better to have more documentation than less.

Second respondent highlighted the financial burden: "It is quite expensive to get it in Italy in the Bosnian language; I paid around 230 euros for it." This is a significant cost, and students should budget for it accordingly. The bottom line: research this document thoroughly for your specific country, obtain it before you travel, and bring the physical original with you.

Document 14: Evidence of No Criminal Proceedings in BiH (Extension Only)

This document is only required if you are applying for an extension of your residence permit. It is a certificate from a competent court in Bosnia and Herzegovina confirming that no criminal proceedings are currently being conducted against you in the country. It must not be older than six months at the time of submission. If this is your first application, you do not need this document.

Document 15: Proof of Secured Accommodation in BiH

The final document on the list is proof that you have a place to live in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This can be a rental contract, evidence of property ownership, or – most commonly for students – a statement from your landlord giving their consent for you to use their apartment, accompanied by evidence that the landlord actually owns or has the right to use the property.

The good news is that if you already obtained a landlord's statement for your White Card registration (Step One), you can reuse that same statement for the residence permit application. Just make sure you kept a copy.

One respondent shared a positive experience with this: "My landlord was very clear about everything, and we went together to the municipality to register the contract to get the stamp

for receiving the residence permit from the immigration office." This is the ideal scenario – a cooperative landlord who understands the process and is willing to accompany you to the municipality. When looking for accommodation, try to find a landlord who has rented to international students before, or at least one who is willing to go through the paperwork with you. It will make your life significantly easier.

The Translation and Certification Requirement

If there is one aspect of the residence permit process that causes the most confusion, frustration, and unexpected expense for international students, it is the requirement for official translations and certified copies. This section explains what these requirements mean in plain language, why they exist, and how to deal with them.

Why Do Documents Need to Be Translated?

Bosnia and Herzegovina has three official languages: Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian. All three are mutually intelligible and use very similar vocabulary, so for practical purposes, a document translated into any one of them will be accepted. The Foreigners' Affairs Office, the Municipality, and every other government institution in the country operate exclusively in these languages. They will not accept documents in English, Italian, French, Spanish, or any other foreign language – no matter how widely spoken that language may be internationally. This means that every single document you bring from your home country that is not already in Bosnian, Croatian, or Serbian must be translated before you can use it.

What Is a "Certified Translation" and Why Can't I Just Translate It Myself?

This is where many students get confused. The translation cannot be done by you, by a friend, by Google Translate, by ChatGPT, or by any other informal means. It must be performed by an authorised court translator (ovlaštteni sudski tumač) – a person who has been officially appointed by the Ministry of Justice of Bosnia and Herzegovina (or the relevant entity-level ministry) to perform legal translations. These translators have a special stamp and signature that certifies the translation as legally valid. Without that stamp, the Foreigners' Affairs Office will not even look at your document.

Court translators are available for a wide range of languages, but availability varies. For common European languages like English, German, French, Italian, and Spanish, finding a translator in Sarajevo is relatively straightforward. For less common languages, it may take more effort. The Federal Ministry of Justice maintains an official list of certified court translators for different languages, which you can consult at: <https://fmp.gov.ba/liste/>. This is an extremely useful resource – before you arrive, check whether translators for your language are available in Sarajevo, and consider reaching out to one in advance.

What Is a "Certified Copy" and How Is It Different from a Photocopy?

In addition to translation, many of the documents you submit must be provided as certified copies (ovjerena kopija). A certified copy is not the same as a regular photocopy. A regular photocopy is just a reproduction of a document – anyone can make one at any copy shop.

A certified copy, on the other hand, is a photocopy that has been officially verified and stamped by a public authority as being a true and accurate copy of the original document. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, you get copies certified at the Municipality Office (Opština) or at a notary (notar). The process is simple: you bring the original document and a photocopy, the official compares the two, confirms they are identical, stamps the copy, and charges you a small fee (usually a few BAM). But you need to know that this step exists and that it is mandatory for certain documents – particularly your passport copy. If you show up at the Foreigners' Affairs Office with a plain photocopy where a certified copy is required, your application will be incomplete and you will be sent away.

The Three Levels of Documents

To avoid confusion, think of documents as existing on three levels, and understand which level the FAO requires for each item:

- An original document is the actual, physical document issued by the relevant authority – your passport, your criminal record certificate, your health insurance policy. These are unique, irreplaceable, and carry real signatures and stamps.
- A certified copy is a photocopy that has been officially stamped at the Municipality or notary as a true reproduction of the original. It carries legal weight and is accepted by government institutions as equivalent to the original for administrative purposes.
- A plain photocopy is just a copy with no official verification. It is useful for your own records but is generally not accepted for formal applications unless specifically stated.

For each document in your application, you need to know whether the FAO requires the original, a certified copy, or a plain photocopy. When in doubt, bring the original and a certified copy – you can never have too much documentation.

What Is an Apostille, and Do I Need One?

If your home country is a signatory to the Hague Apostille Convention – and most European countries, the United States, and many others are – then you have access to a powerful tool for simplifying the international recognition of your documents. An Apostille is a special certificate issued by a designated authority in your home country (often the Secretary of State's office, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, or a similar body) that authenticates the origin of a public document so that it can be recognised in another country without further legalisation.

In practical terms, if you obtain an Apostille stamp on your criminal record certificate, your university transcript, or any other official document before you leave home, it significantly strengthens the legal standing of that document in Bosnia and Herzegovina. One respondent, who holds US citizenship, took this approach: "Anything I could obtain and translate in Arizona, I had translated by someone who is also a court certified notary and then obtained the apostille stamp." This is excellent practice and is strongly recommended for all students from Apostille Convention countries.

Learning from Those Who Came Before

The translation and certification process is one of the areas where students most frequently report being caught off guard. One reflected honestly: "I did not understand it before coming to BiH. I came to BiH with docs printed at home, but they were not good for the immigration office and for ERMA." He had to request original documents to be sent from Italy and then have them officially translated and stamped locally – a process that cost him time, money, and considerable stress.

The lesson is clear: if you can obtain, translate, and certify your documents before you leave your home country, do so. If you cannot, be prepared to spend time and money doing it in Sarajevo after you arrive. Either way, do not underestimate this requirement.

Recommended Translation Services in Sarajevo

Multiple students independently recommended the following translators and translation offices:

- Barbados / Barbosa Translation Office
Recommended by several students as reliable, efficient, and familiar with the residence permit process
- Mensur Delija
Tel: +387 61 890 323 – recommended by students
- Dennis Gratz
Tel: +387 61 267 302 – recommended by students
- Official list of certified court translators: Available at <https://fmp.gov.ba/liste/> – check this resource for translators in your specific language

It is advisable to contact a translator as soon as you arrive in Sarajevo – or even before – to understand their availability, pricing, and turnaround time. During peak periods at the start of the academic year, translators can be busy, and delays in getting your documents translated will delay your entire application.

After Submission – What to Expect

Processing Time

Once you have gathered all fifteen documents, had everything translated and certified, paid your fees at the post office, and physically submitted your complete application dossier to the Foreigners' Affairs Office – you might expect that the hardest part is over. Unfortunately, that is not entirely true. What follows is a waiting period that can be deeply frustrating, largely because it is unpredictable and because the system provides almost no feedback along the way.

Officially, the residence permit is supposed to be processed relatively quickly – the expectation is that it should be issued within the first one to two months of your arrival. In reality, however, the processing time varies enormously from case to case. Some students have received their permits in as little as two weeks. Others have waited six months – nearly the entire duration of their academic stay – before finally receiving the sticker in their passport. There is no clear explanation for why some applications are processed faster than others, and the FAO does not provide applicants with a tracking number, a status update system, or any other way to monitor the progress of their application remotely.

What makes this even more difficult is that the Foreigners' Affairs Office does not proactively contact you when your permit is ready. They will not call you, they will not email you, and they will not send you a letter. Your permit could be sitting in a drawer at the FAO for weeks, and unless you go there and ask, nobody will tell you. One respondent recounted: "I was never contacted once it was ready. I was just lucky the third time I showed up after almost 6 months of waiting." Another respondent had a similar experience: "It took two months, but just because I called after two months of waiting. If I didn't call, nobody would have ever showed up."

The practical advice here is straightforward: after submitting your application, mark a date on your calendar approximately four to six weeks later and begin following up. You can do this by calling the FAO by telephone or by visiting the office in person. Be polite but persistent. Ask specifically whether a decision has been made on your application. If they say it is not ready yet, ask when you should check again. Keep a record of every call and visit – dates, times, and what you were told – in case you need to demonstrate that you have been actively following up.

During this waiting period, you are in a legal grey area. Your visa-free 90-day period may expire before your permit is issued, but as long as you have submitted a complete application within the required timeframe, you are generally considered to be in a lawful status while awaiting a decision. However, it is wise to keep a copy of your submitted application and the receipt confirming your submission, so that if you are ever questioned – for example, during a police check or at a border crossing – you can prove that your application is pending.

Opening a Bank Account

Opening a bank account in Bosnia and Herzegovina is something you should do as early as possible after arriving, for two important reasons. First, you will need a local bank account to manage your day-to-day finances – paying rent, buying groceries, and handling other expenses. Second, if you are relying on personal funds rather than a scholarship to prove your means of subsistence, a bank statement from a local Bosnian bank showing a sufficient balance is the most straightforward way to satisfy this requirement.

Students have successfully opened accounts at Intesa San Paolo and Raiffeisen Bank in Sarajevo. The documents typically required to open an account include your passport, your White Card, a scholarship proof letter (if applicable), and in some cases a certified translated copy of your passport. However, be prepared for the possibility that the bank may initially refuse to open a full current account without a residence permit, offering only a savings account instead.

This is yet another example of the circular bureaucratic logic that international students encounter repeatedly in Bosnia and Herzegovina. One respondent described the experience: "They asked me for a residence permit to have a card/account. And again I convinced them that with the white card I can open an account, because for residence you should have a bank account." The bank requires a residence permit, but the residence permit requires a bank statement, which requires a bank account. If you find yourself in this situation, calmly explain the sequence to the bank employee and, if necessary, ask to speak with a manager. In most cases, persistence and a clear explanation will resolve the issue.

Local hospitals and health insurance

Understanding how healthcare works in Bosnia and Herzegovina is important for a safe and smooth stay. The healthcare system is decentralized, and access to public services depends on your insurance status and place of residence.

Health insurance requirements

International students are required to have valid health insurance during their stay. Before arrival, check whether your current insurance covers medical treatment in Bosnia and Herzegovina, including emergency care and hospitalization.

If your insurance is not valid locally, you will need to arrange:

- international student health insurance, or
- local health insurance

Without valid insurance, you may be required to pay for services upfront.

Accessing healthcare services

Public healthcare is available through local health centers (known as Dom zdravlja) and hospitals. Access may depend on registration and insurance coverage.

As a student, you should:

- identify the nearest Dom zdravlja (primary care center)
- locate the nearest hospital (Opća bolnica or Klinički centar)
- find nearby pharmacies (apoteka)

In many cases, you may need to visit a general practitioner at a health center before being referred to a specialist. Private clinics are also available, especially in larger cities like Sarajevo, Mostar, and Banja Luka, and can offer faster access, though services are paid out-of-pocket.

Emergency situations

In case of emergency, you can go directly to the nearest hospital or call emergency services.

Important emergency numbers:

124 – Ambulance
122 – Police
123 – Fire brigade

Emergency care is provided, but costs may apply if you are not insured.

Costs and documentation

Healthcare costs in Bosnia and Herzegovina are generally lower than in many EU countries, but payment is often required if you do not have local insurance.

To avoid complications:

- always carry your passport or ID
- keep proof of insurance with you
- bring cash or a payment card (some facilities may not accept cards)
- keep all receipts for possible reimbursement

Important Locations in Sarajevo for International Students

As an international student, you will need to visit a number of government offices, service providers, and university buildings throughout the residence permit process. Knowing where these places are before you need them will save you time, stress, and missed classes. Below is a comprehensive directory of the most important locations, organised by category.

Foreigners' Affairs Office (Služba za poslove sa strancima)

This is the single most important office for your residence status. You will visit it at least twice – once for your White Card and once for your Residence Permit – and likely several more times for follow-ups.

Služba za poslove sa strancima – Terenski centar Sarajevo
Address: A transversala – Michael Schumacher 8, Sarajevo
Phone (Central/Protocol): 033 772 994
Phone (Head of Field Centre): 033 779 900 / 033 779 915
Email: info@sps.gov.ba
Website: sps.gov.ba

The office is located outside the city centre and is not easily accessible by public transport. Several students reported that it operates during limited hours that often conflict with class schedules. Plan your visit in advance and confirm opening hours by phone before going.

Municipality Offices (Općine)

You will need to visit the municipality office corresponding to your residential address for certifying document copies (ovjera), verifying your landlord's accommodation statement, and other administrative procedures. Sarajevo is divided into four main urban municipalities – your landlord can tell you which one your address falls under.

Općina Centar	Mis Irbina 1	033 562 300	077
Općina Stari Grad	Zelenih beretki 4	033 282 300	109
Općina Novo Sarajevo	Zmaja od Bosne 55	033 492 100	079
Općina Novi Grad	Bulevar Meše Selimovića 97	033 291 100	108

All municipality offices generally operate Monday to Friday, from 07:30 to 16:00, with the counter hall (šalter sala) sometimes open until 18:00. Arrive early – queues can be long, especially at the beginning of the month.

ERMA / CIS Office (University of Sarajevo)

This is your academic home base. The Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies (CIS) houses the ERMA programme and is where you will collect your enrollment certificate, scholarship attestation, and other university documents.

Centar za interdisciplinarnе studije Univerziteta u Sarajevu – prof. dr. Zdravko Grebo
Address: Zmaja od Bosne 8, 71000 Sarajevo (University Campus)
Phone: 033 668 685

Medical Clinics (Poliklinike)

You will need to visit a medical clinic for your mandatory medical attestation (Document 11) and potentially for health insurance (Document 12). The following two clinics are recommended by both the university and by students who have been through the process, as they are familiar with the specific requirements for international students.

Poliklinika SaNaSa

Grbavička 74, Novo Sarajevo
033 661 840

Medical attestation (~40–50 EUR); combined package with health insurance (~80–100 EUR).
Open Mon–Fri 08:00–19:00, Sat 08:00–14:00.

J.U. Zavod ZZ MUP-a KS

Alije Isakovića 3, Sarajevo
033 280 020

Medical examination for residence permit. Located near the central bank.

Notaries (Notari)

You may need a notary for certifying documents, verifying signatures, or legalising contracts. While the municipality offices handle basic document certification (ovjera), some procedures require a notary. Below are several notaries located in or near the centre of Sarajevo.

Nedžada Kapidžić	Maršala Tita 50/I, Centar	033 259 720
Zdravka Bago	Dolina 2, Centar	033 558 540

Bojan Marković Hamida Dizdara 6/1, Centar
Nerminka Hamidović Radićeva 2/II, Centar

033 555 500
033 556 375

A full and up-to-date list of all notaries in the Federation of BiH is available at:
<https://www.notaribih.ba/staff-members>

Copy Shops (Kopirnice)

You will need copy and printing services frequently – for photocopying your passport, printing application forms (double-sided!), and making copies of various documents. Copy shops are abundant throughout Sarajevo, especially near the university campus and in the city centre. Look for signs saying "Kopirnica," "Fotokopirnica," or "Print."

In general, you will find at least one copy shop within a few minutes' walk of any major university building or municipality office. Prices are very affordable – typically 0.10–0.20 KM per black-and-white copy.

Passport Photo Shops (Fotograf za pasoš)

Passport-style photos (35x45 mm) are needed for the residence permit application and various other administrative procedures. Almost any photo shop or photography studio in Sarajevo can produce them. Simply walk in and ask for "slike za pasoš" (passport photos). The cost is typically 5–10 KM for a set of photos.

Post Offices (Pošta)

Since all administrative fees must be paid via bank note (uplatnica) at a post office, knowing where to find one is essential. The main post office in Sarajevo is located at Obala Kulina bana 8 (near the Eternal Flame / Vječna vatra), and there are branch offices throughout the city. Look for the yellow "BH Pošta" signs. Post offices are generally open Monday to Saturday, with reduced hours on Saturdays.