

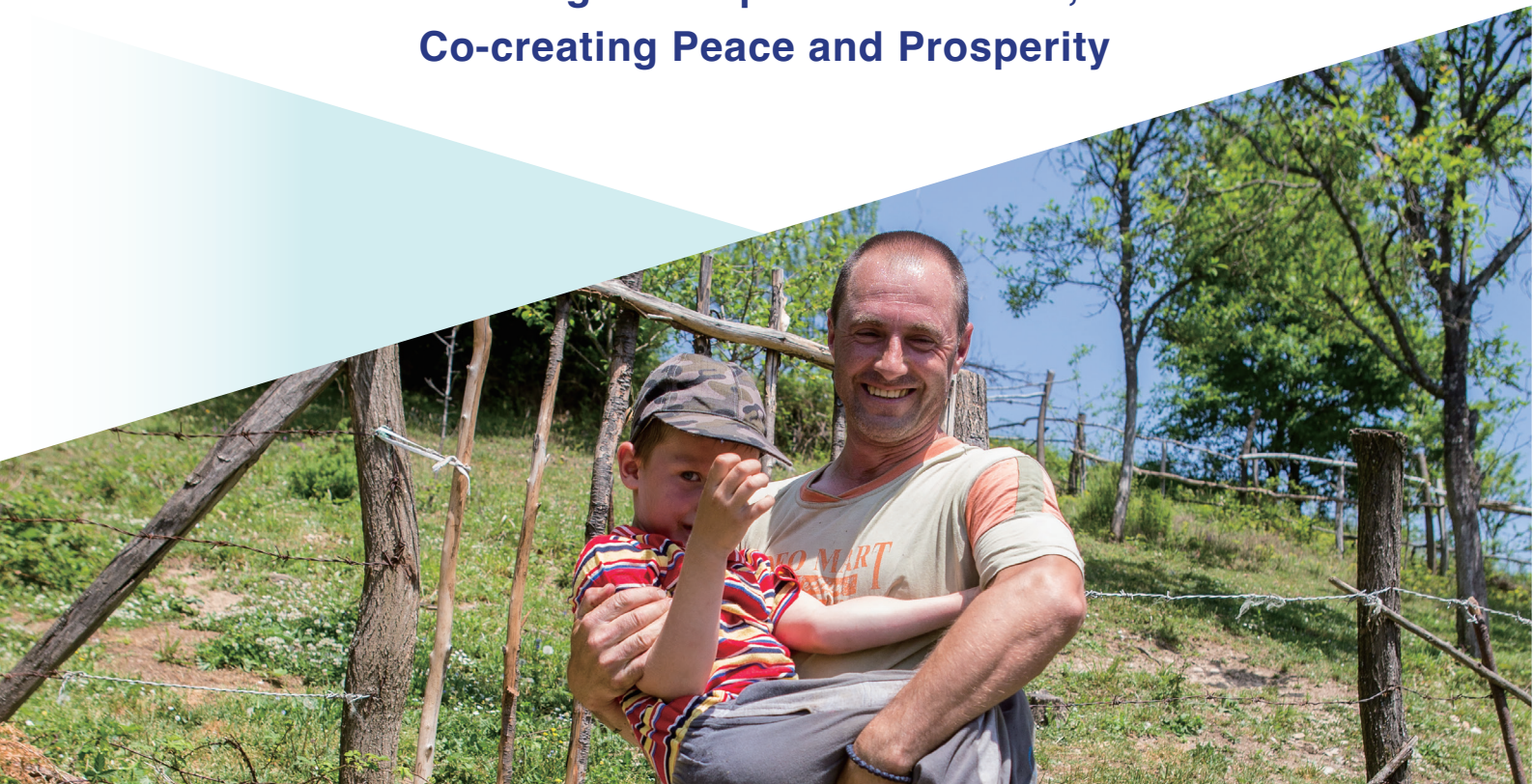


Bosnia and Herzegovina – Japan



30 Years of Cooperation and Friendship

**A Bridge of Hope to the Future,
Co-creating Peace and Prosperity**



MISSION AND VISION

MISSION

JICA, in accordance with the Development Cooperation Charter, will work on human security and quality growth.

VISION

Leading the world with trust

JICA, with its partners, will take the lead in forging bonds of trust across the world, aspiring for a free, peaceful and prosperous world where people can hope for a better future and explore their diverse potentials.

COUNTRY ASSISTANCE POLICY

Country Assistance Policy for Bosnia and Herzegovina

JICA prioritizes (1) consolidation of peace and ethnic reconciliation, and (2) environmentally sustainable economic growth, supporting the country's stability and sustained development, and thereby providing support for its efforts toward EU accession.

Introduction

2026 marks the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Bosnia and Herzegovina, making it a milestone year for both countries. Since the Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995, Japan has stood by Bosnia and Herzegovina, supporting its reconstruction and development.

Japan's Official Development Assistance (ODA), which began in earnest in 1996, initially focused on the rehabilitation and reconstruction of infrastructure damaged by the conflict, and later expanded to include education, healthcare, and mine clearance. In recent years, it has further broadened to promote sustainable economic growth, including private sector development. While remaining closely attuned to local needs, Japan's cooperation has shifted its focus from emergency reconstruction assistance to medium- and long-term support for the country's development toward the goal of EU accession.

Over the past 30 years, guided by the principle of "human security," Japan has consistently provided impartial assistance, transcending differences in ethnicity and background while maintaining neutrality. This approach has become a solid foundation for the trust Japan has earned among many people.

This pamphlet looks back on the history of cooperation and its achievements, while also highlighting the lessons learned through that cooperation and the ties between the two countries that have been nurtured through people-to-people exchange.

CONTENTS

01	Mission and Vision	02
02	Introduction	03
03	Bosnia and Herzegovina's progress with Japan	04-05
04	Seven areas of cooperation	06-17
05	Voices of youth, insights and lessons learned, and expert commentary	18-19

Bosnia and Herzegovina's Development with Japan 1995-2026

Developments within Bosnia and Herzegovina

1995
Signing of the Dayton Agreement and adoption of the Constitution



Source: U.S. Government

1995
Establishment of the OHR (Office of the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina)

1996
First general elections held after the war

1997
Establishment of the Central Bank of Bosnia and Herzegovina

2002
Conclusion of the activities of United Nations Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (UNMIBH)

2004
Completion of the reconstruction of the Old Mostar Bridge

2005
Commemoration ceremony held for the 10th anniversary of the Srebrenica massacre.



Relations with international organizations, donors, Europe, the EU, etc.

2016
Submission of the application for EU accession

2024
The European Council decides to open EU accession negotiations

Relations with international organizations, donors, Europe, the EU, etc.

Relations with international organizations, donors, Europe, the EU, etc.

1995

1996

1997

1998

2002

2004

2005

2006

2008

2010

2012

2014

2016

2020

2024

2026

Major Projects implemented by JICA

1996
Emergency Grant Aid (OSCE: Electoral support)

2002
Project for Reconstruction of Osanica Bridge and Bogatici Bridge



2002
Project for The Provision of Equipment for Demining Activities and Grassroots Grant Aid Project for Mine Clearance



2002
Primary School Construction Project



2006
Project for Sustainable Support for Returnees to Srebrenica through Livestock Market Reconstruction and Agricultural Promotion



2010
Flue Gas Desulphurization Construction Project for Ugljevik Thermal Power Plant

2012
Project for Herzegovina International Tourism Corridor Development and Environmental Conservation

2016
The project for confidence building through physical education

2020
Project for Formulation of Sarajevo Public Transport Management and Operation Capacity Development Plan



2022
Project for Sustainable Support for Returnees to Srebrenica through Livestock Market Reconstruction and Agricultural Promotion

2024
Project for Sustainable Support for Returnees to Srebrenica through Livestock Market Reconstruction and Agricultural Promotion

2026
Project for Sustainable Support for Returnees to Srebrenica through Livestock Market Reconstruction and Agricultural Promotion

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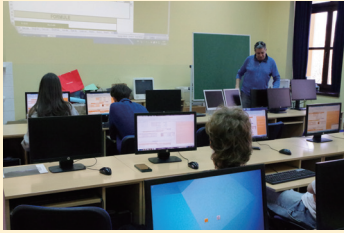
1997
The Project for Improvement of Medical Equipment in Primary Health Care Institutions

1997
Grant Aid for the Increase of Food Production

2004
Development on Rehabilitation Technique for Disabled People



2008
The Project on Informatics Curricula Modernization



2008
Comprehensive Pain Management Project

2014
Project for the Rehabilitation of the Mostar City Sports Center for Community Cohesion through Sports Activities



2014
The Project for Confidence-building through Rural Development

2014
Project for Improving IT Education at Mixed Secondary Schools with Gymnasia Course



2024
Project on Capacity Building for Disaster Risk Reduction through National Forest Fire Information System and Ecosystem-based Disaster Risk Reduction



2026
Project on Capacity Building for Disaster Risk Reduction through National Forest Fire Information System and Ecosystem-based Disaster Risk Reduction

1995

1996

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2008

2010

2012

2014

2016

2020

2024

2026

Relations with Japan

1996
Establishment of diplomatic relations with Japan; Japan begins full-scale reconstruction assistance



1998
Establishment of the Embassy in Tokyo

2005
Conclusion of an agreement between Japan and the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina on technical cooperation



2006
Opening of the JICA Balkan Office



2008
Establishment of the Embassy of Japan in Bosnia and Herzegovina



2026
30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations with Japan



1995

1996

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2026

Source: Niegodzisie (CC BY-SA 4.0)

Supporting the Transition from Social Infrastructure Reconstruction to Sustainable Operation and Maintenance

The four-year conflict that began in 1992 caused severe damage across Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly to the transportation network that supports people's lives and the economy, and became a major obstacle to post-war reconstruction.

In response, Japan began providing emergency infrastructure restoration support in 1996, immediately after the conflict was over. One of the pillars of this support was the reconstruction of destroyed bridges. Through initiatives such as the Project for Reconstruction of Dobož Bridge and Modriča Bridge, bridges were rebuilt in various locations, normalizing the movement of people and goods. These efforts not only spurred the resumption of economic activities but also became symbols of reconciliation for divided communities. Furthermore, in the capital city of Sarajevo, as well as in Mostar and Banja Luka, buses were provided through the Project for Rehabilitation of Public Transport Capacity and Grant Assistance for Grass-roots Human Security Projects. This swift assistance contributed to the revitalization of public transportation, which had been suffering from a shortage of vehicles.

Alongside this physical assistance, Japan conducted the Study on the Transport Master Plan. This long-term plan, based on data, was highly praised by the local authorities and laid the foundation for future transportation infrastructure planning.

From the mid-2000s, as reconstruction progressed, Japan's support shifted from "building" to "preserving value over the long term" — that is, to infrastructure maintenance. Through initiatives including the Project for Improvement of the Equipment for Road Maintenance, Japan supported the creation of a sustainable system where the reconstructed infrastructure could be properly managed and utilized under local ownership.

In recent years, new challenges such as aging infrastructure, urban traffic congestion, and air pollution have emerged. In response, Japan is once again supporting the formulation of transport plans through projects such as the Project for Formulation of Sarajevo Public Transport Management and Operation Capacity Development Plan. Based on detailed data analysis, Japan has outlined a path toward modernizing public transportation, providing the basis for crucial local decisions, including the consolidation of inefficient routes and a review of the EV bus introduction plan.

From emergency restoration to maintenance, and then to planning for the future—Japan's support continues to evolve in line with local conditions, standing by the development of Bosnia and Herzegovina's social infrastructure.

"The Support We Needed Most": The Future of Urban Transport Guided by Data



A trolleybus running through the city of Sarajevo

An official from the Ministry of Transport of Sarajevo Canton reflects on Japan's cooperation in the transport sector, stating, "It was what we truly and most needed." While other donors proposed high-profile projects such as the introduction of new vehicles, Japan provided the evidence for a public transport plan based on data collection and analysis.

The analysis revealed that a hasty merger of public transport companies and a switch from the well-established trolleybus system to EV buses were not necessarily the best options. "Japan's analysis was a significant reference for us when making important decisions," the official says.

It is Japan's approach of not just providing hard infrastructure, but also understanding the local context and working together to find the best path forward, that lays the foundation for sustainable development.

"The Japan Bus": A Story of Reconciliation



A bus provided by Japan and mechanics in Mostar

"The Japan Bus." In the city of Mostar, buses adorned with the Japanese flag are affectionately called by this name. Of the buses donated in 2001, about 20 are still in service more than 20 years later, accounting for nearly half of the vehicles operated by the city's public bus corporation. "We are grateful for Japan's support," says an official from the corporation.

A citizen who used these buses daily as a high school student at the time marvels at the longevity of Japan's support, saying, "It's amazing that buses from over 20 years ago are still running so well."

This assistance, which provided not only vehicles but also maintenance equipment, continues to support the daily lives of the people of Mostar, along with the minibuses donated in recent years.

INTERVIEW



Our Town's "Japanese Bridge (Japanski most)": A Trusted Bridge Supporting Logistics and Daily Life

Everyone affectionately calls this bridge, which I can see from my workplace, the "Japanese Bridge." The old bridge was severely damaged by the conflict and was in such a dangerous state that it could have collapsed at any moment.

After the bridge was rebuilt with Japan's support, transportation in the region changed dramatically. Logistics became smoother, and people could travel back and forth safely. There is probably no one in this area who has not benefited from the bridge. That's why all the residents know that this bridge was rebuilt with Japanese assistance. They feel it is an essential and truly important bridge for their daily lives.

An employee at a gas station near the Modriča Bridge



Bogatič Bridge

30 Years of Change in Numbers



From a Single Seed to a Forest of the Future: The Story of Human Bonds Woven by Economic Reconstruction

The conflict of the 1990s left deep scars in the Srebrenica region. Many people lost their livelihoods and continued to suffer from poverty and mistrust even after returning. In this context, Japan began its support by focusing on "rebuilding livelihoods," the foundation of people's lives.

Immediately after the ceasefire, Japan started supporting the residents' basic living needs through emergency food production aid and assistance for sheep milk shipments. Initially, few residents saw hope in making a living from agriculture. However, JICA set agriculture, in which everyone could participate, as a common theme and created "spaces for collaboration" where people could work together through small-scale projects such as beekeeping and fruit cultivation. By adopting a stance of focusing on those most in need, such as returnees and single-mother households, Japan built a relationship of trust.

Eventually, small successes led to the development of the entire region. The introduction of high-value-added crops such as raspberries and strawberries provided an opportunity to transform agriculture from subsistence to "business." Raspberry cultivation, in particular, was a great success, and the city of Bratunac became a major production area in Bosnia and Herzegovina. As incomes increased and lives stabilized, people began to feel more secure about their future, and economic development promoted reconciliation among them.

The form of cooperation also evolved from direct assistance to fostering local actors. Japan supported the capacity building of the municipal office so that it could take the lead in planning and implementing development plans that met the needs of the residents. Furthermore, to foster small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that could compete in the international market, the Small and Medium Enterprises Promotion Project was launched in the late 2000s, and as part of it, a "mentoring service" was introduced. Through this initiative, Japanese knowledge, such as business know-how and quality control, has been passed down to local entrepreneurs.

Japan's cooperation, which began in a land scarred by conflict, is not merely a provision of goods and funds. It is an endeavor to nurture both economic prosperity and peace of mind by standing with people's desire to be self-reliant and providing opportunities to work together. The locally-rooted industries now support people's livelihoods and connect them to a hopeful future.

Support that Reached the Ground: The "Genuine Trust" Built by Japan



A JICA expert visiting beneficiaries

A local NGO member who has witnessed many international cooperation efforts describes Japan's support as "unique." He says that with other aid, a large portion of the budget often went to office expenses and funds were difficult to deliver to the field. "But JICA was different. A large part of their aid budget reached the beneficiaries, and they included all groups in the circle of cooperation without discrimination."

He recalls that the Japanese experts identified those truly in need of support, and "they worked for the community, not from a top-down perspective." He is convinced that this sincere attitude, which sought nothing in return, earned a level of "trust" more than any other country. A field-oriented approach and fairness have built heartfelt trust among the people.

"Japanese Raspberries" Gave Hope for Tomorrow



A farming family raising raspberries provided by Japan

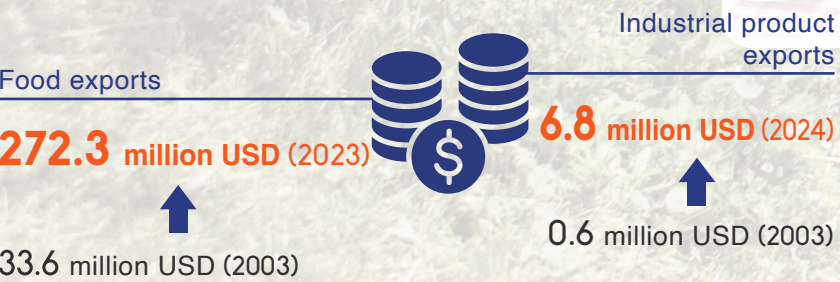
"I will never forget my gratitude for the 140 raspberry seedlings I received from JICA," says one resident. For people who had lost so much in the conflict, it was a hope for the future. The seedlings have multiplied to 4,000 and are now an important source of income that supports their lives. In the neighborhood, they are affectionately known as "Japanese raspberries."

Initially, there was some hesitation about working with neighbors from different backgrounds, but as they helped each other by lending tractors and other means, the awkwardness disappeared. The resident says that these raspberries, which went on to win a gold medal at a competition, gave them the joy of work and hope for tomorrow. Japan's support has revitalized people's livelihoods and community bonds.



Strawberry farmers in Srebrenica

30 Years of Change in Numbers



INTERVIEW



The Spirit of Japan's "Kaizen" Lives On: Fostering Local Industries, Nurturing New Leaders

I participated in a program to learn practical approaches to SME support. The methods for growing a business were very well-organized, and they are still useful in supporting local companies today. The poster for "5S" (Sort, Set in order, Shine, Standardize, Sustain), which I learned about in a JICA training, is still on my office wall. This region urgently needs to transition to a private-sector-led economy, and SME support is essential. JICA was one of the first donors to provide support when our town's tourism industry was in its early stages. Thanks to that, our town is taking steady steps forward as a tourist destination that leverages its rich nature and food culture.

A regional development officer from Trebinje who participated in the Project on Establishment and Promotion of Mentoring Service for Small and Medium Enterprises in the Western Balkans

Sowing the Seeds for the Future: The Bonds of Trust Woven by Education and Sports

Even after the end of the conflict in 1995, the society of Bosnia and Herzegovina has continued to face a complex social and institutional environment. Children, in particular, had limited opportunities to understand each other amidst destroyed schools and segregated educational environments.

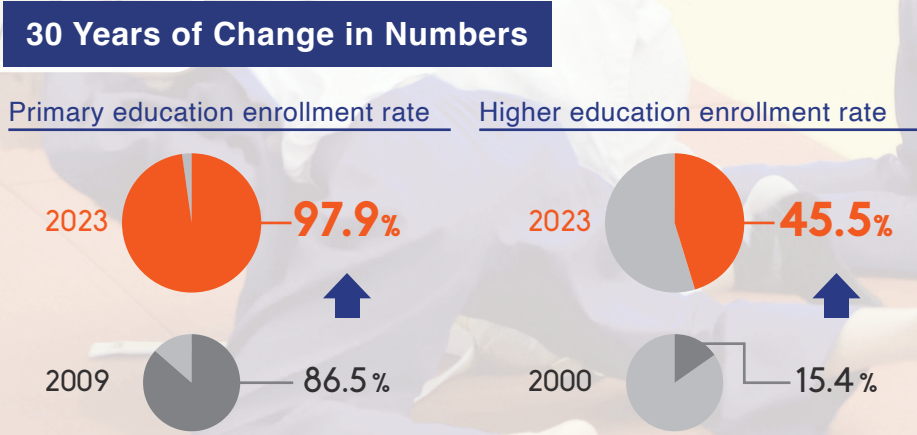
In response to this situation, Japan, from a neutral standpoint, adopted a basic policy of "impartial and balanced support" that benefits everyone and began its cooperation focusing on the children who will shape the future. The first step was the restoration of educational infrastructure destroyed by the conflict. Through support for approximately 100 schools via initiatives such as the Project for Construction of Primary Schools and Grant Assistance for Grass-roots Human Security Projects, Japan not only rebuilt school buildings but also created "places" where children from different backgrounds could spend time in the same classrooms and where parents could cooperate. The schools that received this support are still a source of local pride for their high quality.

Cooperation in the educational field led to the expansion of support into the sports sector. This is because sports, which can be enjoyed by anyone under common rules that transcend differences in language and culture, have the power to connect people's hearts. The Project for Confidence Building through Physical Education supported the development of a "Common Core Curriculum" to integrate physical education curricula that had differed by ethnicity, laying the foundation for children across the country to learn under the same rules. In the city of Mostar, still bearing the scars of conflict, Japan introduced the Japanese-style "Undokai" (sports day), which can be enjoyed by everyone and has now taken root in the community.

These steady efforts, from infrastructure restoration to IT and exchange through sports, have nurtured a spirit of cooperation and mutual respect in the hearts of children. The atmosphere in the community has changed so much that police deployment, once essential at sports tournaments, is no longer necessary. The circle of exchange that began in schools has now expanded to parents and the wider community. Japan's support, through the power of not only "hard" infrastructure but also "soft" connections that link people's hearts, continues to sow the seeds for the future together with the local people.



Artwork by students at
Hasan Kikić Primary School



Warmth Lit in Freezing Classrooms

"The school building was severely damaged by the conflict. The winter cold was especially harsh, and students couldn't take off their coats even in the classroom, shivering as they took lessons. On extremely cold days, we sometimes had to instruct them to stay home," says a teacher from a primary school renovated with Japan's cooperation.

With Japan's help, the heating system, exterior walls, and windows were renovated, allowing children to learn in a comfortable environment. In fact, renovations by other donors had sometimes failed quickly, but the parts supported by Japan have had no problems for years.

A warm classroom where children can learn with peace of mind also contributes to their emotional stability. Japan's support has brought smiles to the children's faces and lit a hope for the future.



To be honest, I was skeptical at first. In a society divided by conflict, I couldn't immediately believe that sports had the power to change anything.

But the experts from Japan were different. They visited us time and again, and their enthusiasm in listening to us seriously left a deep impression on us. With JICA's support, we were able to organize a sports day that brought children from different backgrounds together, and sports activities for children with disabilities, things we couldn't have achieved before. We still hold sports days in the city's schools in spring and autumn, and I hope you will come and see them.

Watching the children sweat together, I have come to realize the importance of connecting people's hearts.

An official from the Mostar City Sports Association involved in the Project for Confidence Building through Physical Education



The JICA expert who dedicated herself to the project is still our friend. Her passion led to a seminar featuring a renowned judo instructor from Japan. The teachings from that time are still alive today and have contributed to improving the level of judo in our country.

World-class athletes are emerging from my dojo, and seeing them win at tournaments brings me the greatest joy. However, there is no system to support their professional activities, and the harsh reality is that promising athletes have to quit the sport due to lack of funds.

Still, it is my dream to produce an Olympic gold medalist from this dojo and bring the first-ever medal for this country back to Mostar.

A coach from a judo club involved in the Project for Confidence Building through Physical Education

Sustainable Development Integrating Climate Action and Environmental Conservation

While Bosnia and Herzegovina is blessed with rich nature and great potential, it is also exposed to threats from climate change, such as forest fires and floods. Japan's cooperation has aimed to conserve this country's precious natural environment and realize sustainable development that utilizes it.

From the immediate post-conflict period, Japan incorporated environmental considerations into infrastructure restoration. In response to the serious environmental problems exacerbated by industrial activities since the former Yugoslavia era, Japan has contributed to reducing the environmental burden through initiatives such as the Flue Gas Desulphurization Construction Project for Ugljevik Thermal Power Plant and the Project for Master Plan for Remediation of Hotspots.

In parallel, to utilize the rich nature as a tourism resource, the concept of "sustainable regional development centered on ecotourism" was envisioned early on, and projects such as the Project for Herzegovina International Tourism Corridor Development and Environmental Conservation were initiated. A framework for public-private partnerships and cross-regional cooperation, aiming for both environmental conservation and tourism promotion, was established, leading to an increase in tourism revenue, employment, and the number of tourists.

In recent years, the risks of forest fires and floods have further increased due to the effects of climate change. In response to this new threat, Japan has launched the Project on Capacity Building for Disaster Risk Reduction through National Forest Fire Information System and Ecosystem-based Disaster Risk Reduction (Eco-DRR). It supports the strengthening of the country's crisis management capabilities through early warning systems using satellite imagery and Eco-DRR methods. Additionally, Japan contributes to improving the living and sanitary environment of residents through measures against air pollution in Sarajevo and the provision of garbage collection trucks to various regions.

Japan's cooperation is not limited to solving immediate problems. It has evolved its form of cooperation in response to the demands of the times, from "environmental considerations" immediately after the conflict, to "pollution control" during the economic growth period, and to "climate change adaptation" in the modern era. Through a series of initiatives that protect the environment, utilize its blessings for tourism, and protect lives from natural threats, Japan supports the creation of a foundation for sustainable development where people can build their own future.

30 Years of Change in Numbers

Economic losses caused by disasters

588 million USD (2014-2023)

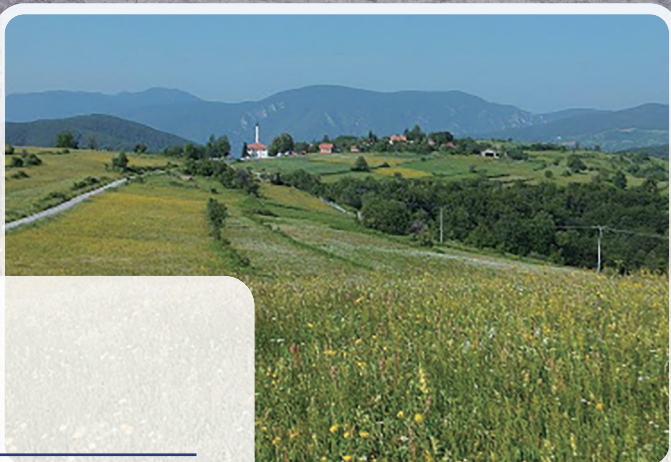
512 million USD (1996-2005)



Tourism revenue

438 million USD (2020)

246 million USD (2000)



The rich natural environment of Srebrenica



Project stakeholders inspecting a forest

Building a Nation Resilient to Natural Disasters: Japan's Cooperation Supporting Response to Forest Fires and Floods

Due to the effects of climate change, responding to forest fires and floods has become a critical issue in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

With Japan's cooperation, the development of a National Forest Fire Information System (NFFIS) is underway for forest fires, and an early warning system using satellite imagery is being established.

For floods, countermeasures are being strengthened by incorporating the concept of "Eco-DRR (Ecosystem-based Disaster Risk Reduction)." A

government official states, "The idea of reducing floods with the water retention capacity of forests was unfamiliar at first, but now we understand its importance."

Based on Japan's expertise in disaster management, solutions that transcend regional barriers are being considered and implemented together.

INTERVIEW

The Challenge of the Tourism Cluster: Promoting the Charm of the Herzegovina Region to the World, Beyond Borders



Before this project began, regional tourism operators worked individually. Japanese experts listened to us and helped us establish an organization called a "tourism cluster" that transcends groups and boundaries.

Thanks to this, we are now able to participate in international tourism fairs and promote the charm of Herzegovina to the world together. Collaborations that were unthinkable before, such as operators from different regions planning tours together, have also emerged.

Believing that "there are no borders for tourism resources," I want to continue to boost tourism through private-sector initiatives. I still appreciate Japan's supportive approach.

Note: The Herzegovina region is the southern part of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Its main city is Mostar.

A tourism business operator involved in the Project for Herzegovina International Tourism Corridor Development and Environmental Conservation

INTERVIEW

For a Community Tackling the Garbage Problem: The Hopes and Future Carried by a Collection Truck



Before this truck arrived, we only had an old, dilapidated truck and couldn't collect all the garbage in the area, leading to poor sanitary conditions. It was then that Japan donated a new collection truck. We were especially grateful because it was right after the region had suffered major flood damage.

Now, this single truck runs five days a week, serving 1,850 households and 350 companies, keeping our community clean. The work is much faster, and we use it carefully, cleaning it thoroughly every week. Our next goal is to encourage residents to sort their garbage and further improve the town's environment.

A driver of a garbage collection truck donated by Japan

Human Resource Development and the Formation of Next-Generation Leaders

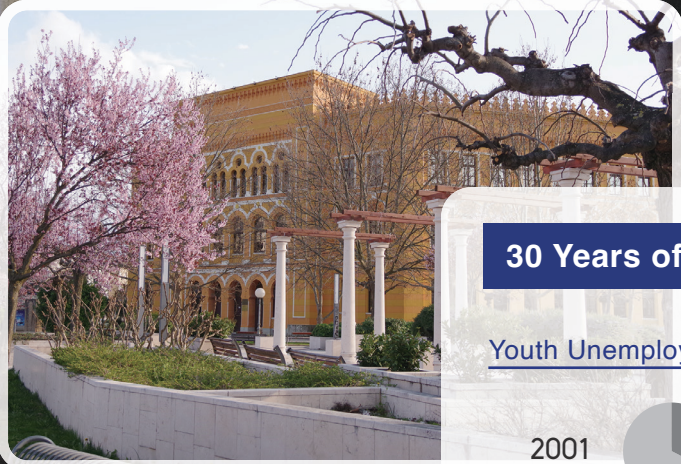
In post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina, the fragmented education system was a major obstacle to national reconstruction. Building a foundation for the youth, who will shape the future, to learn and cooperate together was the task of creating the very future of the country. To address this challenge, Japan has positioned "human resource development" as one of the pillars of its support, starting with intensive vocational training assistance immediately after the conflict and continuing with long-term cooperation.

A symbol of this is the Project on Informatics Curricula Modernization, implemented in three phases since 2006. After the conflict, educational curricula, including content and levels, varied by ethnicity. Japan focused on the IT field, where it was easier to build consensus on common standards. At a high school in the city of Mostar, still bearing the scars of the conflict, an attempt was made to introduce a common curriculum based on Japanese textbooks. In an IT lab equipped with the latest PCs, students who had previously studied in separate classrooms sat side by side for the first time. This successful experience ignited a change in the hearts of students, parents, and teachers, becoming a major step toward nationwide expansion.

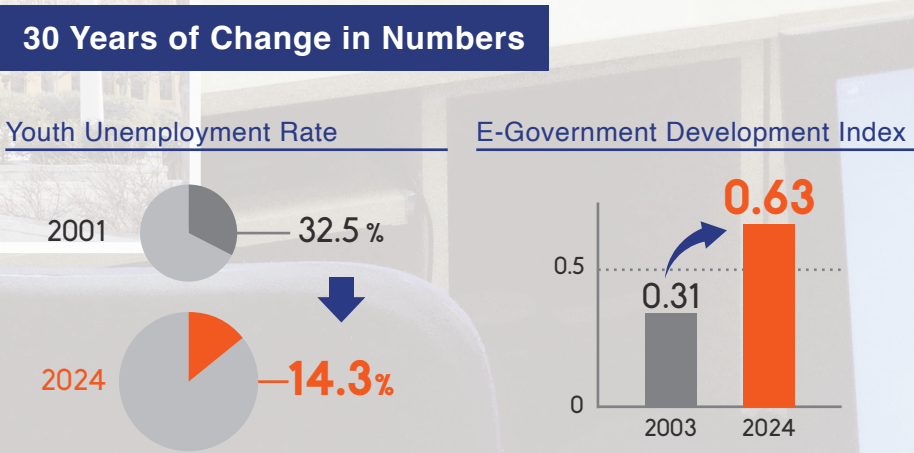
As the project expanded to high schools throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina, Japan did not just distribute equipment and textbooks but repeatedly held training sessions and exchange seminars for teachers and government officials. Through these, they not only enhanced their skills and abilities but also built a network to discuss the future of society with colleagues they had never had the chance to speak with before. This bottom-up approach of changing from the ground up eventually led to the formulation of a national "Common Core Curriculum."

Furthermore, Japan's cooperation did not stop at the standardization of secondary education but expanded its scope to the development of industrial human resources and next-generation leaders who will drive the country's economy. Diverse initiatives, such as cooperation with higher education institutions including the University of Sarajevo, the Small and Medium Enterprises Promotion Project to support corporate growth, the provision of libraries and Braille equipment for the visually impaired, and study visits to Japan for over 800 people, have broadly contributed to supporting economic development and fostering leaders who can be active in the international community.

From the standardization of education to industrial promotion and higher education, Japan's support has laid a solid foundation for nurturing the "next-generation leaders" who will carve out the future of their country with their own hands.



Mostar Gymnasium



A Government Official Who Supported the Innovation of IT Education

"That project was groundbreaking," recalls the government official from that time. After the conflict, IT education had different curricula and textbooks for each school. The introduction of a common curriculum with Japan's support was the first case in any subject to succeed in standardizing textbooks across boundaries.

The impact of teachers learning together and building networks was immeasurable, even more so than the provision of the latest equipment. Students who grew up with this project are now active in innovation fields both at home and abroad. The fact that they will contribute to their home country through technology is also an important legacy of this project.

INTERVIEW

A Spirit of Mutual Help Nurtured by IT



In IT classes, students from different backgrounds help each other very naturally. You can see them cooperating and teaching one another as they work on common tasks, and we hear comments like, "I came to understand other kids in the IT class."

Japan's cooperation is not just about providing equipment. During a study visit to Japan, we were impressed by the student-centered learning style and the culture of cleaning, and we also learned the importance of respecting one another. Teachers brought these lessons back, and they are now being put into practice in schools across the country.

Now, many of our graduates are working as IT engineers both at home and abroad, and even outside the IT field, they are making use of the knowledge and digital skills they have learned.

An IT teacher at a model school for the Project on Informatics Curricula Modernization

INTERVIEW

Creating the Future with IT: The Power of Bonds with Friends to Change Society



The IT class at this school changed my future. Three years ago, I had no IT knowledge, but by learning here with my friends, I acquired skills and gained great confidence. At a recent nationwide app development competition, the app we developed to support children with speech difficulties made it to the top five. I was happy that we could create something useful for someone.

I feel that the IT class is the best training for creating tools to improve myself and my country. In the future, I want to contribute to the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the world.

A student at a model school for the Project on Informatics Curricula Modernization

Paving the Way for People's Lives and Futures: Towards a Landmine-Free Country



A former minefield after demining was completed, with a project official

After the conflict, an estimated one million landmines remained buried across Bosnia and Herzegovina, posing the greatest threat to the return of citizens and the country's reconstruction.

In response to this serious issue, Japan began full-scale support in 2000. Through the Project for Improvement of Demining Equipment, Japan updated aging equipment and contributed to ensuring the safety and enhancing the capacity of deminers by providing high-quality equipment such as four-wheel-drive vehicles and bulletproof vests. This support was provided equally to both the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska, and this neutral stance became the cornerstone of building trust with the citizens.

Japan's cooperation was not limited to a one-time provision of equipment; it has continued with long-term support, including demining assistance in 36 municipalities, mine risk education, and the dispatch of experts and training through Grant Assistance for Grass-roots Human Security Projects and the International Trust Fund. As a result of these long-term efforts, the number of landmine victims, which once reached 500 per year, has been drastically reduced to almost zero. The cleared land has been returned to the people as farmland and residential areas, and it has also become a foundation for the country's economic development, including infrastructure development and industrial revitalization. Although the goal of a landmine-free country is still a work in progress, Japan's support has been a steady step in paving the way for people's safety and the country's future.

Safe Land Nurtures Daily Life and Industry

"We are grateful for the vehicles and GPS provided by Japan. The GPS, which was state-of-the-art at the time, especially changed our activities significantly," says an official from the federal government agency responsible for demining. The cleared land becomes valuable farmland and also helps expand the area where firefighters can operate safely during forest fires.

For many families in Bosnia and Herzegovina, forests are a source of livelihood, providing fuel and other resources. Demining is also about enabling farmers to enter the forest safely to earn their living, directly contributing to their safety. Japan's support has protected not only people's lives but also their daily livelihoods and economic activities.

INTERVIEW

Fair Cooperation and Japan's Four-Wheel-Drive Vehicles Supported the Return to Hometowns

Demining activities were essential for displaced people to rebuild their lives, and I was also working in the field at that time. I still vividly remember the visit of Ms. Sadako Ogata* and the training in Japan. Japan's cooperation treated the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Srpska equally, and that fair stance was a great support.

What was particularly valued in the field were the pickup trucks provided by Japan. Minefields are full of rough roads, but the Japanese four-wheel-drive vehicles were durable and could go on any road. Without those vehicles, we wouldn't have been able to reach many sites.

*Former JICA President and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

An official who was engaged in demining activities in Republika Srpska for many years



Recovered unexploded shells and landmines

30 Years of Change in Numbers

Annual casualties due to landmines

511 (1996) ➡ 0 (2024)



Estimated number of residual landmines

3,000,000 (1997) ➡ 79,000 (2025)



Breaking the Chain of Pain, Toward Community-Rooted Medical Hope

The conflict destroyed Bosnia and Herzegovina's medical infrastructure, and care for those injured in the conflict and by landmines was an urgent task. Based on the philosophy of "human security," Japan has provided unwavering support since immediately after the conflict.

Immediately after the ceasefire, efforts focused on emergency reconstruction support, such as rebuilding destroyed clinics and providing equipment to major hospitals. At the same time, Japan supported the reconstruction of the rehabilitation system through both facilities/equipment and capacity development by establishing "Community-Based Rehabilitation Centers" nationwide. As reconstruction progressed, Japan responded to the need for more specialized care by launching the Comprehensive Pain Management Project, improving the quality of life for many patients suffering from chronic pain such as phantom limb pain. Around this time, efforts to strengthen the emergency medical system also began.

In recent years, in line with the country's development, Japan has supported the improvement of the quality of regional medical care by providing medical equipment such as ambulances and X-ray machines to over 200 clinics nationwide through Grant Assistance for Grass-roots Human Security Projects. It also swiftly delivered medical equipment as part of COVID-19 countermeasures.

From emergency rehabilitation to specialized pain care and the strengthening of regional medical services, Japan's cooperation has evolved with the progress of society. Underlying this is a commitment to protecting the life and dignity of every individual, without bias toward any ethnicity or region, which has led to the trust of the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina.



Equipment provided by Japan and a physical therapist

INTERVIEW

The Ambulance with the Japanese Flag, Connecting Lives

Our town is in a mountainous area, and swift patient transport was a challenge with our old vehicles. It was then that Japan donated a new four-wheel-drive ambulance. I can't count how many lives have been saved thanks to this ambulance. It ran nonstop during a COVID-19 outbreak and a major flood.

The ambulance has the Japanese flag on it, and everyone in the community knows it's from Japan's support. This is not just a vehicle; it's a symbol of the warm feelings of the Japanese people, and we will continue to use it with care.

A member of the ER team at a hospital that received an ambulance from Japan

The Foundation of Rehabilitation Built on Japanese Quality and Philosophy

Amid a shortage of rehabilitation facilities after the conflict, Japan constructed 17 "Community-Based Rehabilitation Centers" nationwide.

A government official at the time recalls, "The way the Japanese worked was a series of surprises." Experts thoroughly managed quality, for instance, by checking for unpainted spots on doors with a dental mirror. The introduction of slippers also improved the sanitary environment. When asked why they were so dedicated, a Japanese expert replied, "To contribute to world peace." The design and universal-design standards established at that time are still passed down as the "standard model" for new facilities today.

30 Years of Change in Numbers

Average life expectancy

70.19 years (1995) ➡ 77.85 years (2023)



Number of medical doctors

5,457 (2000) ➡ 8,645 (2019)





I like physical education and biology classes, and I'm interested in moving my body and learning about the mechanisms of life. I'm still searching for a specific dream for the future, but I have a strong desire to do something for this country. In particular, I want my generation to create attractive jobs that allow more young people to thrive. By the way, I love both traditional Japanese culture and popular culture, including anime!

A student at a primary school whose facility was supported by Japan

I love soccer, and I'm currently playing for three clubs, chasing the ball every day. I'm so happy to be able to practice on such a wonderful, well-maintained field.
I'm good at cooperating with my teammates to score goals. I want to continue playing my favorite sport, soccer, and get much, much better.



A child practicing at a sports facility supported by Japan



Last year, I became the junior European champion, and I'm still practicing judo every day. My dream is to win a gold medal at the Olympics and bring it back to my hometown of Mostar. And someday, I want to build a warm family and make my loved ones happy. My big goal is to bring pride to my hometown through sports while also building a happy life for myself.

A player from a dojo that participated in a judo training conducted by Japan

My dream is to become an actress. To make that dream come true, I'm not only studying acting but also focusing on learning English so I can be active internationally. I've now improved to the point where I can work as an interpreter. Once I succeed as an actress, I would love to visit Japan and experience its culture.



A student at a primary school whose facility was supported by Japan



Seeing my mother work as an accountant, I also want to become an accountant in the future and demonstrate my expertise in various fields. To achieve that dream, I am currently studying business management at university. Bosnia and Herzegovina is politically complex, and wages are still low. For that reason, I am also considering building my career in Germany after graduation. Many of my friends are also looking at working abroad in search of better opportunities.

A student at the University of Sarajevo, where Japan has provided various forms of support

I am studying finance at university. Since I like mathematics, I want to pursue a specialized job in the future that deals with numbers, such as a financial consultant or a banker. I really resonate with the Japanese business philosophy of emphasizing certainty in every detail rather than just pursuing efficiency. I believe that by paying attention to details, you can avoid overlooking important things. First, I plan to go to graduate school in Europe and test my potential abroad.



A student at the University of Sarajevo, where Japan has provided various forms of support

Insights and lessons learned

Japan's cooperation has consistently walked alongside Bosnia and Herzegovina's journey, from the post-conflict reconstruction period to its current stage of development. Its most significant feature is its inclusive cooperation, which is not biased toward any particular ethnicity or political group. The stance of centering on local needs and the bottom-up approach, where experts stay in the field for long periods to listen to residents' voices, have fostered deep trust among the people.

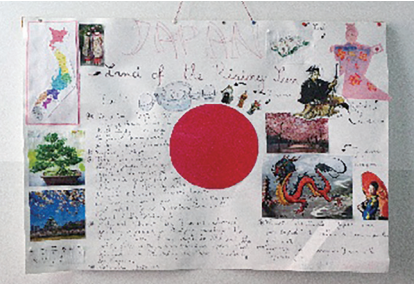
Moreover, Japan's support has not been limited to the provision of "goods" such as facilities and equipment but has emphasized the development of "people" and "systems," which are the foundation of a country's development. In addition to providing high-quality equipment, Japan has supported capacity building for local people to solve their own problems and pass on their knowledge and initiatives to the next generation. This has been achieved through analysis and planning based on data and field surveys, as well as practical technical cooperation and human resource development utilizing Japanese knowledge. This careful and professional approach has enhanced the sustainability of the aid outcomes.

The creation of "places" and "opportunities" where people can naturally collaborate has led to peacebuilding. Through the development of a common curriculum in the education sector and cooperative frameworks that generate common economic interests in the agriculture and tourism sectors, an environment has been formed where people can participate regardless of ethnicity or region. These initiatives have promoted mutual understanding and trust among people from different backgrounds, consequently contributing significantly to social stability and reconciliation.

To ensure that Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to develop sustainably, building on the trust established through past cooperation, it is still necessary to address social challenges such as nurturing the human resources who will shape the future and creating an attractive environment where young people can thrive within the country.

In future cooperation, it will be important to tackle these challenges while leveraging the stance of fairness and neutrality that has been cultivated, as well as the approach of nurturing people and systems.

As a partner for the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina to build their country's future with their own hands, Japan will continue to walk alongside them.



Works of an Ilije Jakovljevic elementary school student ▶

Expert comments



Mari Katayanagi

Professor, Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Hiroshima University

Professor, International Peace and Coexistence Program, Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Hiroshima University. Ph.D. in Law. Previous experience includes working for the UN PKO and the Embassy of Japan in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and serving as a political advisor at the Office of the High Representative in the country. Prior to joining Hiroshima University in 2014, also served as a Senior Research Fellow at the JICA Research Institute. Research interests cover various themes related to conflict transformation, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding

Many people in Bosnia and Herzegovina feel warmly toward Japan. One reason for this is the support Japan provided during and after the conflict. It is said that much of the humanitarian aid during the conflict consisted of expired food, and many people felt that donor countries were using humanitarian aid as a pretext to dispose of their inventory. However, I have heard from friends several times, "That wasn't the case with Japanese canned tuna. That was truly delicious." After the conflict, buses were provided to serve as transportation for citizens, contributing to their freedom of movement. Japan's ODA, which benefits many people through support for medical institutions, schools, and demining, is highly praised.

The people of Bosnia and Herzegovina express surprise and gratitude, wondering why Japan, a distant country with no particular political or religious ties, provides such generous support without imposing conditions. The strength of Japan's assistance lies not only in its appropriate content but also in the way people interact. The relationships that aid workers, including experts dispatched for long-term assignments, build with local people remain in people's memories for many years. The fact that donations were sent from the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina after the Great East Japan Earthquake is surely a result of such cumulative efforts.



Japan International Cooperation Agency JICA Balkan Office

 JICA Balkan

https://www.facebook.com/jicabalkanoffice/?locale=ja_JP

 Embassy of Japan in Bosnia and Herzegovina

https://www.bosnia.emb-japan.go.jp/itprtop_ja/index.html



Stari Most was reconstructed with the cooperation of UNESCO and various European countries