



Reaching the Nations

Country reports on the LDS Church around the world from a landmark almanac. Includes detailed analysis of history, context, culture, needs, challenges and opportunities for church growth.



Cyprus

Population: 1.17 millions (#161 out of countries)

By David Stewart and Matt Martinich

Geography

Area: 9,251 square km. Located in the eastern Mediterranean Sea, Cyprus is the third largest island in the Mediterranean after Sicily and Sardinia. The country remains politically divided between independent Cyprus and the de facto Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, the latter of which has an area of 3,355 square km. The climate is temperate with dry, hot summers and cool winters. The largest mountains are in the south, and a small mountain chain stretches along the northern coast line. Plains occupy the island's center and many coastal areas. Earthquakes and droughts are natural hazards; lack of fresh water, pollution and urbanization are environmental issues. Cyprus is divided into six administrative districts, three of which are entirely or partially occupied by Northern Cyprus.

Peoples

Greek: 77%

Turkish: 18%

Other: 5%

Greeks primarily populate government-controlled Cyprus, whereas Northern Cyprus is primarily Turkish. Half the Turkish population is indigenous, and half have settled since the 1974 Turkish invasion. Most other ethnic groups have recently immigrated or are migrant workers from the United Kingdom, China, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Poland, Russia, Nigeria, and the Middle East.

Population: 1,237,088(July 2018)

Annual Growth Rate: 1.27% (2018)

Fertility Rate: 1.47 children born per woman (2018)

Life Expectancy: 76.2 male, 81.9 female (2018)

Languages: Greek (72%), Turkish (19%), English (2%), other (7%). Greek is the official language, whereas Turkish is the de facto provincial language of Northern Cyprus. English is also widely spoken. Commonly spoken immigrant languages include Romania, Russian, Assyrian Neo-Aramaic, Bulgarian, and Tagalog. Only Greek has over one million speakers.

Literacy: 99.1% (2015)

History

People have settled Cyprus for millennia. Civilizations that ruled or settled Cyprus prior to the birth of Christ include the Hittites, Mycenaean Greeks, Phoenicians, Assyrians, Egyptians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans. The Hebrews referred to Cyprus as Kittim. The early Christian Church had connections to Cyprus, which served as a crossroads for apostles on missionary journeys throughout the eastern Mediterranean. The Byzantine Empire ruled Cyprus and suffered centuries of raids and attacks from Arabs between 500 and 1000 AD. Between 1000 and 1500 AD, various European groups, primarily the Venetians, controlled the island and attempted to supplant native culture. The Ottoman Empire controlled Cyprus between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries until Cyprus came under British rule in the late nineteenth century. Growing nationalism fueled an independence movement in the twentieth century that became realized in 1960. Following Cypriot independence, the United Kingdom retained sovereignty of two military bases. Greece almost took control of Cyprus in 1974, but the Turkish invasion quickly followed. Turkey annexed over a third of the island until a ceasefire was reached. At that time, 180,000 Greek Cypriots were forced from their homes in the north and fled to the south. Over 100,000 Turkish settlers came to Northern Cyprus prior to its declaration of independence in 1983. The sovereignty of Northern Cyprus is only recognized by Turkey. A "green zone" serves as a buffer between the two political entities. The border has become more porous over the years, but a political division between the de facto state and the rest of the country remains. In the last couple of decades, the economy has rapidly developed. Cyprus joined the EU in 2004. Part of the capital city of Nicosia, known locally as Lefkosia, is controlled by Northern Cyprus. Nicosia remains the world's last divided capital.

Culture

Cyprus has a rich and ancient history. Art, folk music, literature, cuisine, and sports each have proud national histories. Tourism has also strongly affected culture. Tobacco and alcohol consumption rates are high. Governments have facilitated travel between North Cyprus and the rest of Cyprus in the past decade. Identification must be shown to cross the border albeit no identification is required for Turkish Cypriots who visit religious sites if they submit these requests to the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus.[\[1\]](#)

Economy

GDP per capita: \$37,200 (2017) [62.2% of U.S.]

Human Development Index: 0.869 (2017)

Corruption Index: 57 (2017)

Cyprus has achieved marked economic growth during the past several decades largely due to tourism and good government policies. However, the country experienced a deep recession in the late 2000s and early 2010s which was influenced by the global financial crisis and exposure to Greek debt. As a result, Cyprus requested an economic bailout from the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund. Economic growth has resumed since the mid-2010s and the GDP grew by 3.9% in 2017. Services employ 81.0% of the workforce and produce 85.5% of the GDP. Industry accounts for 15.2% of the labor force and 12.5% of the GDP. Agricultural products include citrus, vegetables, barley, grapes, and olives. Primary industries include tourism, food processing, and cement and gypsum production. Greece, the United Kingdom, Germany, Libya, Italy, and China are the primary trade partners. Northern Cyprus had a GDP per capita of \$12,702 in 2017. Northern Cyprus has an economy heavily reliant on Turkey for trade and financing. Northern Cyprus also has larger industry and agriculture workforces by percentage than Cyprus.

Corruption in Cyprus is lower than many nearby nations albeit perceived corruption has slightly worsened in the past decade. Some drug trafficking of heroin and cocaine occurs as Cyprus is a transit point from Turkey and Lebanon to Europe. Susceptibility to money laundering remains a concern.

Faiths

Christian: 73%

Muslim: 24%

Buddhist: 1%

Other/unspecified: 2%

Christians

Denominations – Members – Congregations

Greek Orthodox Church of Cyprus – 748,770

Roman Catholic – 24,360

Evangelicals – 6,616

Maronite Catholic – 4,350

Armenian Orthodox – 2,520

Jehovah's Witnesses – 2,600 – 40

Latter-day Saints – 457 – 4

Seventh Day Adventists – 92 – 2

Religion

Christians are the largest religious group and include Greeks and other ethnic groups except for Turkish Cypriots. The 2011 census found that the population in government-controlled areas is 89.1% Greek Orthodox, 2.9% Roman Catholic, 2.0% Protestant, 1.8% Muslim, 1.0% Buddhist, 0.5% Maronite Catholic, and 0.3% Armenian Orthodox. There are approximately 3,000 Jews.^[2] However, a 2006 poll found that only 19% of Greek Cypriots attended church weekly, and over half attended only on holidays or rarely attended church services.^[3] The majority of the population in Northern Cyprus is Muslim (97%) but is very secular, and only 10% attended religious services regularly. Other religious groups in Northern Cyprus include the Church of Cyprus (330 members), Russian Orthodox Church (200 members), Anglicans (180 members), Bahai faith (150 members), Jews (150 members), Maronite Catholics (150 members), and Jehovah's Witnesses (40 members). There are approximately 300 Turkish-speaking Protestants in Northern Cyprus.^[4]

Religious Freedom

The constitution provides for religious freedom, which is upheld by the government. Abuses of religious freedom do occur in society and are reprimanded by government officials. According to the 1960 constitution, only the Autocephalous Greek Orthodox Church of Cyprus, Vakif (an organization for Muslim Turkish Cypriots), Maronite Catholics, Roman Catholics, and the Armenian Orthodox Churches are recognized and receive tax exemption. Religious groups not recognized may function in Cyprus but must register as a nonprofit organization in order to have financial engagements. Registered nonprofit organizations are tax exempted, and religious groups receive nonprofit approval quickly, but the application must be submitted through an attorney. Open proselytism in government control areas is permitted, and foreign missionaries must obtain residence permits.^[5] Public schools are mandated to teach students about the Greek Orthodox Church. Only students with non-Greek Cypriot parents can have this instruction waived. Religious groups are not required to register with the government in Northern Cyprus although registration as an association with the Ministry of the Interior is required to maintain a bank account. Abuses of religious freedom appear primarily perpetrated by government officials. Authorities in Northern Cyprus often restrict Christians' access to religious services and churches. Evangelical Christians complain of government surveillance. Northern Cyprus does not have laws barring proselytism, but missionary activity is rare and discouraged.^[6]

Largest Cities

Urban: 66.8% (2018)

Lemesos, Strovolos, Lefkosia (Nicosia), Larnaka, Lakatameia, **Famagusta***, Pafos, Kato Polemidia, **Girne***.

Cities listed in **bold** have no congregations of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Four of the ten largest cities have a Church congregation. Strovolos and Lakatameia are suburbs of Nicosia, whereas Kato

Polemidia is a suburb of Lemesos. Both Nicosia and Lemesos have Church congregations. Cities with an asterisk are in Northern Cyprus. Forty-two percent (42%) of the national population lives in the ten largest cities.

Church History

In 1962, the Church organized the first group for Latter-day Saint families serving in government. The Nicosia Branch was discontinued in 1969, reorganized in 1971, and discontinued in 1980. Following the dissolution of the International Mission in 1987, Cyprus fell under the jurisdiction of the Austria Vienna East Mission. At the time, there were no congregations or mission outreach.^[7] A branch was reestablished in Nicosia in 1989. Cyprus was assigned to the Greece Athens Mission in 1990 and the Europe/Mediterranean Area in 1991.^[8] Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin dedicated Cyprus for missionary work in September 1993. The Cyprus Branch president, branch members, and many Church leaders from the Europe/Mediterranean Area were in attendance. A fireside was held in Larnaca at the time of the dedication with fifty in attendance, including many interested investigators.^[9] In 2018, Cyprus was reassigned to the Adriatic South Mission.

Membership Growth

Church Membership: 457 (2017)

In late 1993, there were twenty-six members in the Cyprus Branch.^[10] Membership reached 110 at year-end 2000. Membership tripled during the 2000s, reaching 202 in 2003, 303 in 2007, and 386 in 2009. With the exception of 2003 and 2006, membership grew by over 10% annually. In 2007, nonnative membership came from nations including the Philippines, China, Sri Lanka, Mongolia, the United Kingdom, Nepal, Bangladesh, and the United States.^[11] In 2010, missionaries reported that most members in Nicosia were from China and other Asian nations. Stagnant growth occurred during most years in the 2010s. Membership reached 407 in 2011, 448 in 2014, and 457 in 2017. In 2018, local leaders noted a few Latter-day Saints who lived in Northern Cyprus and indicated efforts to hold meetings among these members, particularly those who are unable to cross the border into government-controlled areas.

In 2017, one in 2,673 was a Latter-day Saint.

Congregational Growth

Branches: 4 (2017)

In 1993, the Cyprus Branch served the entire island. Additional branches were organized in Limassol (1994) and Larnaca (1998). The Paphos Branch was created in 2005. In 2007, the first district was created, named the Nicosia Cyprus District. The district had four branches in Nicosia, Lemesos, Larkana, and Pafos.

Activity and Retention

Seventy members and missionaries gathered for the creation of the first district in 2007.^[12] In 2007, active membership stood at fifty to sixty in Nicosia, twenty-five to thirty in Lemesos, and less than ten in both Larnaka and Paphos. District conference attendance was 150 in late 2011. Approximately twenty members usually attended church in the Paphos Branch in late 2017. In 2018, missionaries reported approximately thirty who attended the Nicosia Branch and with as many as half of those who attended being investigators. At the time there were approximately twenty who attended church in the Limassol Branch. In the late 2010s, most investigators and new converts were Africans or Asians. However, missionaries reported significant diversity among investigator nationalities from many nations in Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Asia. In 2018, missionaries reported that essentially all active members spoke English and were not native Cypriots.

Active membership likely numbers between 80 and 100, or 20% of total church membership.

Language Materials

Languages with Latter-day Saint Scripture: Greek, Turkish, English.

All Latter-day Saint scriptures are available in Greek. Only the Book of Mormon has been translated into Turkish although plans were announced in 2017 to translate the remainder of Latter-day Saint scriptures into Turkish.^[13] Many unit, temple, priesthood, relief society, Sunday School, young women, primary, missionary, and family history materials are available in Greek and Turkish. The Liahona has one Greek issue a year. All scriptures and many church materials are also available in Chinese and some other Asian languages spoken by members.

Meetinghouses

There are no Church-built meetinghouses in Cyprus. Meetings occur in rented spaces or renovated buildings.

Humanitarian and Development Work

The Church in Cyprus has completed six humanitarian and development projects, including four community projects, one refugee response initiative, and one wheelchair donation event.[\[14\]](#)

Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects

Religious Freedom

No laws limit the Church's missionary program. Missionaries proselyte freely. The Church does not appear to have any difficulty obtaining residence permits for missionaries. Religious freedom is more restricted in Northern Cyprus where there are few Church members and no missionaries assigned.

Cultural Issues

Greater tolerance of religious minorities exists in Cyprus compared to Greece, yet social barriers dissuade many Greek Cypriots from learning about or joining the Church. Greek Cypriots who join the Church often face ostracism from family and the community as they are no longer considered Greek due to their identification with a non-Orthodox religious group. Nearly all active members are foreigners, which presents challenges for Cypriot natives to assimilate into congregations where they are a minority within their homeland. Intolerance of proselytism among Muslim Turkish Cypriots and continued disputes over the legal status of the Turkish-controlled North have left the population of Northern Cyprus unreached by mission efforts. High alcohol and cigarette present barriers to living Church standards.

National Outreach

Cyprus' small geographic size, highly urbanized population, and developed transportation systems provide opportunities for missionary work with fewer outreach centers. The Church has congregations and missionaries in cities that account for 30% of the national population. Four of the six administrative districts have a congregation; the remaining two are Kyrenia, which is entirely in Northern Cyprus—and Famagusta, with only a small portion in government controlled areas. The Church's presence is limited to only the largest cities.

Extending outreach into small cities and villages will be difficult and is highly unlikely until greater receptivity is manifest among Greek Cypriots. These communities have few foreigners and therefore missionary work would occur primarily among the Greek Cypriots. There are 192 villages with between 100 and 1,000 inhabitants and eighty-three villages or small cities between 1,000 and 10,000 inhabitants without Church congregations. The furthest urban locations from outreach centers in government-controlled territory are less than fifty miles away.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

Essentially all converts are non-Cypriots and are often living in Cyprus temporarily for employment. These members are more transient and challenge the Church's efforts to build self-sustaining local congregations when they return to their home countries or relocate elsewhere. Convert retention appears modest, as activity rates have declined over the past two decades. However, there are likely many inactive members on the rolls who have moved back to their home countries.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

Many converts from East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa have joined the Church, particularly in Nicosia. Missionaries report success in working among the large body of students at the university. Very few Greek and Turkish Cypriots have joined the Church. In the early 1990s, there were only three known Greek Cypriot members.

Language Issues

Few members speak Greek or Turkish as a native language. English is often spoken in Church meetings in Nicosia. Many of the members speak Greek, Turkish, or English as a second language. The diversity in cultures and languages challenges local

leadership in integrating members into the same congregations. Membership size is not large enough to justify the creation of language-specific congregations. Not all Latter-day Saint scriptures are currently available in Turkish.

Leadership

Local priesthood leaders were called to serve as branch presidents at the creation of the Cyprus district in 2007. At the time, branch presidents of two of the four branches (Nicosia and Larnaca) were expatriates of Nepal and England, respectively. The remaining two branches appear to have had missionaries serving as branch presidents.^[15] The Church has been successful in developing leadership among foreign converts, but it does not appear that Greek or Turkish Cypriots have held Church leadership positions. Furthermore, many of these leaders move away and do not provide long-term strength to the Church in Cyprus. In 2018, two branches appeared to have foreign members who served as branch presidents (Nicosia and Paphos), whereas two branches appeared to be led by full-time missionaries (Larnaca and Limassol).

Temple

Cyprus pertains to the Kyiv Ukraine Temple District. It is unclear whether the Nicosia Cyprus District regularly holds group trips to the temple given the small number of active members and long distances. Cyprus may be reassigned to the Rome Italy Temple once the temple is completed in 2019.

Comparative Growth

Cyprus is one of the most well-reached nations in the Eastern Mediterranean and is one of the closest nations with open proselytism to Israel and most of the Middle East. Stagnant membership growth rates in the 2010s and member activity rates have been comparable to most countries in Eastern Europe. The percentage of members in the population is comparable to Bulgaria and Italy albeit membership in Cyprus is almost entirely comprised of foreigners.

Most Christian groups have seen little membership and congregational growth in Cyprus. Jehovah's Witnesses appear the most successful nontraditional Christian denomination as Witnesses continue to report slow, albeit steady growth, in terms of the number of active members and congregations. As in Greece, Jehovah's Witnesses form the largest non-Orthodox or Catholic denomination in Cyprus. Jehovah's Witnesses have developed a Cypriot member base actively involved in proselytism and now maintain forty congregations with over 2,600 active members. Witnesses operate congregations in many languages in addition to Greek and English. Seventh-Day Adventists report fewer than one hundred members and operate only two congregations.

Future Prospects

Prospects for continued success with finding and baptizing converts among the nonnative population are high. However, the transient nature of most converts provides little to no long-term strength and growth to the Church in Cyprus. However, more congregations will likely have local leaders and become less dependent on foreign missionaries if foreign converts remain in the country for extended periods of time. Prospects for growth among the native population remain low as Greek and Turkish Cypriots continue to demonstrate indifference to the gospel message.

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- [4] "Cyprus," International Religious Freedom Report for 2017. Accessed 29 December 2018. <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2017&dliid=280894#wrapper>
- [5] "Cyprus," International Religious Freedom Report 2009, 26 October 2009. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127305.htm>
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- [7] Lloyd, Scott R. "New Seventy plays key role in thrilling events of the Church," LDS Church News, 18 May 1991. <http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/20889/New-Seventy-played-key-role-in-thrilling-events-of-the-Church.html>
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- [11] "First district on island of Cyprus created," LDS Church News, 3 November 2007. <http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/51289/First-district-on-island-of-Cyprus-created.html>
- [12] "First district on island of Cyprus created," LDS Church News, 3 November 2007. <http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/51289/First-district-on-island-of-Cyprus-created.html>
- [13] Approved Scripture Translation Projects. 9 October 2017. Lds.org. https://www.lds.org/bc/content/ldsorg/church/news/2017/10/09/15159_000_letter.pdf?lang=eng
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- [15] "First district on island of Cyprus created," LDS Church News, 3 November 2007. <http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/51289/First-district-on-island-of-Cyprus-created.html>