



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.



Portugal

Population: 10.81 millions (#80 out of countries)

By David Stewart and Matt Martinich

Geography

Area: 92,090 square km. Located in southwestern Europe, Portugal occupies most of the western coast of the Iberian Peninsula and borders Spain and the North Atlantic Ocean. Mountains dominate most central and northern areas, whereas plains and rolling hills cover southern areas. Temperate maritime climate occurs in most areas, with cooler, wetter weather in the north and warmer, drier conditions in the south. The Tagus River bisects Portugal and empties into the Atlantic Ocean at Lisbon. Earthquakes are natural hazards. Environmental issues include soil erosion and pollution. Portugal controls two island archipelagos, the Azores and Madeira, both of which are autonomous regions. Portugal proper is divided into eighteen administrative districts.

Peoples

Portuguese: 95%

Other: 5%

With the exception of recent immigrants, the population is homogeneously Portuguese. Immigrants numbered over 430,000 in 2007, with the most common countries of origin being Brazil (66,400), Cabo Verde (63,900), Ukraine (39,500), and Angola (32,700).^[1] Many recent immigrants come from Eastern Europe.

Population: 10,302,674 (July 2020)

Annual Growth Rate: -0.25% (2020)

Fertility Rate: 1.41 children born per woman (2020)

Life Expectancy: 77.9 male, 84.4 female (2020)

Languages: Portuguese (96%), other (4%). Portuguese is the official language. Common immigrant languages include Ukrainian, African languages, and Portuguese Creoles. Portuguese is the only language spoken by over one million people (10.2 million). Nearly three million speak English as a second language.

Literacy: 96.1% (2018)

History

One of the oldest European states, Portugal established its current political boundaries in 1249 AD. Leon-Castile ruled much of Portugal until a rebellion in the mid-twelfth century established a monarchy under Afonso I and gained territory southward from the Moors. Portugal reached its height of power and influence during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and dominated the seas in many areas. Portuguese-ruled territories stretched around the world and included Angola, Brazil, Cabo Verde Verde, Goa, East Timor, Guinea-Bissau, Macau, Mozambique, and Sao Tome. Several events led to the loss of most of the wealth and power accrued during the centuries of expansion, trade, and prosperity, including the 1755 earthquake in Lisbon, the Napoleonic Wars in the early nineteenth century, and the independence of Brazil in 1822. A republic was established in 1910 but was marked by economic instability and little progress.^[2] Portugal was neutral in World War II, joined NATO at its inception in 1949, and joined the European Community (European Union) in 1986. A military coup overthrew the government in 1974 and paved the way for the independence of its African colonies in 1975. Far-reaching democratic reforms were enacted by the new government. Portugal continues to be among the most progressive European nations.

Culture

The Roman Catholic Church has historically been a major cultural force, but its influence has waned in recent years as a result of increasing secularism. With a rich history of worldwide exploration and trade, Portugal greatly contributed to European expansion and understanding of the world. Architecture, music, art, and sports are proud local traditions. Common Mediterranean foods are represented in Portuguese cuisine, which places a strong emphasis on meat dishes. Soccer is the most popular sport. In 2010, Portugal became one of the few nations to legalize same-sex marriage. Cigarette consumption rates are moderate and alcohol consumption rates are high compared to the world average.

Economy

GDP per capita: \$30,500 (2017) [51.0% of U.S.]

Human Development Index: 0.850 (2018)

Corruption Index: 62 (2019)

Portugal achieved greater development and diversification of the economy following admittance to the European Community in 1986. In recent years, Portugal has struggled to attract greater foreign investment. Unemployment reached a record high in late 2009 at over 10% and slightly decreased to 8.9% in 2017. Services employ 67.5% of the work force and generate 75.7% of the GDP. Industry accounts for 23.9% of the work force and generates 22.1% of the GDP. Major industries include textiles, footwear, wood products, food products, shipbuilding, and tourism. Agriculture accounts for less than 10% of the work force and 2.2% of the GDP. Primary agricultural goods include grain, potatoes, tomatoes, olives, grapes, livestock, and fish. Spain, Germany, and France are the largest trade partners.

Despite being a long-term member of the European Union and NATO, corruption is perceived as more widespread than most Western European nations. The level of perceived corruption has not noticeably changed in the past decade. Portugal is a major crossroads for drug trafficking from Latin America, Asia, and Africa to Europe.

Faiths

Christian: 94.7%

Other: 5.3%

Christians

Denominations – Members – Congregations

Catholic – 9,860,000

Evangelicals – 318,868

Eastern Orthodox – 56,000

Jehovah's Witnesses – 49,692 – 652

Latter-day Saints – 45,576 – 67

Seventh Day Adventists – 9,611 – 115

Religion

Over 80% of the population over age twelve identify as Catholic, but many do not actively attend worship meetings or practice their faith. Non-Catholic Christians and other religious groups constitute less than 5% of the population and often comprise non-Portuguese, such as Africans and Eastern Europeans.[\[3\]](#) There are an estimated 50,000 Muslims and 3,000 Jews.[\[4\]](#)

Religious Freedom

The constitution protects religious freedom, which is upheld by the government. The law protects religious freedom from its abuse by the government or the public. There is no state religion. Non-Catholic Christian denominations with a presence in Portugal for over thirty years and internationally recognized for sixty years were able to receive benefits from the government previously reserved only for the Roman Catholic Church under the 2001 Religious Freedom Act. Not all aspects of the act had been enacted by the government as of 2009. Religious education in public schools is optional and is not limited to Catholicism. There have been no recent reports of abuse of religious freedom in Portugal although there has been some controversy about Muslim women wearing religious clothing in public.[\[5\]](#)

Largest Cities

Urban: 66.3%

Lisbon, Vila Nova de Gaia, Porto, Amadora, Matosinhos, Braga, Maia, Odivelas, Guimarães, Almada, Santa Maria de Feira, Coimbra, Funchal, Queluz.

All fourteen of the cities with over 100,000 inhabitants are within five kilometers of a congregation of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Twenty-four percent (24%) of the national population resides in the fourteen largest cities.

Latter-day Saint History

The Church in the Azores organized a servicemen's group in 1958 and the first branch in 1967. The first convert baptism within the country of Portugal was in the Azores.^[6] In 1974, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints investigated conditions in Portugal to determine whether missionaries could be assigned. Government officials immediately granted permission for the Church to enter the country, and the first mission was established later that year in Lisbon.^[7] President Thomas S. Monson dedicated Portugal for missionary work in April 1975.^[8] Seminary and institute began in the 1970s. The Church opened a second mission in Porto in 1987. In 1988, the Church created the Spain Las Palmas Mission, which included the Canary Islands and Madeira.^[9] A third mission, the Portugal Lisbon North Mission, opened in 1990. In 1991, Portugal was assigned to the Europe/Mediterranean Area.^[10] The Portugal Lisbon South Mission administered the Cape Verde Islands from the early 1990s until Cape Verde was dedicated for missionary work in 2002,^[11] and the Cape Verde Mission was organized in the same year. That same year, the number of missions in Lisbon was reduced from two to one. In 1998, the Mormon Tabernacle Choir performed the last concert of its European tour in Portugal.^[12] In 2000, Portugal was assigned to the Europe West Area.^[13] Two missions were headquartered in Lisbon and Porto between 2002 and 2011 until they were consolidated into a single mission based in Lisbon. In 2015, the Church reopened the Portugal Porto Mission but then consolidated the mission again with the Portugal Lisbon Mission in 2018. Church apostle Elder David A. Bednar visited members in Portugal in 2016.^[14] In 2019, the President of Portugal toured the Lisbon Portugal Temple during the temple open house.^[15]

Membership Growth

Church Membership: 45,576 (2019)

In July 1975, there were one hundred Latter-day Saints, and by 1978 membership reached 1,000. Membership continued to grow rapidly, reaching 5,000 by mid-1984 and 11,000 at year-end 1987.^[16] In 1988, there were 2,800 members in the Portugal Porto Mission.^[17] That same year, missionaries were baptizing 500 converts per month throughout Portugal, over half of whom were joining the church in the three stakes operating at the time. In 1990, there were 7,500 members in the Portugal Lisbon South Mission and 5,200 members in the Portugal Lisbon North Mission.^[18] There were 31,000 members by year-end 1991, and membership growth slowed dramatically thereafter. Church membership reached 34,000 in 1995 and 35,146 in 2000.

Membership grew slowly in the 2000s, but with the exception of 2007, membership has increased every year over the past decade. Membership numbered 35,146 in 2000, 37,170 in 2003, 37,812 in 2005, and 38,188 in 2008. Annual membership growth rates ranged from 0%–2% during this period. In the 2010s, membership growth rates accelerated in the early 2010s to 2-3% per year. In 2010, missionaries reported that the Portugal Lisbon Mission was among the highest baptizing missions in the Europe Area, with forty-seven convert baptisms in February, sixty-one convert baptisms in June, and fifty convert baptisms in August. During his visit to Portugal in 2014, Church apostle Elder Quentin L. Cook reported that the number of convert baptisms in Portugal exceeded 1,000 during the year 2014.^[19] However, annual membership growth rates retreated to 0.7-1.6% thereafter. Church membership reached 39,031 in 2010, 43,240 in 2015, and 45,576 in 2019.

In 2019, one in 227 was nominally a Latter-day Saint.

Congregational Growth

Wards: 32 Branches: 35 Groups: 4+ (May 2020)

The first stake was organized in Lisbon in 1981. Additional stakes were created in Porto (1986), Setubal (1987), and Porto North

(1989). In 1988, there were four districts,^[20] three of which were in Coimbra, Sao Joao de Madeira, and Vila Real.^[21] In 1989, Church created the Oeiras Portugal Stake with seven wards and three branches.^[22] In 1990, there were two stakes and three districts in each of the two missions headquartered in Lisbon.^[23] The Santarem Portugal District was organized in 1991. In 2002, the Coimbra Portugal District became a stake with six wards and three branches.^[24] In the early and mid-2000s, districts were discontinued in Beja, Castelo Branco, and Vila Real. In 2010, there were six stakes and four districts. The number of stakes and districts in Portugal was unchanged throughout the 2010s.

There were sixty-five congregations in 1987 (sixteen wards, forty-nine branches). In 1991, there were 118 congregations in Portugal, including twenty-four wards. For the rest of the 1990s, branches were systematically consolidated, falling from a high of ninety-four in 1991 to seventy-seven by year-end 1999. In 2000, there were eighty-seven congregations, including twenty-eight wards. The number of total congregations declined in the 2000s to eighty-two in 2003, seventy-seven in 2006, and sixty-eight in 2009. In 2004, the number of wards and branches numbered thirty-five and forty-five, respectively. By year-end 2009, the number of wards declined by two and the number of branches declined by ten. In 2010, there was one mission branch in Vila Real. In the 2010s, the number of congregations increased to seventy-four in 2014 (thirty-one wards, forty-three branches). However, the number of congregations decreased to sixty-six in 2018 (thirty-one wards, thirty-five branches). Congregations closed in the 2010s include the Lisboa 2nd Ward (2011), Lisboa 4th Ward (2011), Ermesinde Branch (2014), Lajes Military Branch (2014), Funchal 2nd Branch (2016), Machico Branch (2016), Viseu 2nd Ward (2017), Camara de Lobos Branch (2017), Tavira Branch (2017), Miratejo Ward (2017), Praia da Vitória Branch (2018), and the Figueira da Foz Branch (2018). Congregations that were organized in the 2010s included the Tejo Ward (2011), Bragança Branch (2013), Lagos Branch (2013), Mirandela Branch (2013), Barreira 2nd Branch (2013), Vila Franca de Xira Branch (2014), Chaves Branch (2014), Peniche Branch (2014), Camara de Lobos Branch (2014), and the Queluz Ward (2019). Groups have operated in several areas on mainland Portugal and in the Azores.

Activity and Retention

Member activity rates in Portugal appeared highest in the late 1980s and have dropped dramatically since. In 1988, over 650 Portuguese church leaders assembled for priesthood leadership training in Porto.^[25] During the period of rapid membership growth in the late 1980s and early 1990s, mission leadership noted the major challenges retaining the large numbers of converts baptized during this period as some stakes baptized over 120 converts a month.^[26] In 2004, nearly 8,000 from Portugal and Spain attended a special meeting with President Hinckley in Madrid.^[27] Four hundred seventy were enrolled in seminary and institute during the 2008–2009 school year. Little progress reactivating less active members and improving convert retention rates occurred in the 2000s as nearly twenty congregations were consolidated. The average number of members per congregation rose from 219 in 1989 to 336 in 1999, 566 in 2009, and 680 in 2019.

In April 2010, the Ponta Delgada Branch in the Azores had sixty-five attending church regularly. In March 2010, one of the wards in the Oeiras area had over eighty attending church. In early 2010, the Praia da Vitória Branch in the Azores had fewer than twenty active members and 120 inactive members but after several months of reactivation and proselytism efforts, thirty-five were attending church regularly. Seventy attended the Loulé Branch in mid-2010.

In September 2010, missionaries reported that the Portugal Lisbon Mission had the third highest short-term convert retention rates in the Europe Area, although overall member activity rates remain very low, and it remains to be seen how recent convert retention rates will hold up over time. In 2010, missionaries in the Portugal Lisbon Mission reported that at least six active priesthood holders were required to create a branch in an area.

Very low member activity rates persisted in the 2010s which appeared largely the byproduct of quick-baptism tactics during the 1980s when membership growth rates were most rapid. Returned missionaries noted that most wards had between fifty and 130 active members in the mid and late 2010s, whereas the number of active members in branches widely varied from as high as eighty to as few as five. On average, branches in Portugal usually had approximately fifty active members in the 2010s. In the late 2010s, the Açores Portugal District had 1,600 members on the records of whom only 110 were active (6.9%).^[28] However, many of the members on the district records for the three branches had appeared to have moved or passed away. For example, an audit of the membership records of the São Miguel branch cut the number of members from over 700 to slightly more than 200.^[29] In the 2010s, returned missionaries estimated that approximately half of new converts remained active at Church one year after baptism. The Church generally baptized between 500 and 1,000 new converts annually in Portugal during the 2010s. Total active membership is estimated at approximately 5,000, or 11% of total Church membership.

Language Materials

Languages with Latter-day Saint Scripture: Portuguese, English, Ukrainian.

All Church scriptures and most church materials are translated into Portuguese and Ukrainian. The Liahona has twelve issues a year in Portuguese and Ukrainian. In recent years, General Conference has been translated into both Portugal-spoken Portuguese and Brazilian-spoken Portuguese.

Meetinghouses

The first chapel was built in Portimao, southern Portugal.^[30] In 2010, there were nearly seventy meetinghouses in Portugal. Most congregations meet in Church-built meetinghouses. Smaller branches often meet in rented spaces or renovated buildings.

Humanitarian and Development Work

Due to economic growth and prosperity over the past several decades, the Church has not completed many large humanitarian or development work projects. Only eleven humanitarian or development projects were completed by the Church in Portugal between 1985 and the late 2010s—most of which were emergency response efforts.^[31] Local members have participated in service projects in their communities. In 2004, the Church conducted a Helping Hands activity in which 1,300 volunteers cleaned and repaired picnic areas in city parks.^[32] A second activity occurred later that year with 1,500 volunteers donating 7,000 hours of labor.^[33] Church President Thomas S. Monson announced in General Conference in April 2010 that humanitarian work had occurred in Portugal in the previous three months.^[34]

Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects

Religious Freedom

The Church experiences no restrictions regarding proselytism or assembly. Foreign missionaries do not appear to experience difficulty obtaining visas to serve in Portugal. Little religious discrimination and persecution of nontraditional Christian groups provides a positive environment for Latter-day Saint missionary efforts.

Cultural Issues

Developing a habit of weekly church attendance among investigators and converts appears to be a major challenge. Many less active Latter-day Saints appear to have been nominally Catholic and have never been religiously active. Increasing secularism may be responsible for the dramatic drop in membership growth that began in the early 1990s. Nevertheless, Portuguese continue to remain more receptive to Latter-day Saint missionary efforts than many other secular nations in Western or Southern Europe. Returned missionaries have consistently indicated that strong traditional ties to Catholicism is one of the biggest barriers for missionary work among most of the population in Portugal. Widespread use of tobacco cigarettes, alcohol, and coffee also pose challenges for investigators to completely abstain from these substances prior to baptism and to avoid relapses with these substances after baptism. Misinformation or a lack of information about Latter-day Saints also poses challenges for receptivity.

National Outreach

Portugal is one of the most well reached countries in Europe by the Church. Forty-four percent (44%) of the national population resides in a city with a mission outreach center or in a city with over 20,000 inhabitants within five kilometers of a ward or branch. In 2010, the Church had missionaries assigned to some cities without wards or branches, such as Lagos and Vila Franca de Xira. The percentage of the population reached nationwide may be as high as 60% given that many live within 10 kilometers of a Church meetinghouse. Guarda and Portalegre are the only administrative districts without a ward or branch, but these districts number among the four least populated districts in the country and together comprise less than three percent of the national population. Lisbon and southern Portugal are the most well-reached by the Church in terms of the geographical distribution of meetinghouses and the percentage of Latter-day Saints in the population (perhaps as high as 0.50% in Lisbon and some areas of Faro District), whereas Porto and northern Portugal appear the least reached by the Church among districts with a Church presence. There are many small cities on the outskirts of Porto without a congregation that appear favorable for future efforts to establish congregations.

The consolidation of scores of congregations over the past three decades has reduced national outreach capabilities. Dozens of cities are within ten kilometers of a neighboring city with a mission outreach center and today receive periodic visits from missionaries, but in the past, many of these cities had their own branches. There are thirty-three cities between 20,000 and 60,000 inhabitants that are more than ten kilometers from the nearest mission outreach center, amounting to 11% of the national population. Of these thirty-three, eight had a Latter-day Saint congregations discontinued in the past two decades. Missionaries appear to be assigned to some of these cities and either assist bringing members and investigators to a neighboring city or hold group meetings. Rural populations have a greater potential to be reached by the Church than many other nations due to the small geographic size of Portugal and developed transportation infrastructure. The most densely populated rural areas are along the coast between Lisbon and the Spanish border in the north. The consolidation of missions in Portugal has not directly reduced the Church's outreach capabilities and the closing of missions appears initiated due to modest receptivity, limited missionary manpower worldwide, and reduced emphasis on full-time missionaries for administrative duties.

The Church maintains an Internet site for Portugal at <http://www.igreja-jesus-cristo.pt/>. In addition to Portuguese-language information about Church beliefs and practices, a meetinghouse locator and local news are also provided. A Facebook group created by the Church for Portugal is another form of Internet outreach through social networking. Use of the website in lesser reached areas may improve national outreach and increase the number of self-referrals to missionaries.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

The majority of Church membership appeared to join the church in Portugal between 1985 and 1995. Unfortunately, this period of the most rapid numerical membership growth was characterized by mission policies promoting the rushed baptism of investigators with little pre-baptismal teaching in order to meet arbitrary baptismal goals or quotas, typically before investigators had firmly established regular church attendance and other gospel habits, and in many cases, before overcoming substance addictions or other prohibited behaviors. As a result, this period saw a large increase in nominal membership but very little increase in active, participating membership or the strength of the Church. Years of intensive ongoing efforts to reclaim inactive or disengaged members, many of whom appear not to have met scriptural requirements for baptism in the first place, have achieved few results and continue to strain limited congregational and mission resources. Steady numbers of convert baptisms in the 2010s, who also have appeared to have higher activity rates than converts baptized in previous decades, has appeared to help strengthen existent congregations in many areas, but there has been no net change in the number of congregations in Portugal within the past decade even though Church membership has increased by 7,000. Thus, the Church in Portugal continues to struggle with significant member inactivity problems.

Large numbers of converts baptized today are Africans, Latin Americans, and youth, who present challenges for retention and long-term growth due to often transient lifestyles. Reactivation programs require creativity and coordination between missionaries and local members. In 1998, the Church ran a sixteen-episode televised series that assisted reactivation efforts and helped find new investigators.^[35] Perhaps the most important factor to improve real long-term growth in active membership will be mission policies requiring that prospective converts firmly establish basic gospel habits necessary to sustain a testimony and promote ongoing church activity as requirements for baptism.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

Missionaries frequently teach and baptize immigrants from Portuguese-speaking African nations, such as Angola, Mozambique,

Cape Verde, and Sao Tome and Principe, and Brazil. There do not appear to be any major challenge for these ethnic groups to assimilate in Portuguese congregations.

Language Issues

Church materials are translated in the native language of at least 97% of the population. Non-Portuguese church materials appear to be rarely used, as missionaries work primarily among Portuguese speakers from Brazil, Africa, and Portugal. Few language issues have been encountered. In 2010, the only non-Portuguese-speaking congregation was an English-speaking branch in the Azores for U.S. military personnel in Lajes. However, this branch had closed in 2014, and since then only Portuguese-speaking congregations have functioned in the country.

Missionary Service

In the late 1980s, some stakes and districts had as many as twenty members serving full-time missions.^[36] In 1988, the first member from the Madeira Islands was called to serve a full-time mission.^[37] By 1990, local members constituted 20% of the full-time missionary force.^[38]

The Church sent twenty new missionaries to the Portugal Lisbon Mission in September 2010, as the mission was the highest baptizing mission in Europe at the time. The Portugal Lisbon Mission had eighty-eight missionaries serving in mid-2010. Fourteen missionaries served in the Azores, including eight on the island of Sao Miguel. Once self-sufficient in staffing its missionary needs, Portugal has potential to assist in missionary work in Portuguese-speaking African nations that are currently underserved, such as Angola.

Leadership

Local members led all but a couple small branches, but in limited numbers. Church employees have served regularly in leadership positions, likely due to insufficient numbers of other capable and willing potential leaders. However, in the 2010s there were no Church employees among reorganized stake presidencies, suggesting some improvements with local leadership development. A lack of active, full-tithe paying adult male members who hold the Melchizedek Priesthood, combined with low member activity rates among general Church membership, has delayed the creation of a stake in the Faro District for many years. As of early 2020, only one district functioned in the Faro District. Several Portuguese members have served in international leadership positions. In 1990, former regional representative and stake president Vitor Manuel Pereira Martins from Lisbon began presiding over the Portugal Lisbon North Mission.^[39] In 1996, Jose A. Teixeira from Lisbon was called as an Area Authority.^[40] In 2004, A. Venancio Caleira from Setubal was called as an Area Authority Seventy.^[41] In 2005, Jose A. Teixeira was called to preside over the Brazil Sao Paulo South Mission.^[42] In 2008, Fernando A. R. Da Rocha from Seixal was called as an Area Seventy,^[43] and Elder Jose A. Teixeira was called as a General Authority Seventy to the First Quorum of the Seventy.^[44] In 2009, Joaquim Jorge Oliveira Moreira from Sao Joao da Madeira was called as a mission president^[45] for the Brazil Teresina Mission. In 2018, Calisto Martins Coelho from Amadora was called as the first president of the Lisbon Portugal Temple.^[46]

Temple

The Church dedicated the Lisbon Portugal Temple in 2019 to service members who live in Portugal, the Azores, Madeira, and Cabo Verde. Missionaries have postulated that Portugal remained without a Latter-day Saint temple for so many years due to few active priesthood holders. For example, several European nations with much smaller church memberships have had temples for many years, like Denmark, Finland, and Switzerland. Overall, low member activity rates appeared to be the primary factor in the delayed announcement of a temple until October 2010.

Comparative Growth

The problematic period of rushed baptisms with little, if any, discernible standards from 1985 to 1995 has given Portugal the dubious distinction of being one of the countries with the lowest member activity rates in the world, in a church with member activity rates that are already much lower than those of Jehovah's Witnesses or Seventh-Day Adventists. By 1997, Portugal had the second most Latter-day Saints in continental Europe at 34,000 members, just 2,000 less than Germany,^[47] although Portuguese membership has supported far fewer congregations. Portugal appears to have one of the lowest member activity rates in Europe, as no other European nation has as many members per congregation on average (680). Switzerland supports thirty-six Latter-day Saints congregations with approximately 9,000 members nationwide, whereas Portugal has nearly five times as many members but just sixty-eight congregations. The Church in Germany operated 150 congregations and fourteen stakes in 2019, nearly double of what the Church operates in Portugal, yet the Church in Germany reported only 39,724 members in 2019—approximately 5,000 less than the Church in Portugal. Only 1% of Latter-day Saints were enrolled in seminary or institute in 2008–2009 in Portugal, one of the lowest percentages in the world. Portugal has the highest percentage of nominal Latter-day Saint membership in the population of any European nation (0.44%), slightly more than the United Kingdom and three times the percentage of neighboring Spain.

Other mission-oriented Christian groups experienced rapid membership growth in the 1980s and 1990s, but since 2000 growth rates have declined. Seventh-Day Adventists achieved slow growth in membership during the 2000s but steady growth in the number of congregations. However, Adventists reported no measurable growth in the number of congregations or members during the 2010s although Adventists operate nearly twice as many congregations in Portugal than Latter-day Saints. Jehovah's Witnesses have reported no significant increase in the number of active members or congregations within the past decade. However, Witnesses maintain ten times the number of congregations in Portugal than Latter-day Saints. Evangelicals report moderate rates of growth. Missionary-oriented Christian groups appear to have strong local leadership, which has increased efficiency and national outreach capabilities. These groups also do not rush converts into baptism and wait until regular church attendance habits have been developed, promoting more sustained, real growth and greater correlation between official membership numbers and active membership.

Future Prospects

Portugal continues to present a receptive population to Latter-day Saint missionary efforts in comparison to other European countries as evidenced by generally 500-1,000 new converts baptized a year in only one mission. However, poor convert retention and low member activity accumulating over the past several decades have presented major concerns and have contributed to the closure of many branches and difficulties for districts to mature into stakes. Rejection of past rush-baptize tactics and rebuilding of mission policies based on scriptural mandates and the need for converts to firmly establish basic gospel habits prior to baptism will be key to the Church's long-term efforts to experience real growth and develop a stable, self-sustaining and self-perpetuating local membership.

Reestablishing a Church presence in cities that formerly had mission outreach centers will be vital to expanding nation outreach in Portugal, and this has already begun to occur within the past decade with some sustained success as most of these branches have continued to operate for many years now with local branch presidents. However, congregation consolidations have continued to occur, particularly in the largest cities. Youth involvement in church education programs like seminary, institute, family history and temple work, and missionary preparation classes may ensure greater convert retention and member activity, in addition to increasing the size of the local missionary force.

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