Reaching the Nations International Church Growth Almanac

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

Montenegro

Population: 0.65 millions (#169 out of countries)

By David Stewart and Matt Martinich

Geography

Area: 13,812 square km. Geographically the second smallest former Yugoslav republic, Montenegro borders Serbia, Kosovo, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Adriatic Sea. Rugged mountains cover most the terrain, which includes some of the highest peaks in the region. Close proximity to the ocean creates a Mediterranean climate for most areas, with dry, hot summers and snowy, cold winters. Major water features include Lake Scutari, which straddles the Albanian border and several rivers that flow northward, such as the Piva, Tara, and Lim. Earthquakes are natural hazards, and water pollution in coastal areas is an environmental concern. Montenegro is divided into twenty-three administrative municipalities.

Population: 642,550 (July 2017)

Annual Growth Rate: -0.28% (2017)

Fertility Rate: 1.66 (2010)

Life Expectancy: 74.3 (2010)

Peoples

Montenegrin: 45%

Serbian: 29%

Bosniak: 9%

Albanian: 5%

Muslim: 3%

Romani: 1%

Croat: 1%

Other: 2%

Unspecified: 5%

Montenegrins are a South Slavic ethnic group with close ties to Serbs but claim a separate cultural identity. Montenegrins primarily populate central and southern areas of the country. Serbs consist of Montenegro natives who identify as Serbs or Serbs who arrived over the past several centuries from Serbia. Serbs populate northern, central, and coastal areas. Bosniaks reside in the extreme northeast whereas Albanians populate several border regions along the Kosovo and Albanian borders. Other ethnicities include ethnic Muslims, Croats and Roma.

Languages: Serbian (42.9%), Montenegrin (37.0%), Bosnian (5.3%), Albanian (5.3%), Serbo-Croat (2.0%), other (3.5%), unspecified (4.0%). The official language is Montenegrin, a Serbo-Croatian dialect that is mutually intelligible with Bosnian, Serbian, and Croatian. The government has pushed for the development of a separate Montenegrin language, which has included the introduction of new letters in the alphabet and the use of a modified Latin script as opposed to the Cyrillic used by Serbian.[1] These language issues appear primarily intended to establish a more unique culture and national identity separate from Serbia.

Literacy: 98.7% (2015)

History

The name Montenegro first came into use in the fifteenth century as a Venetian term meaning “black mountain” based on the Southern Slavic designation Crna Gora of the same meaning. Unlike much of the Balkans and Southeastern Europe, Montenegro was an independent state between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries governed by bishop princes until 1852 when a secular government was established. The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, which later became Yugoslavia, absorbed Montenegro following World War I. Upon the independence of many of the Yugoslav republics in the early 1990s, Montenegro maintained ties with Serbia and remained unified under the name Yugoslavia until 2003 when the nation changed its status between the two political entities and was renamed Serbia and Montenegro. During the Milosevic era, relations with Serbia were strained, and Montenegro established separate economic jurisdiction. In 2006, Montenegro voted for independence from Serbia, which occurred in June 2006. Montenegro joined NATO in 2017 and is currently completing the accession process for EU membership.

Culture

Due to its geographic location between Central and Southeastern Europe and access to the Adriatic Sea, Montenegro has historically received strong cultural influences from the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires as well as seafaring merchant states such as Venice. Podgorica is an important Montenegrin cultural center. Cuisine consists of Mediterranean dishes. Many Western European and American sports are popular.

Economy

GDP per capita: $17,400 (2017) [29.2% of U.S.]

Human Development Index: 0.807

Corruption Index: 46 (2017)

In addition to limited economic development and infrastructure, Montenegro’s small size and population make it sensitive to the economic climate of the region. Unemployment, which was 17.1% in 2016, remains a concern for European Union membership. Aluminum exports, hydroelectric power, and tourism are important sectors of the economy. Seventy-seven percent (77%) of the workforce labors in services, whereas 18% are employed in industry. Agriculture employs 5% of the population; products include tobacco, potatoes, fruit, olives, and sheep.

Perceived corruption rates compare to former Yugoslav republics and European Union member nations in Southeastern Europe such as Greece and Bulgaria. Issues that have perpetuated corruption and prevented its reduction include the lack of anti-corruption legislation, organized crime, and alleged corruption ties to some political figures.

Faiths

Christian: 75.5%

Muslim: 19.1%

Other: 1.5%

Unspecified: 2.7%

Atheist: 1.2%

Christians

Denominations Members Congregations

Orthodox – 463,279

Catholic – 21,847

Jehovah's Witnesses – 271 – 5

Seventh-Day Adventists – 238 – 5

Latter-day Saints – 19 – 1

Religion

Most Montenegrins are Orthodox and form the majority in all administrative municipalities except for a few municipalities along the eastern and southern borders. Orthodox denominations include Montenegrin Orthodox and Serbian Orthodox. Muslims constitute the majority in extreme northeastern areas and in patches along the Kosovo and Albanian borders. Most inhabitants between Podgorica and Albania are Catholic.

Religious Freedom

The constitution protects religious freedom, which is upheld by the government and local laws. Abuse of religious freedom is not tolerated. There is no state religion, and the government observes Orthodox Christmas and Easter. Religious communities must register with the local police within fifteen days of arrival. Societal instances of abuse of religious freedom have been sparse and mainly connected to disputes between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Montenegrin Orthodox Church regarding the ownership and operation of Orthodox sites.[2]

Largest Cities

Urban: 60%

Podgorica, **Nikši?, Pljevlja, Cetinje, Bar, Budva, Bijelo Polje, Berane, Herceg Novi, Ulcinj.**

Cities listed in **bold** do not have an LDS congregation.

One of the ten largest cities has an LDS congregation. Fifty-one percent (51%) of the national population lives in the ten largest cities.

LDS History

In 2000, Montenegro was assigned to the Europe East Area. Sometime in the 2000s, Montenegro was transferred to the Europe

Area. Montenegro pertained to the Slovenia Ljubljana Mission until May 2010 when reassigned to the Europe Area Presidency. In early 2012, the Church assigned Montenegro to the Albania-based Adriatic South Mission and assigned the first senior and young proselytizing missionaries to Podgorica. Montenegro was later reassigned to the Croatia-based Adriatic North Mission in mid-2013. There were four young full-time missionaries and one senior missionary couple assigned to Montenegro as of 2016.

Membership Growth

LDS Membership: 19 (2017)

Missionaries serving in the late 2000s reported that at least one active member in Montenegro traveled to Serbia for Church meetings. In early 2012, only one nonnative Latter-day Saint family appeared to live in the country. The first two convert baptisms occurred in 2012. Church membership totaled six in 2014, 17 in 2015, and 23 in 2016. One in 33,818 was LDS as of 2017.

Congregational Growth

Branches: 1 (2017)

In May 2010, the Church organized the Montenegro Branch, an administrative branch under the Europe Area. The few members in Montenegro met as a group in Podgorica until the administrative branch was renamed the Podgorica Branch in the mid-2010s. The Podgorica Branch is assigned to the Beograd Serbia District.

Activity and Retention

Missionaries report that only a few convert baptisms occur most years. However, most convert baptisms have been Montenegrin natives. Church attendance appears to generally fluctuate from 10-20. International visitors constitute a sizable portion of church attendance on most Sundays. Member activity rates appear less than 50%.

Language Materials

Languages with LDS Scripture: Serbian, Albanian, Croatian.

All LDS scriptures are translated in Croatian. Only the Book of Mormon is available in Serbian although there were plans as of 2017 to translate the remainder of LDS scriptures into Serbian.[3] The Church has translated several unit, temple, priesthood, Relief Society, Sunday School, young women, primary, missionary, Church proclamations, and family history materials in Croatian and Serbian. Many CES materials are translated in Croatian. The Liahona has two Croatian issues per year.

Meetinghouses

The Podgorica Branch has met in a well-maintained and spacious rented space in downtown Podgorica.

Humanitarian and Development Work

The Church has conducted 65 humanitarian and development projects in Montenegro, including 10 in 2017. These projects have included community projects, emergency response efforts, maternal and newborn care initiatives, refugee response, vision care, and wheelchair donations. One senior missionary couple serves in the country to oversee these efforts.

Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects

Religious Freedom

Montenegro enjoys full religious freedom, and no legal obstacles appear to have prevented the LDS Church from establishing an official presence prior to 2012. Missionaries proselyte freely, and religious groups generally register with local police without opposition. The Church numbers among the 22 recognized religious groups in Montenegro.[4]

Cultural Issues

The long standing cultural connection with Orthodox Christianity poses a major challenge for the Church to locate receptive individuals, help investigators and members attend church regularly, and withstand societal pressures to engage in practices against LDS Church teachings.

National Outreach

Montenegro's small geographic size allows the nation to be potentially reached with few mission outreach centers. A quarter of the national population receives mission outreach in Podgorica. As Niksic and Pljevlja are the only other cities with approximately 20,000 or more inhabitants, outreach in smaller towns and rural areas will be challenging and will likely not occur for many years or decades to come given struggles to achieve a sizable body of membership in Podgorica. Membership numbered less than 20 for the entire country as of 2017 despite more than five years of formal proselytism efforts. Given low receptivity in Podgorica and the relatively small population of the country as a whole, it appears unlikely for mission leadership to assign full-time missionaries to additional cities within the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, isolated members who live outside Podgorica present opportunities for outreach expansion.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

Only a few converts have been baptized in Montenegro. Many converts who have joined the Church since its official establishment in 2012 no longer appear active. Members have few socialization opportunities at church given the extremely small size of church membership.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

Missionaries thus far have noted no major concerns with ethnic integration challenges. However, the Church may experience challenges integrating Serbs and Montenegrins into the same congregation due to recent Montenegrin nation-building campaigns that are politically driven. Nevertheless, these two groups share many cultural similarities. Any ethnic integration issues resulting in reduced mission outreach efficacy in would most likely arise from extending outreach to ethnic Albanians and Bosniaks in predominantly Serb and Montenegrin congregations due to cultural and linguistic differences.

Language Issues

Serbian and Croatian LDS language resources can be utilized, as both these languages are mutually intelligible with Montenegrin. However increased Montenegrin nationalism—which considers Montenegrin as a separate language—may make some reluctant to use Serbian and Croatian language materials.

Missionary Service

No native Montenegrin members have ever appeared to serve a full-time mission. The Church in Montenegro is entirely dependent on foreign missionaries. Missionaries often fill many ecclesiastical and administrative responsibilities due to the small size of church membership.

Leadership

Only one native member served in the branch presidency as of 2018. Foreign members and full-time missionaries usually serve as branch presidents due to a lack of active members.

Temple

Montenegro was assigned to the Frankfurt Germany Temple as of early 2018. Travel to the temple is time consuming, costly, and unfeasible for regular temple attendance.

Comparative Growth

Montenegro was one of the last non-city-state countries in Europe to have an official branch organized. The Church in Montenegro reports the fewest number of Latter-day Saints of any European country with an official church presence. The percentage of Latter-day Saints in the population is comparable to other recently opened former Yugoslav nations such as Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia.

Protestant Christian groups have a very small presence in Montenegro. The Orthodox majority has been relatively unreceptive

to proselytism efforts, and many missionary-minded groups appear to have devoted few resources. Other nontraditional, proselytism-focused denominations such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh-Day Adventists report slow growth albeit both Witnesses and Adventists operate several congregations within Montenegro.

Future Prospects

Montenegro's relatively recent independence, small population, and distance from established mission outreach centers have made it a lesser priority for missionary work in Europe. Furthermore, low receptivity to LDS outreach has also hampered any efforts to expand outreach. Other nations in the Balkans without an official Church presence have larger populations and have had several individuals requesting additional information about the Church, whereas Montenegrins have generally not shown such interest. Due to the small size of the population, few native members, and poor receptivity to the LDS Church, the Church will likely not experience noticeable growth for many years or decades to come.

[1] "Montenegrin Language," Wikipedia.org, retrieved 31 December 2010. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montenegrin_language

[2] "Montenegro," International Religious Freedom Report 2016. https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2016&dlid=268848#wrapper

[3] "Approved Scripture Translation Projects," lds.org, 9 October 2017. https://www.lds.org/bc/content/ldsorg/church/news/2017/10/09/15159_000_letter.pdf?lang=eng

[4] "Montenegro," International Religious Freedom Report 2016. https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2016&dlid=268848#wrapper