

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.





Malta

Population: 0.41 millions (#177 out of countries)

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Geography

Area: 316 square km. Located south of Sicily in the Mediterranean Sea, Malta consists of three small inhabited islands: Malta, Gozo, and Kemmuna. Rocky and low-laying terrain covers most areas, with many coastal sea cliffs. A Mediterranean climate prevails year round with mild, wet winters and hot, dry summers. Environmental issues include limited fresh water resources and increasing dependence on desalination to satisfy fresh water needs. There are no administrative divisions in Malta; however, sixty-eight local councils have some administrative responsibilities.

Peoples

Maltese: 100%

Maltese are a conglomeration of various Mediterranean peoples who have intermingled for millennia, including Phoenicians, Carthaginians, and Italians.

Population: 449,043 (July 2018)

Annual Growth Rate: 0.99% (2018)

Fertility Rate: 1.48 children born per woman (2018)

Life Expectancy: 80.6 male, 84.8 female (2018)

Languages: Maltese (90.2%), English (6%), multilingual (3%), other (0.8%). Maltese and English are the official languages.

Literacy: 94.4% (2015)

History

Ancient peoples were known to populate the islands of Malta for millennia prior to the birth of Christ where the world's oldest known free-standing architecture has been discovered. The Phoenicians and Carthaginians established settlements for trading

prior to coming under Roman rule in the early third century BC. The Bible mentions that Saint Paul the Apostle shipwrecked on Malta en route to Rome around 60 AD. The Byzantine Empire acquired Malta in the sixth century followed by the Arabs in the ninth century. In the late eleventh century, Normans annexed Malta, which became under Sicilian rule until the early sixteenth century. For the next several centuries, various European states traded and occupied the islands until coming under French rule around 1800 and British rule in 1814. Malta played a crucial role in World War II as a fortress in the Mediterranean. In 1964, Malta gained independence and became a republic in 1974.[1] Greater economic growth and development have occurred in the past several decades. Malta joined the European Union in 2004 and adopted the Euro currency in 2008.

Culture

As a result of occupation by various European powers over the past millennia, Malta exhibits a unique fusion of European and traditional cultural practices and attitudes. Catholicism is a major influence on culture due to its historical legacy and the high percentage of practicing Catholics today. British culture has strongly influenced Malta, as the United Kingdom was the last nation to govern Malta prior to independence. Semitic culture has influenced Malta for thousands of years from Phoenician settlers and a small Jewish population. Cuisine consists of many common Mediterranean foods, with strong influences from Sicily, Italy, and the United Kingdom. There is a sizeable diaspora of Maltese; a large number have immigrated to Australia. Cigarette and alcohol consumption rates rank average for Europe. Overall crime rates are low.

Economy

GDP per capita: $41,900 (2017) 70.0% of U.S.]

Human Development Index: 0.878 (2017)

Corruption Index: 56 (2017)

Malta has achieved considerable economic growth and high living standards over the past several decades despite limited natural resources and reliance on imports to meet food needs. Growth has occurred from tourism, banking, and industry. Malta's prime geographic location between North Africa and Europe has also significantly influenced economic growth. Recent economic growth has been high, with GDP real growth ranging from 5-10% annually for the past three years. Services account for 77.7% of the work force and 88.7% of the GDP, whereas industry employs 20.7% of the work force and 10.2% of the GDP. Primary industries include tourism, electronics, shipbuilding, construction, food processing, and pharmaceuticals. Agriculture accounts for less than 2% of the work force and GDP. Common crops include potatoes, vegetables, fruit, wheat, and barley. Italy, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom are primary trade partners.

Perceived corruption in Malta ranks average for Europe. The government lacks anti-corruption legislation and institutions.[2] There has been no improvement with reducing perceived corruption in the past decade per Transparency International ratings. There is some minor drug trafficking from North Africa. Overall local laws are enforced, and crimes are prosecuted.

Faiths

Christian: 97%

Other/unknown: 3%

Christians

Denominations Members Congregations

Catholic – 400,000

Evangelicals – 5,245

Orthodox – less than 1,000

Jehovah's Witnesses – 774 – 10

Latter-day Saints – 209 – 1

Religion

Ninety-five percent (95%) of the population is estimated to belong to the Catholic Church, and 53% of Maltese attend church regularly.[3] Virtually all political leaders are active Catholics. Local Protestant churches primarily consist of nonnatives. Some Muslim groups estimate that as much as 6-7% of the population is Muslim. Atheists and agnostics may comprise as much as 4.5% of the population per recent survey data.[4]

Religious Freedom

The constitution protects religious freedom, which is generally upheld by the government. Local laws protect religious freedom against abuse. Roman Catholicism is the state religion. The Catholic Church receives funding and support from the government. Recent societal abuses of religious freedom primarily target Muslim migrants albeit it is unclear whether these abuses are primarily motivated by ethnicity or religion.[5]

Largest Cities

Urban: 94.6% (2018)

St. Paul's Bay, Birkirkara, Sliema, Mosta, **Qormi, Zabbar, Naxxar, San Gwann, Marsaskala, Swieqi.**

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

One of the ten largest cities has an official Church branch. A large portion of the population on Malta lives within ten kilometers of the Church's branch in Mosta. Thirty-eight percent (38%) of the national population resides in the ten largest cities, with 93% on the island of Malta.

Church History

Church Apostle Lorenzo Snow took great interest in establishing the Church in Malta in the 1850s due to its central location in the Mediterranean, Semitic language written with the Latin script, and large representation of peoples throughout Europe and the Mediterranean. Missionary activity began in 1852, and by 1856, there was a branch of twenty-five Latter-day Saints. The outbreak of the Crimean War eventually resulted in the Church losing a presence on the island, as many British soldier converts left the island. In 1979, the Italy Catania Mission reopened Malta to missionary activity, but outreach was short-lived due to visa problems. The mission sent missionaries to Malta again in 1988 and successfully established a branch. Efforts were assisted by small numbers of Maltese converts who resided in the United States, Australia, and Canada.[6] In 1991, Malta joined the newly created Europe Mediterranean Area.[7] Seminary and instituted commenced in the early 1990s. The first branch conference and the organization of the Relief Society occurred in 1993.[8] In 1994, several men and their families joined the Church, resulting in separate classes for Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthood holders.[9] Malta belonged to the Italy Rome Mission in 2010 as a result of the discontinuation of the Italy Catania Mission earlier that year.

Membership Growth

Church Membership: 209 (2017)

In 1988, there were twenty-one Latter-day Saints. Membership totaled 129 in 2000. During the following decade, little membership growth occurred as membership typically ranged from 130 to 140. In 2002, membership dropped to 118 and rebounded to previous levels the following year. In 2010, there were at least four convert baptisms. Church membership totaled 132 in 2008, 168 in 2013, and 196 in 2016.

In 2017, one in 1,992 was a Latter-day Saint

Congregational Growth

Branches: 1 (2018)

In 1988, the first modern-day branch was established. The branch divided into two independent branches, the Fgura and Mosta Branches, in 1995. The Fgura Branch met the needs of Maltese speakers, and the Mosta Branch was conducted in English. In

1997, the Fgura and Mosta Branches were consolidated into one branch.[10] The Mosta Branch pertains directly to the Italy Rome Mission.

Activity and Retention

In the early 2000s, the Mosta Branch appeared to have over sixty active members. During the 2007–2008 school year, only one member was enrolled in institute. However, in 2010, six were enrolled in institute. Returned missionaries have noted slight increases in church attendance in the 2010s from eighteen in 2012 to 30-35 in the mid to late 2010s.

Active membership is estimated at 35, or 15-20% of total membership.

Language Materials

Languages with Latter-day Saint Scripture: English.

Translations of stories from the Bible, Doctrine and Covenants, and Book of Mormon are available in Maltese. Limited unit, temple, Priesthood, Relief Society, Young Women, Primary, missionary, audio/visual, family history, church books, church proclamations and declarations, and pamphlet materials are translated in Maltese.

Meetinghouses

In 2010, the Mosta Branch appeared to meet in a renovated building. In the mid-2010s, the Church secured a new building and held an open house.

Humanitarian and Development Work

In 2017, the Church conducted its first humanitarian project in Malta that focused on refugee response.[11] Service activities are typically limited to full-time missionaries performing weekly service projects and local members organizing branch service activities.

Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects

Religious Freedom

The Church faces no restrictions regarding proselytism and assembly. Missionaries serve freely on the island, and past visa issues appear to have been resolved over the past two decades. Societal abuses of religious freedom are low.

Cultural Issues

The strong Catholic tradition of most is the primary cultural obstacle to missionary outreach and has resulted in poor receptivity. High rates of Catholic Church attendance may carry over to formerly Catholic Latter-day Saint converts, improving member activity rates. Conversion for most appears challenging due to the strong correlation of religion and ethnicity. Secularism is less apparent than in many European nations but may pose a future threat towards social attitudes regarding religion and church attendance.

National Outreach

Even with just one mission outreach center, the small geographic size of Malta and concentration of over 90% of the population on the main island offer greater advantages to national outreach over many other countries. Malta has had strong mission outreach despite isolation from mission headquarters in Italy. The placement of just a couple of missionary companionships currently meets the needs of the island. Additional mission outreach centers will likely only be organized once active membership and the receptivity of the population to the Church warrants it. With limited missionary resources dedicated to Europe, Malta has potential to receive far-reaching mission outreach through member-missionary activity through the referral of interested individuals prepared by local members to be taught by the full-time missionaries. Nevertheless, return missionaries note that Malta has often been neglected by mission leaders based in Italy. As a result, the Church in Malta receives little attention and few resources.

The 30,000 inhabitants off the main island on Gozo and Comino receive little, if any, mission outreach. Greater outreach to these two islands appears unlikely for the foreseeable future.

The Church maintains no official Internet site for Malta, but local members created an unofficial website with local church contact information and brief summaries of church beliefs in both English and Maltese at http://www.malta.imlds.com. As of early 2013, this site appears to have gone offline. However, the Church publishes most of its Maltese translations online at: https://www.lds.org/study?lang=mlt.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

Malta has low member activity and convert retention rates. Full-time missionaries assist reactivation efforts in addition to teaching and finding investigators. These efforts have seen some success, as missionaries reported several inactive members began attending church regularly in 2010. Poor attendance in seminary and institute may indicate low member activity among youth and young adults. Local members demonstrate a greater degree of self-sufficiency than many other Mediterranean nations with few Latter-day Saints, but this may be attributed to the English-speaking majority with British roots. Returned missionaries who served in Malta in the late 2010s reported that local members regularly participate in member-missionary work.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

Ethnic integration issues at church are minimal due to the homogeneity of the Maltese population and the frequent visits of foreigners from Europe and North Africa. There is a strong correlation between ethnicity and religion, creating challenges for the indigenous population to join the Church and maintain their previous ethnic identity and social relationships.

Language Issues

A limited number of church materials are translated in Maltese and currently meet most language needs. However, there remain no translations of Latter-day Saint scriptures into Maltese, which will be required for achieving greater outreach and gospel understanding by Maltese speakers. The Church has adequate translation resources to produce the Book of Mormon into Maltese, but there do not appear to be any plans for such translations. The lack of one of the most central volumes of Latter-day Saint scripture in Maltese poses significant concerns and problems for Maltese natives to gain a testimony of the Book of Mormon without studying it in their native language. In 2001, branch services were held in English with Maltese translations for non-English speakers, indicating leadership and active membership are predominantly English speaking. In the early 2010s, missionaries reported that there were no Maltese-speaking missionaries and that virtually all Maltese-speaking members also spoke English.

Missionary Service

Four young missionaries and one senior missionary couple served on Malta in 1993.[12] In 1997, the first indigenous Maltese member was called to serve a mission.[13] By 2001, ten young missionaries and a senior couple were assigned to Malta. In 2010, there were four missionaries serving on Malta. Very few local members have served missions. Involving youth in seminary and institute may increase the numbers of local full-time missionaries over time.

Leadership

The branch president in 2010 was not a native Maltese member and was likely a British resident. A local member served as branch president in 2019 although it is unclear whether he was a Maltese native. Inadequate local leadership may be responsible for the consolidation of the English and Maltese-speaking branches in 1997 and likely prevents the reestablishment of a Maltese-speaking congregation.

Temple

Malta pertains to the Rome Italy Temple district. Maltese-speaking membership appears too limited to perform temple ordinances independently.

Comparative Growth

Malta has experienced some of the greatest percentage membership growth rates in Europe over the past decade as membership has increased by 50%. However, like most European countries with less than 1,000 members, there has been little increase in the number of active members. Most city states, geographically small nations with populations of less than one million, and small islands in Europe have experienced stagnant growth over the past decade, with the exception of Luxembourg,

where membership doubled, and the sole branch became a ward. Malta is the sovereign European country with the third smallest population with an official Church presence.

Non-Catholic Christian groups report slow church growth rates. Protestant groups struggle to create sizeable self-sustaining memberships and have been largely unsuccessful in evangelizing Maltese Catholics. Seventh-Day Adventists gain few new members year to year. Jehovah's Witnesses are among the most successful groups and currently operate ten congregations nationwide. Witnesses have reported an increase of three congregations and approximately 200 active members since 2010.

Future Prospects

Slow church growth and no increase in mission outreach centers on Malta will likely continue for the foreseeable future due to the small size of Latter-day Saint membership, limited missionary resources, and low receptivity of the general population. Latter-day Saints have made little, if any, progress over the past decade, as there has been no significant increase in active membership. Progress in the 1990s in developing local leadership and several full families joining the Church has dissipated in recent years to the point that only one local branch can now be sustained. Involving youth in seminary and institute may offer prospects for breaking out of stagnant church growth and leading to breakthroughs with the native Maltese population. Recent progress with member-missionary involvement is promising that greater results may be achieved in the foreseeable future as long as new converts remain active, contributing members in the Mosta Branch.

[1] "Background Note: Malta," Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, 26 April 2010. http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5382.htm

[2] "Malta," 2010 Index of Economic Freedom, retrieved 22 September 2010. http://www.heritage.org/index/country/malta

[3] "Malta," International Religious Freedom Report 2009, 26 October 2009. http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127324.htm

[4] "Malta", International Religious Freedom Report for 2017. Accessed 21 January 2019. https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2017&dlid=280934#wrapper

[5] "Malta", International Religious Freedom Report for 2017. Accessed 21 January 2019. https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2017&dlid=280934#wrapper

[6] "Work taking hold on the island of Malta," LDS Church News, 26 August 1989. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/18815/Work-taking-hold-on-the-island-of-Malta.html

[7] Cannon, Mike. "Diversity in land, people, and climate," LDS Church News, 7 December 1991. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/21327/Diversity-in-land-people-and-climate.html

[8] "From around the world," LDS Church News, 4 December 1993. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/23177/From-around-the-world.html

[9] Crockett, David R. "History of the Church in Malta," retrieved 21 September 2010. http://www.crockettclan.org/wws/malta.html

[10] Crockett, David R. "History of the Church in Malta," retrieved 21 September 2010. http://www.crockettclan.org/wws/malta.html

[11] "Where We Work," LDS Charities. Accessed 21 January 2019. https://www.ldscharities.org/where-we-work

[12] "From around the world," LDS Church News, 4 December 1993. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/23177/From-around-the-world.html

[13] Crockett, David R. "History of the Church in Malta," retrieved 21 September 2010. http://www.crockettclan.org/wws/malta.html