



Reaching the Nations International Church Growth Almanac

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.



Macedonia

Population: 2.09 millions (#147 out of countries)

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Geography

Area: 25,713 square km. Landlocked in Southeastern Europe, Macedonia borders Bulgaria, Greece, Albania, Kosovo, and Serbia. Most the terrain is mountainous. The Vardar River runs through the center of the country, and three large lakes line the border with Albania and Greece. Climate consists of dry, warm summers and cold, snowy winters. Earthquakes are natural hazards, and air pollution is an environmental issue. Macedonia is divided into eighty-four administrative municipalities.

Peoples

Macedonian: 64.2%

Albanian: 25.2%

Turkish: 3.9%

Roma: 2.7%

Serb: 1.8%

Other: 2.2%

Population: 2,103,721 (July 2017)

Annual Growth Rate: 0.17% (2017)

Fertility Rate: 11.4 births/1,000 population (2017)

Life Expectancy: 73.8 male, 79.2 female (2017)

Languages: Macedonian (66.5%), Albanian (25.1%), Turkish (3.5%), Roma (1.9%), Serbian (1.2%), other (1.8%). Macedonian,

Albanian, Turkish, Romani, Aromanian, and Serbian are national or official languages. Only Macedonian has over one million speakers (1.40 million).

Literacy: 97.8% (2015)

History

Due to its location near Asia Minor, present-day Macedonia experienced a wide array of influences from regional powers over the past millennia. Many of these cultural traditions have been adopted into local culture. The Western Roman Empire controlled the region until coming under the rule of the Byzantine Empire in the sixth century. Slavs began populating the area during this period. The Ottoman Empire took possession of the region from the fifteenth century until 1912. During the Balkan Wars and World War I, Macedonia was divided between Greece, Serbia, and Bulgaria until incorporating into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, which later became Yugoslavia. Macedonia peacefully won independence from Yugoslavia in 1991 as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Poor relations with Greece resulted shortly thereafter due to the new nation's desire to adopt the name Macedonia, which Greeks regard as a Hellenic name. Formal relations between the two nations began in 1995 after Greece lifted a twenty-month trade embargo. Nevertheless, tensions remain between Macedonia and Greece due to this name dispute. In 1999, Macedonia accommodated hundreds of thousands of Kosovar refugees. The large Albanian minority began an insurgency in 2001, as it felt politically and economically marginalized. Greater rights have been secured for minority groups in the past decade, and greater economic growth and stability have occurred. Macedonia has most recently struggled with corruption and the implementation of economic and democratic reforms. Macedonia has also sought membership in the EU and NATO albeit it has not yet joined either organization until the name dispute with Greece is fully resolved.

Culture

Past civilizations and empires have influenced modern culture, particularly the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires. Fresco paintings and traditional music characterize historical art and entertainment. Cuisine draws from Mediterranean and Middle Eastern sources. Handball is the most popular sport. Cigarette consumption rates rank among the highest worldwide, whereas alcohol consumption rates are moderate.

Economy

GDP per capita: \$15,200 (2017) [25.5% of U.S.]

Human Development Index: 0.748

Corruption Index: 35 (2017)

Macedonia was the least economically developed of newly independent former-Yugoslav states in the early 1990s. The Greek embargo, loss of federal funding from Belgrade, and Macedonia's landlocked position delayed economic growth and regional integration. In the past twenty years, Macedonia has become more integrated with surrounding nations but remains sensitive to global and regional economic changes. Macedonia's small population, close proximity to Kosovo, and recent internal instability due to Albanian insurgencies has discouraged greater foreign investment. Services employ 54% of the workforce and produce 60% of the GDP, whereas industry accounts for 29.5% of the workforce and 30% of the GDP. Agriculture employs 16.5% of the workforce and produces 10% of the GDP. Primary crops include grapes, vegetables, tobacco, and fruit. Food processing, textiles, chemicals, and metallurgy are the largest industries. Primary trade partners include Germany, Serbia, Kosovo, the United Kingdom.

Corruption has remained a major issue that is present in most areas of society. The government has stepped up the fight on corruption due to its aspirations for European Union membership. Bribery in customs and law enforcement has been a major issue. Political corruption is a major challenge.

Faiths

Christian: 65%

Muslim: 33%

Other/unspecified: 2%

Christians

Denominations Members Congregations

Macedonian Orthodox – 1,363,211

Catholic – 84,148

Jehovah's Witnesses – 1,320 – 24

Seventh Day Adventists – 541 – 23

Latter-day Saints – 34 – 1

Religion

Religious affiliation is highly correlated by ethnicity, as virtually all Macedonians are Macedonian Orthodox, almost all Albanians are Muslim, and almost all Serbs are Serbian Orthodox. Other religious primary include Roman Catholics, Protestants, and Jews.^[1] Most the population does not regularly attend religious services.

Religious Freedom

The constitution and the law protect religious freedom, which is generally upheld by the government. Persecution and religious discrimination by government or individuals is not tolerated. There is no official religion, but five religious groups are mentioned in the constitution. Religious groups must register with the government to function as legal entities. Foreigners conducting missionary work or religious activities must gain approval from the State Commission for Relations with Religious Communities and Groups to receive a visa. The process to obtain a religious work visa usually takes approximately four months and these visas are valid for six months once they are issued. Religious education is offered in public schools. Some religious groups have not received legal status after applying for registration. Societal abuses of religious freedom primarily consist of harassment, vandalism, and robberies at religious sites.^[2]

Largest Cities

Urban: 67%

Skopje, **Kumanovo, Bitola, Prilep, Tetovo, Veles, Ohrid, Gostivar, Stip, Strumica.**

Cities listed in **bold** have no LDS congregation.

One of the ten largest cities has a congregation. Forty-seven percent (47%) of the national population lives in the ten largest cities.

LDS History

Macedonia was assigned to the Slovenia Ljubljana Mission for the 1990s and 2000s, but no missionary work occurred during this period. Macedonia and Albania served as the primary staging points for much of the Church's humanitarian response to the Kosovo conflict in 1999.^[3] In 2000, Macedonia was assigned to the Europe East Area. In 2009, Elder D. Todd Christofferson visited Macedonia and met with a small number of members and individuals interested in the Church living in the area. At the time, the only known Macedonian citizens who were Latter-day Saints consisted of a family of four. In 2009, the Church did not have an official presence.^[4] In May 2010, Macedonia was placed under the supervision of the Europe Area Presidency and an administrative branch was organized. The Macedonian government approved the Church's registration application in 2011. In February 2012, the Church assigned Macedonia to the Albania-based Adriatic South Mission. Senior missionaries were assigned sometime in late 2011 or early 2012. In April 2012, the first young, proselytizing missionaries were assigned. The first Relief Society meeting occurred in late 2015.

Membership Growth

LDS Membership: 34 (2017)

In 2010, membership consisted of foreigners temporarily living in the country with the exception of one Macedonian family. Ten

missionaries were assigned to Macedonia in 2015. In 2017, one in 61,874 was LDS.

Congregational Growth

Branches: 1 (2017)

In May 2010, the Church created an administrative branch for Macedonia under the direction of the Europe Area Presidency. Prior to this time, a group met for Sunday meetings that reported to the Slovenia Ljubljana Mission. The branch was later renamed the Skopje sometime in the mid-2010s. The Skopje Branch is directly supervised by the Adriatic South Mission.

Activity and Retention

The first convert baptisms appeared to occur in 2012. There were nine convert baptisms in 2014. There were twenty active members in early 2018. Activity rates appear to be high (60%).

Language Materials

Languages with LDS Scripture: Albanian, Serbian, Turkish.

There were ten materials translated into Macedonian as of early 2018, including Gospel Fundamentals, administrative materials, the Basic Unit Program Guidebook, the sacrament prayers, the Thirteen Articles of Faith, hymns and child songs, the Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith pamphlet, and a family booklet. All LDS scriptures are available in Albanian. Only the Book of Mormon is available in Serbian albeit there were plans in late 2017 to translate other LDS scriptures in the foreseeable future.^[5] Many unit, temple, priesthood, Relief Society, Sunday School, young women, primary, missionary, and family history materials are available in Albanian and Serbian. Several CES manuals are available in Albanian.

Meetinghouses

The Skopje Branch holds meets in a rented facility in central Skopje.

Humanitarian and Development Work

LDS Charities has conducted 55 humanitarian and development projects in Macedonia that have focused on community improvement, emergency response, maternal and newborn care, refugee response, vision care, and wheelchair donations.^[6]

Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects

Religious Freedom

Laws and government policies have supported religious freedom in Macedonia to provide the legal protections for the Church to openly proselyte. The Church has maintained government registration since 2011. Visa regulations that take as long as four months to process pose challenges for assigning foreign missionaries in a timely manner.

Cultural Issues

The strong ethnic identity of Macedonians to the Macedonian Orthodox Church and Albanians to Islam is a major cultural obstacle that has reduced receptivity of many to the Church. Due to the strong influence of traditional religions, joining a Church regarded as nontraditional and foreign may result in converts facing ostracism and ridicule from their families and communities. High cigarette consumption rates create challenges for many future investigators who face challenges completely ending their smoking addictions. High smoking rates may reduce the receptivity of the Church due to its teachings against tobacco use. Efforts among ethnic Albanians may be the most productive for the Church as Albanians in neighboring Albania have demonstrated the greatest receptivity to LDS mission outreach among ethnic groups in Southeastern Europe.

National Outreach

The Church's tiny membership is concentrated in Skopje where only one branch operates. A third of the national population resides in the Skopje area. Mission leadership investigated prospects to open additional cities to proselytism in 2016 such as Kumanovo. However, these efforts did not result in any additional cities opening to proselytism as mission leaders determined

that no additional cities should be opened at that time. Future mission outreach will likely be limited to Skopje and only 1-2 other major cities, such as Kumanovo and Bitola, due to low receptivity to LDS outreach. Additional delays to open more cities to proselytism may result in missed opportunities to establish a foothold in these locations if religious freedom conditions deteriorate or if receptivity to the LDS Church declines. Missionaries have occasionally visited other cities to meet isolated members and investigators such as Kumanovo and Ohrid. The Church in Macedonia has stringently followed a conservative centers-of-strength paradigm that has focused all of its proselytism resources into a single city with minimal returns.

Distance from mission headquarters and a lack of Church members until the late 2000s/early 2010s have been partially responsible for the limited LDS presence in Macedonia today. The Slovenia Ljubljana Mission previously administered to all the nations of the former Yugoslavia, many of which relied heavily on foreign missionaries to fill local leadership and keep members active. Some of these nations such as Bosnia, Montenegro, and Kosovo remained without mission outreach until the early 2010s for similar reasons. Few mission outreach centers in the Balkans likely contributed to the lack of a Church presence in Macedonia and other recently reached nations until the early 2010s. The Adriatic South Mission services several countries in southeastern Europe. As a result, there are limited resources and attention provided to the Church in Macedonia in comparison to other countries in the mission with significant more members and larger populations such as Albania and Greece. Albanian leadership and resources may be effective to conduct proselytism efforts that target ethnic Albanians in Macedonia.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

The Church in Macedonia reports good member activity and convert retention rates despite its extremely small size and strong reliance on foreign full-time missionaries for missionary efforts. New converts face pressure from family and friends to return to their previous beliefs and practices due to strong religious ties to ethnicity. Societal pressures may reduce convert retention rates.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

Past conflict between Macedonians and Albanians may impact the integration of members and investigators from these two ethnic groups into the same congregations. Once a large enough active membership base is developed, language-specific congregations will most likely be the best solution to minimize ethnic conflicts, miscommunications between Albanian and Macedonian converts, and better meet the language needs of members and investigators. However, there has not appeared to have been any major challenges with ethnic integration in the Skopje Branch thus far.

Language Issues

The Church has a small body of LDS materials translated into Macedonia albeit there remain no Macedonian translations of LDS scriptures. Albanians may also be useful in reaching the substantial Albanian minority in view of the high receptivity Albanians have demonstrated for the Church over the past two decades. However, the concentration of ethnic Albanians in the west of the country near the Albanian border and remote from the capital of Skopje may limit the utility of Albanian language for mission outreach until additional congregations are organized in this region. Most ethnic minorities have an ample supply of Church materials in their native languages, but future mission outreach will likely not occur in areas where these languages are most commonly spoken for many years or decades to come.

Missionary Service

A senior missionary couple and several young, full-time missionaries are typically assigned to serve in the Skopje Branch. No native Macedonians have ever appeared to serve full-time missions.

Leadership

A native member has served as branch president for several years. However, most leadership appears to be comprised of foreigners or full-time missionaries. Larger numbers of Macedonian natives serving in branch leadership will be needed for greater progress and stability for the Church in the long-term. Moreover, improvements in the self-sufficiency of branch leadership may help attract more converts who remain active.

Temple

Macedonia is assigned to the Frankfurt Germany Temple. No organized temple trips have appeared to occur. Long distance and travel expenses require significant sacrifice for members to attend the temple. Macedonia will likely be reassigned to the Rome Italy Temple when it is completed.

Comparative Growth

The Church in Macedonia is comparable in size to the Church in other former Yugoslav republics that have had an LDS presence established since the early 2010s such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Montenegro. However, the Church in Macedonia reports the highest member activity rate in the region as most new converts have been retained. Macedonia numbers among one of the only countries in Europe where there is only one LDS congregation in the entire country.

Many proselytism-oriented Christian faiths have a presence in Macedonia and constitute a small minority. These groups have struggled to reach across cultural divides and achieve greater membership growth. Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses experience slow or stagnant membership growth rates, although both groups have approximately two dozen congregations throughout the country.

Future Prospects

The Church has only recently established an official, permanent presence in Macedonia. However, receptivity to the Church has been low as evidenced by fewer than forty members in the country despite six years of consistent proselytism from as many as ten young, full-time missionaries assigned to the country at a time. Slow growth will likely continue to occur in Skopje although there do not appear any realistic prospects for the organization of additional congregations in Skopje for many years or decades to come given historical trends. One or two additional cities may open to proselytism during the next decade, such as Kumanovo, Bitola, or Ohrid.

[1] "Macedonia," International Religious Freedom Report 2016.
<https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2016&dliid=268840#wrapper>

[2] "Macedonia," International Religious Freedom Report 2016.
<https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2016&dliid=268840#wrapper>

[3] "Church continues sending aid to refugees of Kosovo," LDS Church News, 8 May 1999.
<http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/35723/Church-continues-sending-aid-to-refugees-of-Kosovo.html>

[4] Mattox, Elder Raymond P. "Members are good citizens in Albania," LDS Church News, 20 June 2009.
<http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/57493/Members-are-good-citizens-in-Albania.html>

[5] "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

[6] "Where We Work," LDS Charities. Accessed 28 May 2018. <https://www.ldscharities.org/where-we-work>