



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.



Lithuania

Population: 3.51 millions (#134 out of countries)

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Geography

Area: 65,300 square km. Located in Eastern Europe, Lithuania borders Latvia, Belarus, Poland, Russia's Kaliningrad Oblast, and the Baltic Sea. Fertile, low laying plains dotted with small lakes cover most the country. The nearby sea moderates the climate, producing wet weather and temperate summers and winters. Floods and droughts are natural hazards. Pollution, deforestation, and soil and groundwater contamination from military bases is an environmental issue. Lithuania is divided into sixty administrative counties.

Peoples

Lithuanian: 84.1%

Polish: 6.6%

Russian: 5.8%

Belarusian: 1.2%

Other: 1.1%

Unspecified: 1.2%

Lithuanians form the majority. Poles primarily populate the southeast near the Polish border. Russians most likely live in the larger cities or near Kaliningrad. Other ethnic groups include Belarusians and Ukrainians.

Population: 2,793,284 (July 2018)

Annual Growth Rate: -1.1% (2018)

Fertility Rate: 1.6 children born per woman (2018)

Life Expectancy: 69.9 male, 80.8 female (2018)

Languages: Lithuanian (82%), Russian (8%), Polish (5.6%), other and unspecified (4.4%). Lithuanian is the official language. Only Lithuanian has over one million speakers (2.3 million).

Literacy: 99.8% (2015)

History

In the thirteenth century, Lithuania emerged as a state and added territory for the following century, becoming the largest nation in Europe by the end of the fourteenth century. Lithuania allied with Poland in the late fourteenth century and a century later united as the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The union was dissolved and incorporated into surrounding nations in 1795. Lithuania achieved independence following World War I but was absorbed into the Soviet Union in 1940. The once large Jewish population was annihilated by the Nazis during World War II. In March 1990, Lithuania was the first Soviet republic to declare independence, which was later recognized in September 1991. Russian troops withdrew remaining forces in 1993. Since independence, relations have strengthened with Central and Western Europe as Lithuania joined NATO and the European Union in 2004, the euro zone in 2015, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 2018.

Culture

Lithuanians tend to be reserved and respectful. Family structure and responsibilities are traditional and conservative. There is a rich legacy of Lithuanian literature starting from the Middle Ages. Alcohol and tobacco cigarette consumption rates are high. The rate of divorce is high.

Economy

GDP per capita: \$32,400 (2017) [54.2% of U.S.]

Human Development Index: 0.858 (2017)

Corruption Index: 59 (2017)

Lithuania has achieved economic growth since independence and pursued trade with both Eastern and Western Europe. Growth in GDP came to a halt in 2009 due to the global financial crisis as the economy contracted by 15%. Unemployment also rapidly increased from 5.8% in 2008 to 13.7% in 2009. However, the economy has since recovered and has posted GDP annual real growth rates of 2-4%. Current challenges center on the liberalization of labor laws and difficulties with younger skilled workers emigrating elsewhere. Services produce 67.2% of the GDP and employ 65.8% of the workforce, whereas industry accounts for 29.4% of the GDP and employs 25.2% of the workforce. Primary industries include machinery, home appliances, and electronics. Grain, potatoes, and sugar beets are common crops. Primary trade partners include Russia, Germany, Poland, and Latvia.

Corruption rates are higher than many nations in the European Union but lower than most of Eastern Europe. Perceived corruption significant improved during the 2010s to levels comparable to Latvia, Costa Rica, and Czechia. Corruption is regarded as a moderate concern for business. Bribery, extortion, and ineffective enforcement of anti-corruption laws are ongoing concerns.[\[1\]](#)

Faiths

Christian: 82.9%

Other/unspecified: 11.0%

None: 6.1%

Christians

Denominations – Members – Congregations

Roman Catholic – 2,156,415

Russian Orthodox – 114,525

Old Believers – 22,346

Evangelical Lutheran – 16,760

Evangelical Reformist – 5,587

Jehovah's Witnesses – 3,056 – 46

Latter-day Saints – 980 – 5

Seventh Day Adventists – 765 – 22

Religion

Catholics nominally form the majority at approximately 75-80% of the population. Russian Orthodox members live primarily along the border with Belarus. Nontraditional religious groups tend to have fewer adherents than traditional religious groups. There are approximately 3,100 Jews and 2,800 Muslims.[\[2\]](#)

Religious Freedom

The constitution protects religious freedom, which is upheld by the government. Religious discrimination, violence, or interference is illegal. There is no state religion, but some religious groups receive special privileges including religious teaching in public school and the right to register marriages. Traditional religious groups require a legacy of more than 300 years and receive greater benefits from the government. Among non-traditional groups, only the Evangelical Baptist Union of Lithuania, the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, the Pentecostal Evangelical Belief Christian Union, and the New Apostolic Church of Lithuania have state recognition. To obtain state recognition, a religious group must operate in the country for at least twenty-five years. Other nontraditional groups register individual congregations but do not have full government recognition. Official registration can be granted to nontraditional religious group who do not have state recognition in order to hold bank accounts and own property. Societal abuses of freedom of religion consist primarily of discrimination and vandalism against Jews and Muslims.[\[3\]](#)

Largest Cities

Urban: 67.7% (2018)

Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipeda, Siauliai, **Panevezys, Alytus, Marijampole, Mazeikiai, Jonava, Utena.**

Cities in **bold** do not have a congregation of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Four of the ten largest cities have a Church congregation. Forty-eight percent (48%) of the population lives in the ten largest cities.

Church History

The Russia St. Petersburg Mission included Lithuania until the creation of the Latvia Riga Mission in 1993. Missionaries first arrived in December 1992.[\[4\]](#) In June 1993, Elder M. Russell Ballard dedicated Lithuania for missionary work with twenty-seven in attendance. At the time, eight missionaries were assigned to the country.[\[5\]](#) The previous year, there was only one member living in the country.[\[6\]](#) In 1993, missionaries received media coverage nationwide, which helped improve the Church's image and correct misinformation.[\[7\]](#) The Latvia Riga Mission was renamed and moved to Vilnius, Lithuania in 1996. Mission headquarters returned to Latvia in 2001. Seminary and institute began in 1998. Lithuania joined the Europe East Area in 2000. The Latvia Riga Mission was renamed the Baltic Mission in 2002.

Membership Growth

LDS Membership: 980 (2017)

By 1999, there were 180 members in Vilnius, 150 in Kaunas, and 120 in Klaipeda. Total membership reached 554 in 2000, increasing to 640 and 735 in 2001 and 2002, respectively. Membership increased to 823 in 2006, 900 in 2009, 969 in 2014, and 984 in 2016. Slow membership growth rates have occurred for most years since 2003. During the past 15 years, annual membership growth rates have generally ranged from -1% to 4%. In 2018, there were approximately 300 members in Vilnius (approximately half of whom were Russian speakers), 200 members in Kaunas, 175 members in Klaipeda, and seventy members in Siauliai.

In 2017, one in 2,881 was a Latter-day Saint.

Congregational Growth

Branches: 5 (2018)

The Church organized its first two branches in 1994 with one branch each in Kaunas and Vilnius. By the end of 1995 there were three branches—two in Vilnius and one in Kaunas.^[8] The two Vilnius branches were combined into one congregation for both Lithuanian and Russian speakers in the late 1990s. Additional branches opened in Klaipeda in 1996 and Siauliai in 2000. In early 1998, branches became part of the newly created Vilnius Lithuania District. By year-end 2000, there were four branches: Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipeda, and Siauliai. In 2006, a Russian-speaking congregation was created in Vilnius, bringing the total of branches to five.

Activity and Retention

In 2000, 200 youth throughout the Baltic States traveled to Lithuania for a youth conference.^[9] In 2009, over 400 throughout the Baltic States attended a fireside with Elder L. Tom Perry in Latvia.^[10] Sixty-five young single adults from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania met in Riga, Latvia in March 2010 for a young single adult conference. During the 2008–2009 school year, thirty were enrolled in seminary or institute.

In the late 1990s, there were approximately 120 active members in Vilnius and eighty active members in Klaipeda. In the late 2000s, there were twenty active members in Siauliai, 30-40 active members in Klaipeda, and 40-50 active members in Kaunas. At the time only about one-third of converts remained active one year after baptism. Returned missionaries who served in the mid-2010s reported 20-50 active members in Klaipeda, thirty-five active members in the Russian-speaking Vilnius 2nd Branch, 35-50 active members in Kaunas, and 45-55 active members in the Lithuanian-speaking Vilnius 1st Branch. In the mid-2010s, convert retention rates for one year after baptism were approximately 50-60%. In 2018, active membership stood at approximately fifteen in the Siauliai Branch, thirty in Klaipeda Branch, forty-five in Kaunas Branch, fifty in the Vilnius 1st Branch (Lithuanian speaking), and sixty-five in the Vilnius 2nd Branch (Russian speaking). The Vilnius 2nd Branch had the highest member activity rate (approximately 50%), whereas branches in Kaunas, Klaipeda, and Siauliai had the lowest member activity rates (approximately 20%). Approximately 30-35% of members in the Vilnius 1st Branch were active in 2018. During one twelve-month period in the late 2010s, there were seventeen convert baptisms nationwide with more than half of them occurring in the Vilnius 2nd (Russian) Branch. Convert retention rates have been excellent in the late 2010s at over 90% nationwide.

Active membership nationwide is approximately 200-225, or 20-23% of total membership.

Language Materials

Languages with Latter-day Saint Scripture: Lithuanian, Russian, Polish.

All Latter-day Saint scriptures and most church materials are available in Lithuanian, Russian, and Polish. The Liahona magazine has two issues in Lithuanian, four in Polish, and twelve in Russian a year.

Meetinghouses

Branches meet in rented spaces or renovated buildings.

Humanitarian and Development Work

The Church has conducted eighty humanitarian and development projects since 1985 – the vast majority of which have been community projects.^[11] In 1998, approximately 800 young single adults in the United States made 200 quilts for distribution in the Appalachian Mountains, Lithuania, and Yugoslavia.^[12]

Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects

Religious Freedom

Missionaries may openly proselyte. There are no laws limiting the Church's activities, and congregations are officially registered. The Church does not have state recognition and may not receive it for many years even though it has maintained a presence since the early 1990s, as this status is rarely granted to nontraditional religious groups.

Cultural Issues

Increased materialism and secularism since independence, coupled with decades of communism, have created disinterest in religion among most Lithuanians. Returned missionaries report major challenges with atheism and negative societal views of the Church as a cult largely due to misinformation. High alcohol and tobacco cigarette use challenges investigators making lifestyle changes prior to baptism and also increases the likelihood of converts relapsing to former addictions. Some forms of proselytism—such as street contacting—may be less effective due to the reserved nature of many Lithuanians.

National Outreach

A minority of Lithuanians receive mission outreach. Thirty-eight percent (38%) of the national population resides in cities with a congregation. Opportunities exist to significantly expand national outreach among the urbanized population. Four cities over 30,000 inhabitants, twenty-two cities between 10,000 and 30,000 inhabitants, and approximately sixty towns between 1,000 and 10,000 inhabitants have yet to receive mission outreach. The largest cities appear most likely to receive future mission outreach, especially nearby cities with already established congregations. The Church likely has some members living in these cities and towns, which can help orchestrate cottage meetings and lay the foundation of future Church leadership. It is unclear whether this is on the current agenda for the Baltic Mission although recent reports from Estonia and Latvia suggest no plans to open additional cities to the Church.

The limited number of missionaries and small numbers of active members and leaders is the greatest issue restricting broader mission outreach. Full-time missionaries and mission resources must be shared with Latvia and Estonia although Lithuanian-speaking missionaries usually serve their entire missions in Lithuania with the exception of short periods in Estonia or Latvia. Furthermore, the emigration of active members poses challenges for the Church to expand outreach as mission resources become channeled into strengthening the five branches.

Although the Church maintains many Lithuanian and Russian gospel study and missionary materials online, only Russian has a version of Mormon.org for Internet proselytism efforts. The Church maintains a Lithuanian version of its Mormon Newsroom site at: <https://www.mormonu-naujienos.lt/>. This site provides news and accurate information about the Church in the Lithuanian language.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

Convert retention has significantly improved since 1990s and early 2000s levels when most converts joined the Church. Convert retention rates have increased from approximately 30% in the early 2000s to over 90% during at least one twelve-month period in the late 2010s. However, the number of converts baptized during this time period has significantly decreased. Nevertheless, the conversion of higher-quality converts presents good opportunities to strengthen the Church and improve the self-sufficiency of congregations. The Church continues to struggle with most members on Church records who have been inactive for many years or even decades. Member activity rates in the late 2010s were twice as high for adult men than for adult women.

The Church struggles with natural growth and its ability to attract youth converts and to keep them active. There are very few families in the Church who have infants or young children. In Klaipeda, at least twenty youth were inactive in the late 2000s. In the late 2010s, nearly 60% of youth were active. Many fall into inactivity due to the small number of active members who they can relate with and a lack of nurturing from older members. With greater planning, foresight and local member participation, greater successes may be achievable in convert retention and member reactivation.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

Cooperation between Russian and Lithuanian-speaking members has allowed the Church to efficiently meet the needs of its membership. Potential issues integrating these and other ethnic groups into the same congregation may occur, but membership as a whole has placed historical grudges and dislikes aside in the Church. Very little, if any, outreach has occurred among Polish Lithuanians, partially due to most living in areas outside of current mission outreach.

Language Issues

With the exception of Vilnius, where language-specific congregations meet, all other branches meet the needs of both Lithuanian and Russian speakers. Kaunas has few Russian speakers, and the majority of members and all missionaries speak Lithuanian. Klaipeda has historically provided translations in sacrament meeting for Lithuanian and Russian speakers. The Church benefits from the large amount of materials available in Lithuanian and Russian despite the national Church membership numbering less than 1,000.

Missionary Service

Ten Lithuanian-speaking and eight Russian-speaking missionaries served in Lithuania in the late 1990s. Eight missionaries served in Kaunas in early 2009, and four missionaries served in Klaipeda in early 2010. The number of missionaries assigned to the Baltic Mission significantly decreased in the mid and late 2010s.

Many local members have also served full-time missions in their youth and as older adults. By 1995, six Lithuanian members were serving missions in Russia, Utah, and Poland.^[13] In early 2010, the former Klaipeda Branch president and his wife were serving a temple mission at the Helsinki Finland Temple. The limited number of youth challenges efforts to increase the numbers of full-time missionaries from Lithuania.

Leadership

The Church has developed adequate local leadership to be self-sufficient in Church administration. All five branches in Lithuania have had local branch presidents for many years. Increasing the number of men capable of leading congregations will be central to expanding national outreach and ensure self-sufficiency over the long term.

Temple

Lithuania pertains to the Helsinki Finland Temple district. Temple trips occur regularly and take longer than Estonia and Latvia, requiring greater sacrifice for members to attend. Members usually travel by bus to Estonia and take a ferry to Helsinki.

Comparative Growth

Lithuania has the most limited mission outreach in the Baltic States and is the only nation with a city over 80,000 inhabitants without a congregation, Panevezys. However, Lithuania has experienced comparable membership growth to Estonia and Latvia, as all these nations had between 750 and 1,250 members in 2017. Estonia has the highest percentage of Latter-day Saints in the population. Activity rates are comparable throughout the three countries and are similar to or slightly higher than many Eastern European nations.

Other missionary-focused groups report stagnant growth or slight declines in the number of members and congregations. Seventh-Day Adventists report steady decline in membership and stagnant congregational growth. In 2016, there were only 765 Adventists in Lithuania. Jehovah's Witnesses have reported stagnant numbers of active members and congregations during the 2010s.

Future Prospects

Elder M. Russell Ballard predicted the following in May 1993:

From this small beginning, you will see the Church grow and prosper here. There will be many branches and then a district and, in the Lord's due time, there will be stakes. Who knows, if we could look out 50 years, perhaps a small temple. That all depends on us, really, and how diligent we are willing to be, and how wise and prudent we are willing to be as we proceed to establish the kingdom of God in Lithuania.^[14]

In 2018, the creation of a stake seemed unlikely in the near future, as there were still fewer than 1,000 members, and a stake generally has more than 2,000 members and over one hundred active Melchizedek Priesthood holders. Additional congregations in Vilnius may be organized due to the city's size and large population if warranted by increases in the number of active members. A Russian-speaking congregation may be organized in Klaipeda once active membership increases among both Russian and Lithuanian speakers. The outlook for additional cities opening to missionary work is unfavorable for the foreseeable future due to fewer mission resources allocated to the Baltic States, reliance on full-time missionaries to open additional cities to the Church, population decline, and emphasis on strengthening established branches rather than expanding to previously unreached areas. Cities most likely to open for missionary work include Panevezys, Alytus, and Marijampole

because of their large populations and Jonava and Kedainiai because of their proximity to Kaunas. Greater national outreach and growth in congregations will hinge on local members, leaders, and mission leaders' capacity to organize small units in unreached cities and to inspire local members to share the gospel with their associates.

[1] "Lithuania Corruption Report," Business Anti-Corruption Portal. Accessed 24 November 2018.
<https://www.business-anti-corruption.com/country-profiles/lithuania/>

[2] "Lithuania," International Religious Freedom Report 2017. Accessed 24 November 2018.
<https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2017&dliid=280928#wrapper>

[3] "Lithuania," International Religious Freedom Report 2017. Accessed 24 November 2018.
<https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2017&dliid=280928#wrapper>

[4] "Lithuania," Country Profiles, retrieved 16 April 2010. <http://newsroom.lds.org/ldsnewsroom/eng/contact-us/lithuania>

[5] "4 European lands dedicated," LDS Church News, 12 June 1993.
<http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/23051/4-European-lands-dedicated.html>

[6] "From around the world," LDS Church News, 25 November 1995.
<http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/26393/From-around-the-world.html>

[7] "From around the world," LDS Church News, 9 July 1994.
<http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/25332/From-around-the-world.html>

[8] "From around the world," LDS Church News, 25 November 1995.
<http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/26393/From-around-the-world.html>

[9] "Baltic youth conference draws from four countries," LDS Church News, 11 November 2000.
<http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/38856/Baltic-youth-conference-draws-from-four-countries.html>

[10] Jegina, Inara; Klundt, Jo Ann. "History visit to Latvian saints," LDS Church News, 26 September 2009.
<http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/57926/Historic-visit-to-Latvian-saints.html>

[11] "Where We Work," LDS Charities. Accessed 24 November 2018. <https://www.ldscharities.org/where-we-work>

[12] McCook, Bill. "800 young single adults tie 200 quilts for needy," LDS Church News, 17 October 1998.
<http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/31079/800-young-single-adults-tie-200-quilts-for-needy.html>

[13] "From around the world," LDS Church News, 25 November 1995.
<http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/26393/From-around-the-world.html>

[14] "4 European lands dedicated," LDS Church News, 12 June 1993.
<http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/23051/4-European-lands-dedicated.html>