



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.

Slovakia



Population: 5.44 millions (#117 out of countries)

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Geography

Area: 49,035 square km. Landlocked in Central Europe, Slovakia borders Poland, Ukraine, Hungary, Austria, and Czechia. Terrain consists of lowlands in southern areas and rugged mountains in the central and northern regions subject to a temperate climate. Summers are cool, whereas winters are cloudy and humid. Pollution and acid rain are environmental issues. Flooding is a natural hazard. Slovakia is divided into eight administrative regions.

Peoples

Slovak: 80.7%

Hungarian: 8.5%

Roma: 2.0%

Other: 1.8%

Unspecified: 7%

Slovaks constitute the majority of the population. Hungarians are concentrated along the Hungarian border.

Population: 5,445,040 (July 2018)

Annual Growth Rate: -0.02% (2018)

Fertility Rate: 1.42 children born per woman (2018)

Life Expectancy: 73.9 male, 81.2 female (2018)

Languages: Slovak (78.6%), Hungarian (9.4%), Roma (2.3%), Ruthenian (1%), other and unspecified (8.7%). Slovak is the

official language and is the only language with over one million speakers (4.3 million).

Literacy: 99% (2011)

History

Celts populated present-day Slovakia starting in the sixth century BC. The Roman Empire pushed into the region for a couple centuries following the birth of Christ. The Huns invaded between the fourth and seventh centuries. Slavs settled during this period and gained influence and political power. Hungary annexed Slovakia and maintained control until the twentieth century. Following World War I and the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Slovaks and Czechs united to create Czechoslovakia. Communism spread to Czechoslovakia following World War II, and the region remained under the Soviet sphere of influence until 1989. A peaceful division between Czechs and Slovaks occurred in 1993. In 2004, Slovakia joined the European Union and NATO. In 2009, Slovakia joined the euro zone.

Culture

Slovakia possesses a respected legacy of artists, scholars, and athletes. Cuisine is characteristic of Central Europe and primarily consists of meat, potatoes, and soups. Alcohol consumption rates are high and comparable to Russia. Cigarette consumption rates compare to most of Europe.

Economy

GDP per capita: \$33,100 (2017) [55.4% of U.S.]

Human Development Index: 0.855 (2017)

Corruption Index: 50 (2017)

Slovakia has achieved strong economic growth and has experienced a rapid transformation from a centralized economy to a free market economy since independence. This has resulted in successful integration into Central Europe and the European Union. Unemployment reached record lows in the late 2010s. Moreover, the percentage of the population that lives below the poverty line significantly declined in the 2010s. Services and industry employ 73.4% and 22.7% of the workforce, respectively. Industry is well diversified and includes automobiles, metal production, food, electricity, oil, nuclear fuel, machinery, paper, and printing. Primary trade partners include Germany, Czechia, and Poland.

Corruption is perceived as more prevalent than in most European Union nations and influences all sectors of the economy. Bribes to obtain medical care and higher education are commonly paid. Many report corruption in the judicial system.^[1] There has been progress with reducing corruption in recent years to the point that corruption levels are comparable to most of Central Europe. However, there are major concerns in regards to the prosecution and punishment of those found guilty of corruption.^[2]

Faiths

Christian: 86.5%

None: 13.4%

Other/unspecified: 0.1%

Christians

Denominations Members Congregations

Roman Catholic – 3,375,925

Greek Catholic – 206,712

Evangelical – 67,163

Orthodox – 50,000

Jehovah's Witnesses – 11,395 – 139

Seventh Day Adventists – 2,278 – 53

Latter-day Saints – 272 – 4

Religion

Most Slovaks identify as Roman Catholic. Orthodox Christians tend to live in the east, and many members of Protestant churches live along the Hungarian border.^[3] Slovakia has historically had one of the highest percentages of those reporting regular church attendance in the European Union at 33% in 2009.^[4]

Religious Freedom

The constitution protects religious freedom, and government typically upholds this right. There is no official religion, but ties exist between the government and the Catholic Church. Registration is not required for religious groups to assemble but is needed to obtain special government benefits, such as conducting legal marriages. The 2007 registration law requires a religious group to have 20,000 adult members who are citizens or permanent residents. This legislation limited the rights of smaller religious groups.^[5] In 2017, the government raised the number of adult members to 50,000 in order for a religious group to obtain official registration. Groups that previously obtained official government recognition had their registration grandfathered as officially recognized religions. Unregistered religious groups may operate in the country, but are limited in terms of government funding, the establishment of schools, or authority to perform marriages. Societal religious intolerance and persecution primarily targets Muslims.^[6]

Largest Cities

Urban: 53.7% (2018)

Bratislava, Kosice, **Prešov**, Žilina, **Banská Bystrica**, **Nitra**, **Trnava**, Trenčín, **Martin**, **Poprad**.

Cities listed in **bold** have no official congregation of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Four of the ten largest cities have an official Church branch. Slovakia has one of the most rural populations in Europe as only twenty-two percent (22%) of the national population lives in the ten largest cities, and approximately half of the national population lives in rural areas.

Church History

Missionary work began in Czechoslovakia in the 1920s when the Church obtained legal recognition in 1928. The Church dedicated Czechoslovakia for missionary work in 1929 and a mission was organized. Slow growth occurred for the following two decades due to a depression and World War II. The first member was baptized in present-day Slovakia in 1939.^[7] Missionary work occurred between 1946 and 1950 until the mission was closed.^[8] The Czechoslovak Mission was discontinued in 1950 and reopened in 1990, the same year the Church regained legal recognition.^[9] Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf dedicated Slovakia for missionary work in 2006.^[10] Known colloquially as the Slovakian Miracle, in September 2006 missionaries throughout the Czech Prague Mission obtained over 30,000 signatures from those who agreed to have the Church enter the country. In addition to their signatures, Slovakian citizens also had to provide their personal identification number, home address, and full name.^[11] Slovakia pertains to the Europe Area and was previously administered by the Europe Central Area until consolidated with the Europe West Area in the late 2000s. In 2018, the Prague-based Czech/Slovak Mission administered Slovakia.

Membership Growth

LDS Membership: 272 (2017)

There were approximately 200 members in Czechoslovakia in 1990.^[12] In 2000, there were 102 members in Slovakia. Slow growth occurred during the 2000s and 2010s as membership reached 120 in 2004, 124 by 2007, 203 in 2011, and 272 in 2017. The largest membership increase occurred in 2010 when there was a net increase of 32 members. Annual membership growth rates highly varied during most of the 2000s, but generally were approximately zero. Annual membership growth rates ranged

from 10-20% during a three-year period in the late 2000s and early 2010s, then slowed to 5-8% for most years during the 2010s.

In 2017, one in 20,021 was a Latter-day Saint.

Congregational Growth

Branches: 4 Groups: 1 (2018)

The Church organized its first two branches in Trenčín and Bratislava in 1993. The Žilina Branch was organized in 1996. In 2007, a fourth branch was created in Kosice. A branch briefly operated in Martin in the late 2000s. In the late 2000s, missionaries opened Banská Bystrica, and a group was formed. In 2012, a group was formed in Zvolen although the group appeared to close shortly thereafter. Most of the converts and investigators who attended the Zvolen Group were Roma that had personal connections to Slovakian Roma who joined the Church in Sheffield, England. However, most of these converts appeared to become inactive shortly after baptism, resulting in the closure of the Zvolen Group. A group also appeared to briefly operate in Nitria in 2014.

In the late 2000s, the Brno Czech Republic District administered to three branches, whereas the Czech Prague Mission administered the Kosice Branch. In 2015, the four branches in Slovakia were organized into the Bratislava Slovakia District. In 2017, a member group continued to operate in Banská Bystrica.

Activity and Retention

Fifty-six members and missionaries attended the dedication of Slovakia in 2006.^[13] In 2009, the Bratislava Branch had approximately thirty active members. Other congregations appeared to have fewer than thirty attending regularly at the time. Seminary and institute programs began in 1993 although there were zero students reported in either program in 2013. There were approximately ten active members in Žilina in the early 2010s. In the mid-2010s, there were approximately twenty active members in Bratislava and ten active members each in Trenčín and Kosice. At the time, approximately half of new converts remained active one year after baptism. Active membership likely number no more than sixty, or 20-25% of total membership.

Language Materials

Languages with Latter-day Saint Scripture: Slovak, Czech, Hungarian, Ukrainian.

Slovak is mutually intelligible with Czech, in which all Church scriptures and many church resources are available. However, Slovaks value their own national identity and language, which has become increasingly differentiated from Czech since independence for nationalist reasons, and they do not like to use Czech materials. The Slovak translation of the Book of Mormon was published in early 2013. Plans were reported in 2017 to translate the Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price into Slovak.^[14] All Church scriptures and a wide selection of Church materials are translated into Hungarian and Ukrainian, although few Slovaks speak these languages, and there are no congregations in border regions where these populations are concentrated. Church materials translated in Slovak consist of several unit, temple, priesthood, Sunday School, primary, missionary, and family history materials.

Meetinghouses

All congregations meet in rented spaces or renovated buildings.

Humanitarian and Development Work

The Church has conducted 176 humanitarian and development projects in Slovakia since 1985 that have primarily consisted of community projects.^[15] Dutch Relief Society members made quilts for orphanages in Croatia and Slovakia in 2002.^[16]

Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects

Religious Freedom

The Church has enjoyed the benefits of government recognition only since late 2006. Prior to registration, missionaries only

served in Slovakia on a temporarily basis. Recently received government registration allows for greater allocation of mission resources. No laws restrict missionary activity.

Cultural Issues

Slovakia has one of the most religiously active populations in the European Union. Slovaks maintain strong cultural ties to Roman Catholicism and most appear disinterested in other religions. Misinformation about the Church further discourages many from learning about the Church or speaking with missionaries. Increasing materialism and wealth during the past two decades may lessen the receptivity of the population to mission outreach. Those who adhere to traditional religious groups face greater challenges from family and friends if they join the Church.

National Outreach

Notwithstanding its relatively religious population, Slovakia remains one of the least reached nations in Europe by mission efforts, as the combined population of cities with a branch or member group amount to 16% of the population. Half of the population resides in administration regions with an official branch. Most cities with congregations have had a gospel witness for a short duration and only few missionaries, and so the scope and impact of past and present mission outreach has been very small. Approximately sixty cities ranging from 10,000 to 50,000 inhabitants have no congregations and little, if any, concentrated proselytism efforts. There are several cities where the Church used to operate a branch or member group, but today do not appear to have a Church presence whatsoever such as Martin, Nitra, and Zvolen.

Slovakia lacks a mission of its own but depends on outreach directed by the Prague-based Czech/Slovak Mission and has received much less attention, missionary manpower, and resources than the Czech Republic. Essentially all missionary activity occurred within cities near the Czech border until the mid-2000s. The small size of current membership and a less receptive population after nearly three decades since the fall of communism complicate expanding national outreach, although the limited member base largely reflects the small missionary complement and historically few resources that have been allocated to missionary work in Slovakia.

The Church maintains a Slovak version of [lds.org](https://www.mormoni.sk/) with information about Church teachings, news, and meetinghouse locations at <https://www.mormoni.sk/>. The Church has Slovak translations of the Book of Mormon and several church materials online at [lds.org](https://www.mormoni.sk/) although there is no Slovak version of [Mormon.org](https://www.mormon.org/). Internet-based outreach can be effective to reach a larger audience if these efforts are consistently maintained and appropriately applied.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

Member activity rates are low and there are less than one hundred active members nationwide despite a continuous Church presence for 25 years. Approximately half of converts remain active one year after baptism, but it appears that many converts eventually become inactive years later. Burnout and discouragement appear to have stifled member-missionary efforts. A lack of socialization opportunities at Church is a major challenge. There are extremely few native families in the Church. Strong involvement of local members in missionary activity as well as the allocation of additional full-time missionaries and outreach resources will be required to accelerate membership growth.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

The small size of membership and an overrepresentation of foreign members limit greater growth and self-sufficiency among Slovakian membership. In Bratislava during the early 2010s, half of the active membership was Slovak, and foreign members held many callings. Hungarians in the south and other minority groups remain unreached by mission outreach. Hungarians appear more receptive to the Church, which may allow for greater membership growth once proselytism efforts occur in Hungarian-speaking regions. Tension between Hungarians and Slovaks complicate outreach among both groups in border regions.

Missionary Service

Prior to obtaining government recognition, missionaries could only work in Slovakia on temporary visas. Sixty missionaries were serving in the Czech Prague Mission in 2006.^[17] By early 2009, around twenty missionaries served in Slovakia. Four elders served in Kosice in early 2010. Very few Slovak members have served full-time missions. The Church in Slovakia is entirely dependent on foreign missionaries to staff its proselytism needs.

Language Issues

Although some Church materials are translated in Slovak, no Latter-day Saint scriptures were translated until 2013 despite two decades of outreach in Slovak-speaking areas. The lack of scriptures in Slovak has slowed membership growth over the past

two decades, which in turn relegates Slovak to a low-priority language, perpetuates delays in the translation of scripture, and reduces the scope, efficacy, and vision of mission outreach: a self-perpetuating cycle of neglect and stagnation based in circular logic. Like Georgian and some other languages with few local members and long delays to obtain translations of Latter-day Saint scripture, the Slovak language will require greater vision from mission planners grounded in long-term commitment to the local population and not merely the small number of present members.

Church services in Bratislava are held in both English and Slovakian. There are few non-Slovakian speakers in other congregations.

Leadership

All four branches appeared to have local branch presidents with the possible exception of Kosice in May 2010. However, by late 2018 only the Bratislava Branch appeared to have a native branch president. Foreign missionaries frequently serve in leadership positions due to a lack of active priesthood holders. The decision to organize Slovakia into its own district in 2015 did not appear related to increases or progress with local leadership development. Rather, this decision appeared motivated by an emphasis on leadership development in Slovakia for the future and in preparation to organize Czechia into its own stake. The small size of active membership and a lack of leadership in Banská Bystrica have prevented the creation of an independent branch. Similar problems appear primarily responsible for the dissolution of member groups or branches in other cities.

Temple

Slovakia pertains to the Freiburg Germany Temple district. Temple trips likely regularly under the Bratislava Slovakia District. Slovakian members benefit from close proximity to the temple despite their small numbers.

Comparative Growth

Slovakia has the lowest percentage of Latter-day Saints among European nations with at least five million inhabitants. Only Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro have a lower percentage of Latter-day Saints among sovereign European nations with at least 500,000 people, yet all three of these nations have had a Church presence only since the early 2010s. Few European nations besides Slovakia with an official Church presence have fewer than one hundred active members. Some European nations have had the Church arrive more recently and have experienced greater growth. In Moldova, the Church began its operations in the mid-1990s and obtained legal recognition from the government at the same time as Slovakia, yet had 50% more nominal members in 2017 than Slovakia and had all four of its branches led by native branch presidents in late 2018.

Missionary-minded Christian groups have experienced slow growth in Slovakia in recent years but have a significantly larger membership base than Latter-day Saints. Evangelical groups have seen little growth. The number of Seventh-Day Adventists has increased by only one hundred, and the number of churches has remained essentially stagnant for more than two decades. Jehovah's Witnesses have reported an increase of less than one hundred active members in the 2010s and a net decrease of 21 congregations between 2010 and 2017.

Future Prospects

The outlook for future Church growth appears poor given the extremely small number of active members, dependence on foreign-based leadership and missionary manpower to maintain minimal outreach, and few cities with a continuous Church presence. The Church has yet to experience a breakthrough with attracting Slovak converts in greater numbers. Few missionaries or resources continue to be allocated despite the Church's success in securing government recognition in 2006. Increasing materialism has further eroded receptivity, and the Church faces an increasingly competitive environment from better organized outreach-oriented faiths with strong indigenous membership. Increasing materialism and delays in the translation of Slovak-language scriptures have limited missionary efforts in finding, teaching, baptizing, and retaining converts. Future progress to improve the bleak plight of the Church in Slovakia will hinge on the development of self-sufficient local leadership and better vision to strengthen and expand Church operations into additional areas.

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