



# 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.



## Kosovo

Population: 1.86 millions (#151 out of countries)

By David Stewart and Matt Martinich

### Geography

**Area:** 10,887 square km. Landlocked in the Balkans, Kosovo is a small nation that borders Serbia, Macedonia, Albania, and Montenegro. Terrain consist of a flat, elevated basin and mountains subject to a continental climate creating cold, snowy winters and hot, dry summers. Air and water pollution, water scarcity, and land degradation are environmental concerns. Kosovo is divided into thirty-eight administrative municipalities.

### Peoples

Albanian: 92.9%

Bosniaks: 1.6%

Serbs: 1.5%

Turk: 1.1%

Ashkali: 0.9%

Egyptian: 0.7%

Gorani: 0.6%

Romani: 0.5%

Other/unspecified: 0.2%

Albanians form the majority in most areas. Serbs are concentrated in extreme northern Kosovo and in some larger cities but have significantly decreased in numbers over the past decade following the Kosovo War in the late 1990s.

**Population:** 1,895,250 (July 2017)

**Annual Growth Rate:** N/A

**Fertility Rate:** N/A

**Life Expectancy:** N/A

**Languages:** Albanian (94.5%), Bosnian (1.7%), Serbian (1.6%), Turkish (1.1%), other (0.9%), unspecified (0.2%). Albanian and Serbian are the official languages. Only Albanian has over one million speakers (1.6 million).

Literacy: 87.5% (2007)

## History

Serbs began to settle Kosovo in the seventh century but did not incorporate the region into the Serbian Empire until the thirteenth century. Serbia built many important Orthodox churches and monasteries in Kosovo, further deepening the Serbian legacy and claim to the region. The Ottoman Empire annexed Kosovo in 1389 and retained control until 1912. By the end of the nineteenth century, Albanians became the largest ethnic group as a result of immigration to the area from elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire. Serbia, and later Yugoslavia, administered Kosovo for the remainder of the twentieth century and granted greater autonomy in 1974. Albanian nationalism increased in the 1980s and strained relations with Yugoslavia. A separatist movement began to take shape following Slobadan Milosevic and the Serbian government decision to revoke Kosovo's autonomous status by first taking nonviolent opposition and later forming the Kosovo Liberation Army. Serbians began an aggressive, brutal campaign against Albanians in Kosovo through ethnic cleansing. Approximately 800,000 fled the country, and many died in the conflict. NATO led a three-month military campaign against Serbian forces and the United Nations established the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo. Negotiations between Serbian and Kosovo authorities failed in the 2000s and resulted in a formal declaration of independence in February 2008. As of May 2018, over 110 countries recognized Kosovo as a sovereign nation, but Serbia, Russia, China, India, and many nations in Latin America, Africa, Eastern Europe, and Asia do not recognize Kosovo independence. In July 2010, the World Court supported Kosovo's declaration of independence in determining that this declaration did not violate international law. Relations between Kosovo and Serbia were normalized in 2013. In 2018, Kosovo sought membership in the EU, NATO, and UN.

## Culture

Kosovo shares many cultural similarities with Albania, as the vast majority of the population is Albanian. Traditions and cultural practices often differ by city or town. Family plays a major role in society. Music is important to many and consists of a wide range of genres such as folk music using traditional Albanian instruments and modern music genres.

## Economy

**GDP per capita:** \$10,400 (2017) [17.5% of U.S.]

**Human Development Index:** 0.786

**Corruption Index:** 39 (2017)

War, political instability, and isolation have prevented greater economic growth and modernization, as Kosovo is one of Europe's poorest nation. Remittances from citizens of Kosovo living in Central Europe and elsewhere form an important part of the economy. Thirty-three (33%) of the population is unemployed, which fuels illegal activity and corruption. More than half of Kosovar youth are unemployed and as a result of limited employment opportunities leave Kosovo to seek employment elsewhere. Thirty percent (30%) of the population lives below the poverty line. Rich mineral deposits are underutilized due to lack of investment and equipment. As many live in small towns and rural areas, agriculture is an important sector of the economy and produces wheat, corn, and potatoes. Mining is the primary industry, exploiting nickel, lead, zinc, and magnesium deposits. Macedonia and Albania are important trade partners.

## Faiths

Muslim: 95.6%

Roman Catholic: 2.2%

Orthodox: 1.5%

Other: 0.07%

None: 0.07%

Unspecified: 0.56%

## Christians

### Denominations Members Congregations

Catholic – 41,696

Jehovah's Witnesses – 269 – 8

Latter-day Saints less than – 102 – 2

## Religion

More than 95% of the population affiliates as Muslim although many do not attend worship services or display traditional Muslim cultural traits. Nearly all ethnic Albanians are Muslim. Serbs are primarily Serbian Orthodox. Catholics and Protestants account for fewer than 5% of the population. Catholics tend to reside nearby their churches in three administrative municipalities near the Albanian border, whereas Protestants are concentrated in Pristina and other cities.

## Religious Freedom

The constitution protects religious freedom, which is generally upheld by local laws and government practices. Religion and ethnicity are highly correlated, making it difficult to determine whether societal acts of violence are ethnically or religiously motivated. In recent years, many of these acts of violence have targeted Serbian Orthodox churches and adherents. Both Christian and Muslim religious holidays are national holidays. Religious groups are not required to register to operate. Protestants groups are not registered with the government but desire official recognition in order to obtain needed permits to own land and obtain building permits. Some friction between Protestants and local government has occurred concerning obtaining permits to build churches or bury their deceased.[\[1\]](#)

## Largest Cities

Urban: N/A

Priština, **Prizren**, **Uroševac**, **Kosovska Mitrovica**, Gjakova, **Peja**, **Gjilan**, **Vushtrri**, **Podujevo**, **Orahovac**.

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

Two of the ten largest cities have an LDS presence. Approximately 29% of the national population lives in the ten largest cities. The urban population likely accounts for less than half the national population.

## LDS History

In 2000, Kosovo was assigned to the Europe Central Area. In 2006, President Weight from the Slovenia Ljubljana Mission traveled with his assistants to Kosovo on an exploratory visit to assess conditions and meet with members and investigators. The first converts from Kosovo to join the Church were baptized in the United States and in other nations. The first known baptism in Kosovo occurred in August 2006. The same month, twenty-six members from Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, and Kosovo attended a youth single adult conference in Slovenia. In 2010, Kosovo was reassigned from the Slovenia Ljubljana Mission to the Europe Area Presidency. By 2010, the Church had established the Kosovo CES Institute under the Balkans CES Coordinator. In 2010, missionaries in the Albania Tirana Mission began teaching a woman through Skype who had been investigating the Church for several years. Proselytizing missionaries were first assigned to Kosovo in 2011. In 2012, Kosovo was assigned to the Albania-based Adriatic South Mission. Two sister missionaries were attacked and beaten in 2013 by individuals who espoused extreme Islamist ideology.[\[2\]](#) Church leaders in the mid-2010s noted other instances of threats

against foreign full-time missionaries.

## **Membership Growth**

### **LDS Membership: 102 (2017)**

In 2006, Gjakova had three native members and four foreign members, and Pristina had several members. Pristina had around twelve members in 2010. Church membership totaled 50 in 2013. In 2017, one in 18,581 was LDS.

## **Congregational Growth**

### **Branches: 2 (2017)**

In 2006, members met in at least two groups in Pristina and Gjakova. In 2010, the Church organized an administrative branch for Kosovo under the Europe Area. The administrative branch was renamed the Pristina Branch in 2011. In late 2012, missionaries opened Gjakova to proselytism and operated a group. The Gjavoka Branch was organized in 2014. A member group briefly operated in Peja in 2014. Missionaries were assigned to Peja briefly in the mid-2010s. Missionaries almost opened Prizren to proselytism in 2014.

## **Activity and Retention**

Twelve attended the first baptism held in 2006. A sacrament meeting in Gjakova in 2006 had eighteen in attendance, including nine investigators. Usually around a dozen attended Church meetings held in 2010 in Pristina. In the mid-2010s, there were approximately 35 active members in Pristina and approximately 10 active members in Gjakova. Total active membership is likely around 50, or 50% of nominal membership.

## **Language Materials**

### **Languages with LDS Scripture:** Albanian, Serbian.

All LDS scriptures are available in Albanian. Only the Book of Mormon is available in Serbian albeit there were plans to translate the remainder of LDS scriptures into Serbian as of late 2017.<sup>[3]</sup> 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**

Church meetings are held in members' homes.

## **Humanitarian and Development Work**

A total of 42 humanitarian and development projects have occurred in Kosovo.<sup>[4]</sup> In 1999, the Church donated 200,000 pounds of blankets and clothing to Kosovo refugees temporarily living in Macedonia. Ninety thousand pounds of humanitarian aid was donated later that year to refugees. Many Church members hand-made quilts and donated them to the Church to distribute to the needy in Kosovo during the crisis. By the end of the year, more than 100,000 quilts had been made and donated.

## **Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects**

### **Religious Freedom**

There are no restrictions forbidding proselytism, foreign missionaries, or church activities for religious groups without government recognition. Concerns over the political stability of the region and low living standards likely delayed the placement of full-time LDS missionaries until the early 2010s. Difficulty for nontraditional Christian groups purchasing land and obtaining building permits may create challenges later for the LDS Church once membership size and activity merit larger meetinghouses. Repeated threats against foreign missionaries by Islamist extremists may disrupt or discourage expansion of proselytism efforts.

## **Cultural Issues**

Following his visit to Kosovo in 2006, President Weight reported that many were receptive to the Church and that if missionaries were assigned to the country they would not have a shortage of people to teach. Many remain receptive to Christianity, and many missionary-oriented churches report success gaining converts on college campuses. However, recently returned missionaries have reported that youth and young adults are often less tolerant of LDS proselytism due to stronger religious ties to Islam than their parents. Decades of Serbian oppression has appeared to strengthen the ethno-religious of many Albanian Kosovars to Islam.

## **National Outreach**

The Church extends outreach only in two cities, where 10% of the Kosovar population resides. Few converts have joined the Church since the first missionaries were assigned. Low current receptivity to proselytism will likely dissuade any serious efforts to open multiple additional cities to proselytism in the foreseeable future. Efforts to open additional cities during the mid-2010s failed due, in part, to societal intolerance of LDS proselytism. For example, missionaries who briefly served in Prizren in 2014 reported that they were requested by government officials to leave the city for their own safety. Missionaries have noted low receptivity outside of Pristina.

Several converts from Kosovo have joined the Church in other countries and returned to their home country. Coordination of mission outreach in Kosovo and Kosovar communities around the world will be the most effective means of increasing national outreach, the number of Kosovar member families, and convert retention.

## **Member Activity and Convert Retention**

Current member activity rates appear significantly higher than most other countries in the region. However, convert retention and member attrition have been significant challenges that have stifled growth, particularly in Gjakova.

## **Ethnic Issues and Integration**

The homogeneity of the population reduces ethnic integration challenges.

## **Language Issues**

Church materials are translated in the native language of more than 95% of the population. This is very atypical for nations with a recent, unofficial Church presence.

## **Leadership**

Several Kosovar members have historically served in leadership positions in the two branches. However, leadership remains strongly reliant on foreign full-time missionaries or foreign members who temporarily live in the country to adequately staff leadership positions.

## **Temple**

Kosovo is assigned to the Frankfurt Germany Temple. Members may attend the Rome Italy Temple once it is completed. Temple trips likely do not occur due to the small size of church membership.

## **Comparative Growth**

In 2010, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, and Montenegro were the last four noncity-state countries in Europe without independent branches. However, Kosovo was the first of these four nations with full-time missionaries assigned. All of these nations have had official LDS branches since the early 2010s and Kosovo reports the highest percentage of Latter-day Saints among these four nations. The percentage of Latter-day Saints in the Kosovar population is comparable to the Church in Serbia. Most of the former Yugoslavia has experienced major challenges in convert retention and slow membership growth over the past two decades. The Church in Albania has reported significantly greater growth than the Church in Kosovo. For example, the Church in Albania reported 3,000 members, one stake, 13 wards/branches, and one mission in 2017. Moreover, the Church in Albania reports the highest percentage of Latter-day Saints in the population of any country in Southeastern Europe at 0.10%.

Other Christian groups have experienced growth in Kosovo, although their presence has been limited until recently due to instability and war in the region. Continuing to delay mission outreach in Kosovo may result in many receptive to the gospel

message joining other denominations and becoming less apt to join the LDS Church over time.

## Future Prospects

The receptivity of the Church in Albania and recent success of Christian groups in Kosovo would seem to suggest that the Church has potential for greater growth in Kosovo than in many other Southeastern European nations in the coming years. A small native-member community is in place to begin the foundation of local leadership to work with full-time missionaries. However, the high rate of emigration and current reliance on foreign members in church administration presents challenges. Moreover, LDS proselytism efforts have been met with disappointment since they began in the early 2010s due to most Albanian Kosovars exhibiting stronger ethno-religious ties to Islam than their counterparts in Albania. Safety concerns for missionaries have also been more significant than other neighboring nations and have interfered with efforts to expand outreach. As a result, it appears unlikely that the Church will report noticeable growth in Kosovo for many years to come.

[1] "Kosovo," International Religious Freedom Report for 2016.

<https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2016&dliid=268830#wrapper>

[2] Walch, Tad. "2 Mormon missionaries OK after attack in Kosovo; suspected assailants arrested." Deseret News, 13 November 2013.

<https://www.deseretnews.com/article/865590522/2-Mormon-missionaries-OK-after-attack-in-Kosovo-suspected-assailants-arrested>.

[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](https://www.lds.org/bc/content/ldsorg/church/news/2017/10/09/15159_000_letter.pdf?lang=eng)

[4] "Where We Work," LDS Charities, accessed 26 May 2018. <https://www.ldscharities.org/where-we-work>