

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.



Romania

Population: 21.73 millions (#58 out of countries)

By David Stewart and Matt Martinich

Geography

Area: 238,391 square km. Romania is located in Eastern Europe and borders Ukraine, Moldova, Bulgaria, Serbia, Hungary, and the Black Sea. Mountainous terrain occupies central and northern areas, which include the Carpathian Mountains and Transylvanian Alps. Fertile plains run along the eastern and western borders and dominate the southeast. Most areas experience temperate climate with snowy, cold winters and warm summers with regular participation. The Danube River forms portions of the Serbian, Bulgarian, and Ukrainian borders and empties into the Black Sea in eastern Romania. Earthquakes and landslides are natural hazards. Environmental issues include erosion, declining soil quality, air pollution, and damage to wetland areas from water pollution. Romania is administratively divided into forty-one counties and one municipality.

Peoples

Romanian: 83.4%

Hungarian: 6.1%

Roma: 3.1%

Ukrainian: 0.3%

German: 0.2%

Other: 0.7%

Unspecified: 6.2%

Population: 21,457,116 (July 2018)

Annual Growth Rate: -0.35% (2018)

Fertility Rate: 1.36 children born per woman (2018)

Life Expectancy: 72.1 male, 79.2 female (2018)

Languages: Romanian (85.4%), Hungarian (6.3%), Romani (1.2%), other (1.0%), unspecified (6.1%). Romanian is the official language. Languages with over one million speakers include Romanian (18.3 million) and Hungarian (1.35 million).

Literacy: 98.8% (2015)

History

The Dacians inhabited Romania—then known as Dacia—before the birth of Christ. In the first century, the Romans conquered Dacia and established a province that was incorporated in their empire for several centuries. Invasions from Goths and other native peoples drove the Romans out by the late third century. During the Middle Ages, various ethnic groups settled or controlled the region, including Avars, Bulgars, Cumans, Huns, and Slavs. Transylvania—currently in northwestern Romania—emerged as a state in the eleventh century and was under rule of the Hungarian Empire. Wallachia—southern areas of Romania—unified in the fourteenth century and came under Ottoman rule in the fifteenth century. Moldavia became a political entity in the fourteenth century and received strong political influences from Russia, Poland and other neighboring powers. Moldavia and Wallachia unified in the mid-nineteenth century as Romania and independence was recognized by 1878. Romania fought alongside the Allied Powers in World War I and gained additional territory following the conflict, such as Transylvania. In World War II, Romania joined the Axis Powers and came under Soviet rule in 1944. The Soviets established a communist government that lasted until 1989. Dictator Nicolae Ceausescu ruled for several decades and was known for his oppressive reign and police raids in the 1980s. In 1989, Ceausescu was overthrown and executed. During the 1990s and 2000s, relations with Central and Western Europe strengthened. Romania joined NATO in 2004 and the European Union in 2007.

Culture

Poverty, social attitudes, and political influences contributed to the increase of children in Romanian orphanages to over 200,000 in the early 1990s.[1] The Romanian Orthodox Church serves as a powerful cultural influence and symbol of national identity. Many Romanians are excellent cooks. Cuisine borrows from many surrounding nations and commonly includes sausage, stuffed vegetables, malmaliga (cornmeal pudding), potatoes, and bread. Alcohol consumption rates are among the highest in the world, whereas cigarette consumption rates rank higher than most nations. Abortion is culturally accepted and commonplace.

Economy

GDP per capita: $24,600 (2017) [41.1% of U.S.]

Human Development Index: 0.811 (2017)

Corruption Index: 48 (2017)

Romania faced many challenges adopting a free-market capitalist system following the fall of communism, due to outdated and inadequate national infrastructure to meet the population's needs. Widespread poverty and bureaucracy have limited economic growth and development. In the mid-2010s, Romania experienced significant economic growth with GDP increasing by 6.9% in 2017. This growth was primarily driven by increased trade with the EU, good agricultural output, domestic demand, and tax cuts. Services employ 42.8% of the workforce and produce 62.6% of the GDP, whereas agriculture employs 28.3% of the workforce and produces 4.2% of the GDP. Primary crops include wheat, corn, sugar beets, barley, and sunflower seed. Industry accounts for 33.2% of the GDP, employs 28.9% of the workforce, and primarily consists of machinery, auto assembly, textiles, mining, and food processing. Primary trade partners include Germany, Italy, France, and Hungary.

Corruption in Romania is perceived as being more widespread than in most other European Union member nations. Tax evasion is widespread. Many allege that the government has not done enough to fight corruption. Investigating higher ranking government officials on corruption charges has been difficult due to laws and legal protection offered by the judicial system. Many Romanians report regularly paying bribes.[2] Widespread perceived corruption has reduced foreign investment and limited economic development. There has been a slight improvement in the perception of corruption in Romania during the past decade.

Faiths

Christian: 92.6%

Other: 0.9%

None/atheist: 0.2%

Unspecified: 6.3%

Christians

Denominations Members Congregations

Romanian Orthodox – 18,560,405

Roman Catholic – 1,072,856

Greek Catholic – 488,000

Seventh Day Adventists – 64,885 – 1,354

Jehovah's Witnesses – 40,101 – 551

Latter-day Saints – 3,052 – 15

Religion

Most Romanians affiliate with the Romanian Orthodox Church. The largest Christian minority groups are Roman Catholics and Greek Catholics. Catholics and Protestants are concentrated in Transylvania and primarily consist of ethnic Hungarians. Muslims primarily live in the southeast. There are 3,400 Jews and 40% of Jews reside in Bucharest.[3] Although 99% of the population identify with a Christian denomination, a 2007 poll reported that only 31% attend religious meetings at least several times a month.[4]

Religious Freedom

The constitution protects religious freedom, but the government restricts some aspects of religious practice. There is no state religion, although the Romanian Orthodox Church has a strong influence on government and religious affairs. The Romanian Orthodox Church has exacerbated intolerance towards non-Orthodox Christian churches by criticizing proselytism conducted by other religious groups and influencing the legislation of new rigorous recognition requirements for minority religious groups. Controversy continues over the Romanian Orthodox Church's refusal to return many Greek Catholic churches it received in 1948 to current Greek Catholics.

To register as a religious association, a religious group must have at least 300 adult members. To obtain religion status—which entitles religious groups to receive tax-exempt status, broadcast religious programming, establish schools, receive government funding, and teach religious material in public schools with adherents—religious groups must be registered as religious associations, have had at least twelve years of a continuous presence in Romania, and constitute at least 0.1% of the population (about 21,500 people). There are eighteen recognized religious groups with religion status, including Seventh-Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses. Proselytism is permitted but is sometimes disrupted by local government officials. Religious groups that have recently arrived, engage in active proselytism, or are concentrated among ethnic minorities experience the greatest societal discrimination.[5]

Largest Cities

Urban: 54% (2018)

Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Timisoara, Iasi, Constanta, Craiova, Brasov, Galati, Ploiesti, Oradea, **Braila**, Arad, Pitesti, Sibiu, Bacau, **Târgu-Mures**, **Baia Mare**, **Buzau**, **Botosani**, **Satu Mare**.

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

Fourteen of the twenty cities with over 100,000 inhabitants have a Church congregation. Twenty-eight percent (28%) of the national population resides in the twenty largest cities.

Church History

At the close of the nineteenth century, Latter-day Saint missionary Mischa Markow preached in several Eastern and Central European nations. Several joined the Church, and a congregation was organized in Bucharest. Mischa Markow traveled to additional cities, such as Brasov,[6] where members met for several decades following his initial proselytism efforts. Between 1903 and 1933, Brasov had thirty convert baptisms, and forty-eight missionaries served in the city. [7] However, war and political instability resulted in little Church influence in the area for the following six decades. Most of the original members emigrated to the West or had passed away by the mid-1970s.[8]

Elder Russell M. Nelson dedicated Romania for missionary work in February 1990.[9] Although humanitarian missionaries had already been serving in the country under the Austria Vienna East Mission,[10] the first proselytizing missionaries arrived in December 1990. In 1991, the Hungary Budapest Mission began administering Romania, and the first convert baptisms since the fall of communism occurred. The Church obtained missionary visas and gained legal standing through the Liahona Association that was registered with the government in 1993. The same year, the Church organized the Romania Bucharest Mission, which also administered church work in neighboring Moldova. Seminary and church institute classes began in 1996. The first Romanian Book of Mormon translations arrived in 1998.[11] Romania became part of the Europe East Area in 2000. The first young women camp was held in 2009.[12] In early 2010, two missionaries died by natural gas asphyxiation in their apartment while sleeping.[13] In 2010, only around six Romanian members had received their Patriarchal blessings, as there are no patriarchs in the country because no stakes were organized. In 2018, the Church discontinued the Romania Bucharest Mission and reassigned Romania to the Hungary Budapest Mission, which was renamed the Hungary/Romania Mission.

Membership Growth

LDS Membership: 3,052 (2017)

Membership growth accelerated in the 1990s. In 1991, there were fifty convert baptisms. At the end of 1993, there were 300 members. Membership doubled to 600 two years later. By year-end 1997, there were 1,100 members, and in 2000, membership reached 1,770. Covert baptisms ranged from 132 to 206 per year between 1993 and 1998. Membership continued to increase to 2,196 in 2003, 2,623 in 2006, and 2,736 in 2008. Annual membership growth rates fell from 12% in 2001 to 5%–8% in the mid-2000s and to 2%–3% in the late 2000s. Essentially stagnant membership growth has occurred since 2010 as annual membership growth rates have generally ranged from -0.5% to 2.0%. The Church reported 3,002 members in 2012 and 3,059 members in 2016.

In 2017, one in 7,054 was a Latter-day Saint.

Congregational Growth

Branches: 15 (2018)

The Church organized its first branch in modern times in 1991 in Bucharest. The branch split the following year. Two districts operated in Bucharest by 1995 but were consolidated in 1998. Ploiesti became the second city with a branch in 1993.[14] Many cities opened for missionary work and had branches organized in the late 1990s, including Arad (1997), Brasov (1997), Cluj-Napoca (1997), Oradea (1997), Sibiu (1997), Timisoara (1997), Bacau (1998), Constanta (1998), and Pitesti (1999). Branches were organized in Galati and Iasi in 2000. A district was organized in Ploiesti in 1999, which in 2001 administered four branches (Brasov, Pitesti, Ploiesti, and Leogane). The number of official branches increased from one in 1991 to four in 1993, nine in 1995, sixteen in 1997, and twenty in 2001.

In 2001, six branches functioned in Bucharest, each with a native branch president, which together formed the district.[15] However by 2009, only two branches remained in Bucharest—the Mihai Bravu and Panduri Branches. During the 2000s, three additional cities opened to missionary work: Deva, Alexandria, and Craiova. In 2009, the Church created the Arad Romania District, which included branches in Arad, Deva, Oradea, and Timisoara and consolidated the Ploiesti Romania District with the district in Bucharest for a total of six branches in Alexandria, Bucharest, Brasov, Pitesti, and Ploiesti. By 2009, there were seventeen branches nationwide.

In 2010, all cities opened to missionary work had a branch organized except for Craiova, where members met as a group. In 2011, a branch was organized in Craiova. In 2012, a group was organized in the town of Feldioara. However, the group was closed shortly thereafter. The Deva Branch closed in 2013. A member group opened in northern Bucharest in 2013 but closed shortly thereafter. In 2017, the Alexandria Branch closed. In 2018, the Church organized a district in Iasi with four branches: Bacau, Brasov, Galati, and Iasi. At the time the Bucharest Romania District had six branches and the Cluj-Napoca Romania District had five branches.

Activity and Retention

In 2000, seventy youth gathered for the first youth conference since the organization of the Romania Bucharest Mission.[16] Eighty-one were enrolled in seminary or institute during the 2008–2009 school year. In 2000, 200 attended skits about different Book of Mormon stories from six branches in the Bucharest Romania District.[17] A young single adult conference in Bucharest had sixty-five in attendance in 2001.[18]

In mid-2010, the Constanta Branch had around twenty attending church meetings. At the time most branches had fewer than fifty active members. In the early 2000s, the two branches in Bucharest had the most active members, with the Mihai Bravu Branch having over one hundred active members. In the mid-2010s, approximate church attendance by branch was as follows: Panduri (45-75), Mihai Bravu (30-60), Ploiesti (20-60), Cluj-Napoca (35-50), Brasov (30-35), Arad (15-30), Bacau (20), Iasi (15-30), Constanta (15), Oradea (10-15), Pitesti (5-15), Sibiu (10), Craiova (less than 10), Alexandria (5), and Timisoara (5). At the time there were approximately a dozen who attended the Bucharest North member group before it closed. In the late 2010s, approximate church attendance by branch was as follows: Cluj-Napoca (40), Iasi (20), Brasov (15-20), Bacau (5-15), and Galati (less than 10). At the time returned missionaries reported that 50-70% of recent converts remained active one year after baptism. Poor fellowshipping from members, weak testimony of the Church, and being offended by a member or church leader were among the most common reasons why inactive members no longer attended church per returned missionary reports. The average number of members per branch increased from 121 in 2004 to 165 in 2009 and 203 in 2017.

Nationwide active membership is estimated at no greater than 400, or 15% of total membership.

Language Materials

Languages with Latter-day Saint Scripture: Romanian, Russian, Ukrainian, German, Bulgarian, Serbian, Turkish.

All Latter-day Saint scriptures are available in Romanian, Russian, Ukrainian, German, Bulgarian, and Serbian. Only the Book of Mormon is translated in Turkish. Most Church materials are available in German. Romanian, Serbian, and Turkish translations of some family history, missionary, primary, young men, priesthood, Relief Society, Sunday School, unit, and temple materials are available. A greater number of materials for these organizations are available in Russian and Ukrainian. The Liahona has six issues a year in Romanian, four issues a year in Bulgarian, and twelve issues a year in German, Russian and Ukrainian. Bulgarian, Russian, and Ukrainian have several audio/visual materials and CES student manuals translated.

Meetinghouses

The Church has constructed only a couple meetinghouses. Most congregations meet in rented spaces or renovated buildings.

Humanitarian and Development Work

In 1990, Church members in Europe quickly answered the call for aid and assistance to Romania's disadvantaged by organizing teams of medical professionals composed of members from several nations. Needed supplies were also donated that were funded by member donations.[19] That same year members in California sent quilts to needy orphanages in Romania.[20] In 1991, BYU held a book drive that donated 40,000 books to the Central University Library in Bucharest.[21] Humanitarian missionaries provided valuable service to handicapped children, helping the Romanian public better accept disabled children.[22] Assistance to orphanages continued in the 2000s, and there was an increase in specialized development projects. In 2000, members in Washington state sent bedding materials to an orphanage in Iasi, Romania.[23] In 2003, the Church assisted the disabled by coordinating with members and local medical professionals fitting and allocating prosthetic devices.[24] The Church offered humanitarian assistance following severe flooding along the Danube River in 2006.[25] In 2010, the Church donated Braille writers to a school for blind children. In 2014, Latter-day Saints participated in efforts with the Podul Dragostei Foundation to rebuild computers and donate computers to foster children in Romania.[26] By 2017, the Church had conducted a total of 300 humanitarian and development projects in Romania since 1985.[27]

Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects

Religious Freedom

The Church has maintained positive relations with the national government and enjoys full religious freedom. The Church does not have religion status as nominal membership is approximately one-tenth of the number needed to qualify. The Church has experienced challenges renewing missionary visas and has faced societal and local government opposition to proselytism in many locations. In 2006, a religious textbook published by the Ministry of Education depicted the Church and other recently arrived religious groups as a threat to society.[28] In 2008, customs officials delayed the shipment of religious materials by a

month. There have been many instances of society, local government, and some Romanian Orthodox Church officials harassing and discriminating against Latter-day Saints but these instances have recently become less frequent.

Cultural Issues

Anxiety and suspicion of recently arrived nontraditional religious groups creates a cultural barrier to missionary efforts. Most Christians do not actively participate in their faith. The Romanian Orthodox Church has created major cultural obstacles for the Church to overcome in proselytism. Economic problems require many to work on Sundays, which creates difficulties for members and prospective members to consistently attend church. Those seeking to join the Church who have participated in an abortion must be interviewed by a member of the mission presidency to be considered for baptism. Converts who have not completely ended smoking or drinking habits before baptism experience poor retention.

National Outreach

The Church has made noticeable progress increasing national outreach over the past twenty years but has seen a reduction in mission outreach capabilities in Bucharest as congregations have consolidated and the Romania Bucharest Mission was consolidated with neighboring missions. Twenty-four percent (24%) of the national population resides in a city with a branch. Four percent (4%) of Romania's population lives in cities with over 100,000 inhabitants without a branch. This subset of the population may be most likely to receive future mission outreach. Fourteen of the forty-one administrative counties (34%) have a branch. There are over 180 cities with between 10,000 and 100,000 inhabitants without mission outreach that account for 20% of the national population. Romania's large rural population will likely remain almost totally unreached for many more decades, as limited mission resources cannot fully administer larger population centers.

Romania's large population and small, needy Church membership spread throughout the country has posed a daunting task for mission leaders to staff current mission outreach centers while simultaneously opening new ones. Distance and a lack of members in northern Romania have prevented the opening of any cities in this region. Northern Romania alone has ten counties that have no mission outreach centers and is where the most populous unreached cities are concentrated. Locating any members or past investigators who reside in this region, holding cottage meetings with these individuals, distributing Church literature, and performing humanitarian activities may help improve the prospects of establishing additional permanent mission outreach centers.

The Church maintains an Internet site for Romania at http://www.mormonii.ro/. The website provides doctrinal information, meetinghouse locations, local news, and mission contact information in Romanian. Furthermore, the Church has a Romanian version of its website for the general public interested in learning more about the Church at https://www.mormon.org/ron. Use of the website in street contacting and proselytism initiatives can help interested individuals learn about the Church and make contact with missionaries.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

The Church in Romania reports one of the lowest member activity rates in Eastern Europe. In 1998, the two districts functioning in Bucharest were consolidated partially in preparation for a future stake. However, low member activity and convert retention rates together with lower than expected membership growth rates make the organization of a stake in Romania unlikely for the foreseeable future. Member activity rates may be the lowest in the Bucharest area, as the six branches originally functioning in the city were consolidated into just two. These branches are likely considerably larger than any of the original six Bucharest branches, but many members were lost to inactivity before consolidation, and the increased distances and travel times have contributed to further attrition. Additional factors in low convert retention and member activity rates include quick baptisms tactics of full-time missionaries during the years of most rapid membership growth in the 1990s and early 2000s, limited social support infrastructure in smaller branches, and societal pressures marginalizing Latter-day Saints. Reactivation efforts through specific congregation-sponsored activities focusing on the age and needs of less active or inactive members may stabilize member activity over time, although dramatic improvements are unlikely. Full-time missionaries report that they help fellowship and teach less active members, especially in Bucharest. Coordinated mission efforts with seminary and institute may be effective means to increase social cohesion, doctrinal understanding, and strengthen member testimonies. Convert retention rates markedly improved in the 2010s although very few converts joined the Church during this time period.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

Romanians constitute the bulk of membership, and most areas have little ethnic diversity. Hungarians primarily reside in counties near the Hungarian border, and other ethnic groups tend to populate border areas with their receptive ethnic homelands. As many non-Romanians live in remote, distant areas, the Church has encountered few opportunities to conduct missionary work among them, as there are few or no nearby mission outreach centers. Hungarians are most likely to receive mission outreach in the northwest especially now that Romania and Hungary are in the same mission, but Hungarians in Romania face challenges initially integrating into congregations of Romanians due to past ethnic conflicts. There are some ethnic Hungarian Latter-day Saints in Oradea, Timisoara, and Brasov. Missionaries have had some interaction with Roma in several areas but no concentrated mission outreach efforts have occurred.

Language Issues

Romania experiences few language issues, as 85% of the population speaks Romanian as a first language. The remaining 15% of the population has received little missionary outreach, as missionaries serving in Romania have not historically taught or learned Hungarian or other commonly spoken minority languages. Ample Church literature is available in the first language of 98% of the population, but non-Romanian materials appear to be largely unused in everyday proselytism.

Missionary Service

In 2000, only seven Romanians had served full-time missions, and eleven were currently serving missions. Eighty missionaries served in the Romania Bucharest Mission in late 2009. Romania relies heavily on foreign missionaries to staff its missionary force. Few youth converts, low birth rates in the few Latter-day Saint families, and historically low convert retention have limited the native missionary force.

Leadership

Although leadership capabilities in Bucharest appear to have made little, if any, progress over the past decade, local leadership in many other cities has strengthened. Greater self-reliance and leadership development in northwestern Romania likely contributed to the Church organizing the Cluj-Napoca Romania District in 2009 and the Iasi Romania District in 2017; however, these districts were also likely organized to reduce travel times between cities and to assist mission president oversight of branches. The Iasi Branch was included in the Chisinau Moldova District when it was organized in 2009 and likely provided needed leadership and assistance to Moldovan members before reassigned back to Romania-based districts. Only a few of Romania's sixteen branches had missionaries serving as the branch president in 2010 but most likely had missionaries serving in support roles due to the small number of active priesthood holders. In 2018, three of the branches appeared to be led by foreigners or full-time missionaries. Most small branches have full-time missionaries who serve in leadership positions due to a lack of active members.

Temple

Romania pertains to the Kyiv Ukraine Temple district. In the early 2000s, members typically traveled thirty-six hours by bus to the Freiburg Germany Temple twice a year.[29] Temple trips continue to occur regularly and require long-term planning and sacrifice in time and money for members who participate. The Church may build a small temple closer to Romania in neighboring Hungary one day.

Comparative Growth

Romania used to achieve some of the steadiest growth in convert baptisms and membership among Eastern European nations between 1990 and 2010 although current growth rates are among the slowest in the region. These trends are comparable to most large nations in Eastern Europe, such as Ukraine, Poland, and Russia, where rapid membership growth occurred in the early 1990s, followed by declining growth in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and nearly stagnant growth since in the late 2000s. Many of these nations have even experienced a decline in active membership during some years. Member activity rates in Romania appear slightly lower than most other nearby nations. The percentage of members in the population is lower than most European nations. The Church in most nearby former communist European nations maintains greater national outreach than Romania albeit these nations are smaller geographically and less populated.

Non-Orthodox Christians report little to no increases in membership, and many of the larger denominations are in decline. Over the past decade, Seventh-Day Adventists have reported declining membership and decreasing numbers of converts, yet the number of congregations remains nearly unchanged. Evangelicals and Jehovah's Witnesses appear among the few Christian groups that report regular increases in membership, although these groups report large unreached areas of the country. Witnesses reported slight increases in the number of active members and congregations during the 2010s.

Future Prospects

The outlook for future growth in Romania appears poor within the foreseeable future. The Church currently reports one of the lowest member activity rates in the world in Romania and consistent efforts to strengthen local leadership and expand national outreach have yielded few results. External factors the Church faces that have posed difficulties for growth include strong cultural ties to Orthodox Christianity and societal suspicion of foreign, America-based religious groups. The closure of the Romania Bucharest Mission and the reassignment of Romania to the realigned Hungary/Romania Mission indicates a significant reduction in mission resources allocated to the two nations despite a combined population of more than 31 million. This decision appears rooted in extremely few convert baptisms in Romania since the early 2010s combined with worldwide efforts to redistribute mission resources from less productive areas to more productive ones. Thus, progress with reversing current stagnant growth trends will require greater participation from local members and leaders in proselytism and national outreach expansion combined with effective vision from mission leadership to strengthen remaining branches.

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