

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.



Slovenia

Population: 1.99 millions (#148 out of countries)

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Geography

Area: 20,273 square km. Situated in Central Europe, Slovenia borders Croatia, Italy, Austria, Hungary, and the Adriatic Sea. High mountains and valleys in the eastern Alps cover most of the interior with some plains in the northeast and the narrow strip of coast. Coastal areas experience a Mediterranean climate, whereas the interior is subject to a continental climate consisting of cold winters and warm summers. Flooding and earthquakes are natural hazards. Environmental issues include water pollution in rivers and the Adriatic Sea, air pollution, and acid raid. Slovenia is administratively divided into 212 municipalities.

Population: 1,972,126 (July 2017)

Annual Growth Rate: –0.31% (2017)

Fertility Rate: 1.36 children born per woman (2017)

Life Expectancy: 74.8 male, 82.2 female (2017)

Peoples

Slovene: 83.1%

Serb: 2.0%

Croat: 1.8%

Bosniak: 1.1%

Other/unspecified: 12%

Languages: Slovenian (91.1%), Serbo-Croatian (4.5%), other or unspecified (4.4%). National or official languages include Slovene, Hungarian, and Italian. Only Slovene has over one million speakers (1.8 million). Slovenian is not mutually intelligible with Croatian or Serbian, but many older Slovenes understand Serbo-Croatian. Most young Slovenes are fluent in English.

Literacy: 99.7%

History

Slavs arrived in the sixth century and formed Caratania, which ruled the area for several centuries. Carantina later joined the Carolingian Empire. Slovene lands subsequently became subject to Austrian rule. The Protestant Reformation left a strong legacy on Slovenia, including the Slovene script used today. Protestants were expelled in the early seventeenth century.[1] The Austro-Hungarian Empire controlled the area until its dissolution following World War I. Slovenes, Croats, and Serbians united to form Yugoslavia in 1929. Slovenia remained a republic of Yugoslavia until an independence movement was initiated in the 1980s, culminating in independence in 1991. War with Yugoslavia lasted only ten days. Slovenia's remote location and low ethnic diversity isolated it from later conflicts in the Balkans. Rapid modernization, renewed historical ties with Western Europe, and political stability have resulted in strong economic growth over the past two decades.

Culture

Slovenia exhibits many societal features of former communist nations of Central and Eastern Europe, with a large portion of the population identifying as nonreligious and a revival of traditional religious groups, Catholicism in Slovenia's case. Slovenia has achieved some of the greatest economic growth and wealth among former communist nations in Europe, resulting in increased secularism and higher costs of living. There is a legacy of famous writers, architects, composers, painters, and musicians. Cuisine consists of a variety of foods native to the country or introduced from elsewhere. Cigarette and alcohol consumption rates are high.

Economy

GDP per capita: $34,100 (2017) [57.3% of U.S.]

Human Development Index: 0.890

Corruption Index: 61 (2017)

In 2017, Slovenia had one of the highest GDP per capita among the former communist nations in Central and Eastern Europe. Wealth is more equally distributed than most nations, and the economy has modernized to Western European levels. The worldwide financial crisis in the late 2000s resulted in a decline of 7.3% in the GDP and increased the unemployment rates to 9.4%. However, the unemployment rate decreased to 6.8% by 2017. Services employ 64.6% of the labor force and produce 65.8% of the GDP. Industry employs 31.7% of the workforce and produces 32% of the GDP. Metal and aluminum products, smelting, electronics, and truck and car manufacturing are primary industries. Agricultural products include hops, wheat, and coffee. Primary trade partners include Germany, Italy, Austria, and Croatia. Corruption levels rank among the lowest for former communist nations in Europe.

Faiths

Christian: 61%

Muslim: 2.4%

Unaffiliated: 3.5%

Other/unspecified: 23%

None: 10.1%

Christians

Denominations Members Congregations

Catholic – 1,139,889

Orthodox – 45,359

Jehovah's Witnesses – 1,881 – 30

Seventh Day Adventists – 563 – 17

Latter-day Saints – 426 – 4

Religion

Fifty-eight percent (58%) of Slovenians are Catholic. Orthodox Christians and Muslims each account for 2% of the population and are primarily Serbs and Bosniaks, respectively. Non-Catholic and non-Orthodox Christians account for less than 1% of the population. Twenty-three percent (23%) provided no information concerning their religious affiliation, and 10% identified as atheists on the 2002 census.[2]

Religious Freedom

The constitution protects religious freedom, which is upheld by the government. Persecution, abuse of religious freedom, and religious discrimination are not tolerated. Many Christian holidays are national holidays. Religious minorities may also observe their religious holidays under the law. Registration with the government is not required for religious groups to practice but is required to obtain legal status. Some isolated instances of societal infringement of religious freedom have been reported targeting Muslims and Catholics.[3]

Largest Cities

Urban: 50%

Ljubljana, Maribor, Celje, Kranj, **Koper**, **Velenje**, **Novo Mesto**, **Ptuj**, **Trbovlje**, **Kamnik**.

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

Four of the ten largest cities have congregations. Twenty-eight percent (28%) of the national population lives in the ten largest cities.

LDS History

The first Slovene members joined the Church in other nations, such as Norway and Austria. Interest in opening the Slovene-populated region of Yugoslavia to missionary work began as early as 1974 when the president of the Austria Vienna Mission met with government officials in Ljubljana and Maribor. Kresimir Cosic, a popular Croatian basketball player who joined the Church in the 1970s, helped raise awareness of the Church and its teachings in Yugoslavia.[4] The Church was first recognized by the Yugoslav government as a legal entity in 1975.[5] The Austria Vienna East Mission was organized in 1987 and administered Yugoslavia. The first missionaries arrived in November 1990, and by March 1991, the Church obtained legal recognition. In the same month, jurisdiction for Slovenia returned to the Austria Vienna Mission, and the first convert baptism occurred.[6] Seven Slovenia members attended the Bern Switzerland Temple rededication in October 1992.[7] In 1992, the first Slovenian couple was married in the Frankfurt Germany Temple.[8] The first missionary called from Slovenia began serving in September 1993 from Ljubljana.[9] The Austria Vienna South Mission was created in 1996 and administered the former Yugoslavia. Mission headquarters were relocated to Slovenia in 1999, Croatia in 2003, and back to Slovenia shortly thereafter.[10]

Slovenia became part of the Europe Central Area in 2000, which was consolidated with the Europe West Area to form the Europe Area in the late 2000s. Many local government officials and members throughout the country attended the groundbreaking of the first chapel in Ljubljana in 2006.[11] Seminary and institute began in 1997 and 2008, respectively. Sometime in the early 2010s, the Slovenia Ljubljana Mission was relocated to Zagreb, Croatia and renamed the Adriatic North Mission.

Membership Growth

LDS Membership: 426 (2017)

In the early 1990s, there were ten LDS members.[12] Membership growth was strongest in the 1990s, as there were 199 members by year-end 1999. A year later there were 246 members. During the 2000s, growth has been slow but consistent, as

membership reached 325 in 2003, 352 in 2007, and 385 in 2010. Membership has declined at times such as in 2004, 2010, and 2017, but other years have experienced growth rates ranging from 1.5% to 14%. In 2008, 180 of the 380 members in Slovenia resided in Ljubljana.[13] In 2018, there were approximately 200 members on church records for the Ljubljana Branch. In 2017, one in 4,629 was LDS.

Congregational Growth

Branches: 4 (2018)

The Church organized branches in Ljubljana, Celje, and Maribor as well as the Ljubljana Slovenia District in 1992. With the exception of 2002, there have been four branches by the end of each year during the 2000s. Branches remain established in Ljubljana, Celje, and Maribor. The Slovenia/Croatia Mission Branch was headquartered in Ljubljana for members living in remote locations in the two countries until it was discontinued in 2018. A group began meeting in Novo Mesto in the late 2000s, and missionaries were assigned to the city, but in November 2009, the city closed to missionary work. It appears that not a single convert baptism occurred while the city was opened for missionary work. A branch may have briefly functioned in Kranj in the past, and in 2010 missionaries were assigned to the city. Members in Kranj travel to Ljubljana for church meetings until the Kranj Branch was organized in 2014. Missionaries were assigned to Velenje in the late 1990s but no longer serve in the city.

Activity and Retention

In 2000, there were approximately seventy active members nationwide. Celje had approximately twenty active members in 2008. Conferences in Southeastern Europe and the Balkans have had regular attended from Slovene youth and young adults. Nineteen youth from Slovenia attended a youth conference held for nations of the former Yugoslavia in 2000.[14] Forty-seven youth from Slovenia and Croatia met for a youth conference in 2003.[15] A seven-country conference that included Slovenia had 130 in attendance in 2007.[16] 418 attended an open house for the new meetinghouse in Ljubljana, including the mayor and civic leaders.[17] 150 attended a meeting with Elder D. Todd Christofferson in 2009.[18] Seventeen were enrolled in seminary and institute during the 2007–2008 school year. Returned missionaries who served in Slovenia during the mid-2010s reported thirty-five active members in Ljubjana, thirty active members in Kranj, twenty-four active members in Celje, and fifteen active members in Maribor. At the time missionaries estimated that approximately 40% of new converts remained active one year after baptism. In 2018, missionaries serving in Ljubljana reported that as many as fifty attended sacrament meeting on some Sundays, whereas as few as nineteen members attended sacrament meeting on others Sundays. Active membership is estimated at approximately 100, or 20-25% of total membership.

Language Materials

Languages with LDS Scripture: Slovenian, Croatian, Hungarian, Italian, Serbian.

Only the Book of Mormon is available in Slovenian and Serbian albeit plans were announced in late 2017 to translate the remainder of LDS scriptures into both languages.[19] All LDS scriptures are translated into Croatian, Hungarian, and Italian. The Church has translated several unit, temple, priesthood, Relief Society, Sunday School, young women, primary, missionary, Church proclamations, and family history materials into Slovenian, Croatian, and Serbian. Hungarian and Italian have more Church materials available, including the Church Handbook of Instructions and many audio/visual materials. Many CES materials are translated in Croatian. The Liahona has twelve Italian issues, twelve Hungarian issues, two Croatian issues, and one Slovenian issue and annually.

Meetinghouses

The Ljubljana Branch meets in a church-built meetinghouse competed in 2008. Branches in Celje, Kranj, and Maribor meet in rented spaces or renovated buildings.

Humanitarian and Development Work

LDS Charities has conducted eight humanitarian projects (e.g. community projects, emergency response, refugee response) since 1985.[20] Service projects are usually limited to events sponsored by local congregations and full-time missionaries fulfilling weekly service hours.

Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects

Religious Freedom

No laws or government interference has limited the Church's missionary program. Missionaries may openly proselyte.

Cultural Issues

Despite increasing secularism, the Catholic Church remains a major culture influence. Although minority religious groups enjoy religious freedom today, negative societal attitudes toward non-Catholics persist, and little remains of the Protestant legacy since the expulsion of Protestants in centuries before. Many exhibit little interest in the LDS gospel message due to indifference towards religion or strong traditional ties to Catholicism, Orthodoxy, or Islam. High cigarette and alcohol consumption rates indicate that addiction to cigarettes and alcohol is an issue that converts may struggle to completely overcome.

National Outreach

Slovenia's small geographic size reduces the number of needed outreach centers. However, half of Slovenes live in rural locations. Missionaries are assigned to cities that account for less than one-quarter of the national population. Over the past three decades, the Church has only been successful in establishing congregations in Slovenia's four largest cities. Missionaries have temporarily been assigned to Novo Mesto and Velenje. In 2010, missionaries made periodic trips to some cities without congregations, such as Velenje. A lack of receptive Slovenes and high living costs discourages greater mission outreach with full-time missionaries. Periodic missionary visits, cottage meetings, distributing church literature, and media exposure may be the most efficient means of improving the Church's proselytism approach.

The Church maintains a website for Slovenia at http://www.cerkev-jezusa-kristusa.si/. News, meetinghouse locations, and information about Church doctrines and practices are provided in Slovenian. The Internet site provides mission outreach to unreached areas and a nonconfrontational method to reach interested individuals.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

The number of nominal members in Slovenia has doubled in the past twenty years, whereas the number of active members has increased by only about thirty. Slight increases in active membership indicate that some new converts have been able to integrate into established congregations, which in some nations can become close-knit and unwelcoming to those who don't fit in. Unfortunately, most new converts during the past twenty years have not been retained. Member activity remains strongest in Ljubljana, where there are some active full-member families. In Celje, Church meetings were held for only held for two hours in 2009 due to the small number of active members.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

The lack of ethnic diversity reduces ethnic tensions while creating strong connections to religious traditions that are difficult for many Slovenes to break. There does not appear to have been any gospel witness to ethnic minorities in border regions.

Language Issues

One elder serving in Ljubljana reported in 2010 that many missionaries in recent years have struggled to learn Slovene proficiently. A lack of adequate command of Slovenian among many missionaries limits outreach. As of early 2018, the Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price have yet to be translated into Slovenian.

Missionary Service

Slovenia remains entirely dependent on foreign missionaries to supply its full-time missionary force. In late 2009, seventeen missionaries were serving in Slovenia, and in early 2010, ten elders served in Ljubljana. Very few Slovene members have served full-time missions. In early 2010, no Slovene members were serving missions although a couple young men had recently returned from their missions and a couple more were preparing to serve in the near future.

Leadership

Slovene leadership has been small, but dedicated. The branch president of the Ljubljana Branch in the early 1990s had been the first Slovene missionary;[21] he and his wife his wife were the first Slovenian couple to marry in the temple in 1992.[22] The first native district president of Slovenia began his tenure in 1998.[23] Native branch presidents lead branches in Ljubljana and Kranj. In 2018, Slovenia has a native district president although the district leadership is minimally staffed.

Temple

Slovenia pertains to the Frankfurt Germany Temple district. Temple trips occur and members typically travel by bus. Slovenia may be reassigned to the Rome Italy Temple when it is completed. Prospects for a closer temple appear unlikely in the foreseeable future.

Comparative Growth

Until the mission was relocated to Croatia, Slovenia was one of the European nations with the smallest church membership with a full-time mission, although the mission previously serviced all nations of the former Yugoslavia. The Ljubljana Branch numbers among the largest LDS congregations in the former Yugoslavia by active membership. However, the percentage of Church members in Slovenia is less than half the percentage in most Western or Central European nations. In the former Yugoslavia, Slovenia has the second largest Church membership. Historical membership growth rates rank average for the Balkans and lower than most former communist nations in Central and Eastern Europe. Slovenia also has the highest percentage of active members in the former Yugoslavia.

Christian groups have experienced little growth in Slovenia. Jehovah's Witnesses are the largest proselytism-oriented denomination, as Witnesses have a strong presence in Central Europe and rely on local members to perpetuate growth. However, Witnesses have reported a slight decline in active membership in the past decade. Seventh Day Adventists report essentially stagnant growth in regards to membership and congregations.

Future Prospects

Very slow or stagnant growth is anticipated for the LDS Church in Slovenia within the foreseeable future. Future growth in national outreach appears unlikely in the medium term, as past efforts to expand national outreach in smaller towns have been largely unsuccessful with the exception of Kranj. Active membership growth appears most likely in Ljubljana. Breakthroughs in gaining multiple converts in unreached cities and towns will be required for mission outreach to exceed 50% of the population. The small number of members, limited local leadership, and low rates of native missionary service have limited growth. Secularism, superficial religious belief, atheism following decades of communism, and the adherence of most the religiously active to Catholicism create significant obstacles toward greater church growth. Greater vision, training, and desire among the Slovene LDS faithful will be necessary if church growth rates are to be improved.

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[3] “Slovenia,” International Religious Freedom Report 2016. Accessed 7 June 2018. https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2016religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2016&dlid=268868#wrapper

[4] Cimerman, Dora Glassford. “First for LDS in Slovenia,” LDS Church News, 28 October 2006. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/49676/First-for-LDS-in-Slovenia.html

[5] “Croatia,” Country Profiles, retrieved 22 May 2010. http://newsroom.lds.org/ldsnewsroom/eng/contact-us/croatia

[6] “Slovenia,” Desert News 2010 Church Almanac, p. 574.

[7] Avant, Gerry. “Thousands gather and savor experience of temple dedication,” LDS Church News, 31 October 1992. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/21988/Thousands-gather-and-savor-experience-of-temple-dedication.html

[8] “Cinderella story: a dress for bride-to-be,” LDS Church News, 6 February 1993. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/23044/Cinderella-story-a-dress-for-bride-to-be.html

[9] “From the world,” LDS Church News, 22 January 1994. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/24203/From-the-world.html

[10] “Slovenia,” Desert News 2010 Church Almanac, p. 574.

[11] Cimerman, Dora Glassford. “First for LDS in Slovenia,” LDS Church News, 28 October 2006. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/49676/First-for-LDS-in-Slovenia.html

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[13] “Season of interest,” LDS Church News, 1 November 2008. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/55659/Season-of-interest.html

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[16] “Seven-country conference,” LDS Church News, 11 August 2007. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/50936/Seven-country-conference.html

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[18] “First meetinghouse dedicated in Croatia,” LDS Church News, 20 June 2009. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/57494/First-meetinghouse-dedicated-in-Croatia.html

[19] “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

[20] “Where We Work,” LDS Charities. Accessed 7 June 2018. https://www.ldscharities.org/where-we-work

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[23] Gardner, Marvin K. “Albin Lotric: Pioneer in Slovenia,” Ensign, Feb 2002, 39.