

KOSOVO (Kosova)



QUICK FACTS

Population: 1,870,981

Area: 10,887 square km (slightly larger than Delaware)

Capital: Pristina (pop. 207,062)

Languages: Albanian (official) 94.5%, Bosnian 1.7%, Serbian (official) 1.6%, Turkish 1.1%

EDUCATION

The Kosovar education system is divided into two major stages: primary (1st-9th grade; mandatory) and secondary (3-4 years). Vocational school is also offered as an alternative to secondary school. The average number of students per classroom is 35. Kosovo uses a 5-point grading scale (5 = "excellent"; 1 = "unsatisfactory"). Instruction is available in Albanian, Serbian, Bosnian, Turkish, and Croatian.



Updated: 7/28/2016

Kosovans celebrating independence

Kosovo is a small country in southeast Europe, surrounded by Macedonia, Albania, Montenegro, and (most notably) Serbia. While its independence has been recognized by more than 100 countries, Serbia still claims Kosovo to be an autonomous province. The area that now comprises Kosovo was part of the Roman Empire 2,000 years ago and later became a battleground for the Bulgarian, Byzantine, and Serbian Empires. During the Middle Ages until as late as the 19th century, it had a majority Slavic population, but the arrival of the Ottomans caused demographic upheaval. Throughout most of the 20th century, Kosovo had an ethnically Albanian, Islamic, majority population, but was ruled from Belgrade. Kosovo-Albanians agitated for greater autonomy during the period of Communist Yugoslav rule, but their efforts were largely frustrated. The dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s led to renewed calls for autonomy and independence, and the Kosovo Liberation Army was formed. Accusations of Serbian atrocities led to NATO intervention in 1999, and the arrival of a UN peacekeeping force. Kosovo declared independence in 2008, making it Europe's newest sovereign nation.

RELIGION

Christianity has been practiced in Kosovo for thousands of years, perhaps as early as the 5th Century CE. However, Islam was introduced in the late 14th century, and has since become the majority religion. Today, religious practice largely falls along ethnic lines, with Kosovo Albanians practicing Islam (95.6%), and Slavic populations practicing Christianity (Roman Catholic 2.2%, Orthodox 1.5%).

ETHNICITY

Ethnicity has been a highly contentious issue in Kosovo for centuries. Historically a majority Serbian area, displacement from oppression and warfare during Ottoman rule created an ethnically Albanian majority. To address this, Serbian leaders in the period between World War I and World War II launched a massive colonization campaign, when perhaps 65,000 individuals moved to Kosovo. However, most of the Serbian colonists fled back to Serbia during World War II, as Kosovo became part of the Italian-puppet Albanian state. Following the war, Yugoslav authority was restored, and the communist government repressed the Kosovo Albanian population, as well as their Islamic faith. Following the Kosovo War of 1998-1999, tens of thousands of Serbians emigrated from Kosovo. Today, 92.9% of Kosovo's population is ethnically Albanian, with small Bosnian (1.6%), Serbian (1.5%), and Turkish (1.1%) minority groups.

FAMILY, RELATIONSHIPS & CUSTOMS

Family is very important to Kosovars, and three-generation households are common. Kosovars believe in the concept of “Besa,” which means living a life-style of respect and honor, and always fulfilling one’s oaths. Kosovars share many cultural practices with Albanians. The *filija*, a crepe-like dish, is commonly served in Kosovar homes. Kosovar holidays include New Year’s Day, Christmas, Independence Day (17 Feb), Easter, Europe Day (9 May), and Eid ul-Fitr (8 August).

CONTEMPORARY KOSOVO

Today, Kosovo is a parliamentary republic. The government continues to seek universal recognition as a sovereign state, but that is still contested by a handful of countries, including Serbia and Russia. In 2013, with the help of EU moderators, Kosovo and Serbia normalized relations. In exchange for what amounted to Serbian recognition of the de facto independence, Kosovo agreed to grant greater rights to the minority Serb population in northern Kosovo.

Kosovo maintains good relations with the West, and aspires to join the EU. The Kosovar population remains grateful to NATO for its assistance during the Kosovo War, and a 2016 Gallup poll found that 85% of Kosovars approve of US global leadership (the highest in the world).

Despite recent diplomatic achievements, Kosovo’s population remains among the most impoverished in Europe. The average per capita income is \$2,500, and 45% of the country’s population is below the poverty line. An aging transportation and energy infrastructure has made it difficult to attract foreign investment. The center-right Democratic League of Kosovo is currently in power in Kosovo, led by Prime Minister Isa Mustafa. Mustafa has recently worked to clearly define the border between Kosovo and Macedonia.



(Sinan Pasha Mosque, Prizren)

NAMES

Kosovar names have traditionally had Muslim origins, but recently naming practices have become more similar to Albanian custom. Surnames are often derived from the name of a place, or clan affiliations. Typical surnames include Beqiri, Shala, and Sejdiu.

FAMOUS KOSOVARS

Actor Eshref Durmishi, actress Arta Dobroschi, footballers Xherdan Shaqiri and Almen Abdi, rapper Lerdj Vula, Pop Singers Rita Ora and Nevena Bozovic.

KOSOVAR WORDS

HelloTungatjeta
 How are you?Qysh jeni?
 Welcome!..... Mirë se vini!
 My name is... Unë quhem...
 Excuse me Më falni
 Yes Po
 No..... Jo
 I understand..... Unë kuptoj
 I don’t understand..... Nuk kuptoj
 Thank you!.....Faleminderit!
 GoodbyeMirupafshim
 Cheers!Gëzuar!



(Rugova Mountains)

KOSOVARS IN THE USA

Tens of thousands of Kosovars have emigrated from Kosovo since the 1960s due to limited economic opportunities and Serbian repression. The largest waves occurred in the 1990s, as Yugoslavia began to dissolve and warfare broke out between Serbia and Kosovo. While most migrants settled in Western Europe, some went to the United States. Today, there are more than 13,000 Kosovars in the US. Remittances from the Kosovar diaspora constitute a considerable portion of Kosovo’s GDP (around 15%).



The gold outline of Kosovo on a blue background. Each of the six white stars represents a major ethnic group in Kosovo.



USEFUL LINKS

- bbc.com/news/world-europe-18328859
- cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kv.html
- beinkosovo.com/en/be-in-kosovo