

Country Background Information: Slovenia



REPUBLIKA SLOVENIJA is a Central European country of two million people. About half of the population lives in urban areas. Ljubljana is the largest city with approximately 280,000 inhabitants.

Slovene is the official language, but Hungarian and Italian are co-official languages in areas where these are the native languages of these minority communities. Ethnically, 82% are Slovenes; 6% Croats, followed by Serbs, Bosnians, Macedonians, Montenegrins and Albanian migrants from former Yugoslavia. Among the total population, 0.5% are Roma. The Roma people are thought to have originated in the East, perhaps in the Himalayas. While they have migrated to many countries, they have maintained many of their own customs and their language. Even today, many are nomadic. They can be found throughout Europe.

Flora and Fauna

Slovenia lies in the northern temperate belt. Average winter temperatures fall below 0°C, but the summers are pretty hot.

Slovenia is the third most-forested country in Europe. Over 60% of its surface is covered by forests, both deciduous and coniferous. The greatest single protected area is Triglav National Park. Natural forest is only 60 km from the capital. Wild animals like deer, squirrels, and edible dormice are seen on the edges of forests located close to towns while brown bears, and rare and endangered species of animals such as wolves, lynx, wildcats, wild grouse and pheasants prefer less populated areas. Many species of birds nest in the country and many more migrate here from all over Europe. Slovene rivers, lakes and seas are rich in fish; its fresh waters also harbour many freshwater crabs. The Kranj bee is a native species of bee of which Slovenia is proud.

History

The territory of modern Slovenia lies at the heart of Europe at the meeting point of three European groups: the Germanic, the Slav and the Roman. This young country has emerged from a long history of occupations and influences.

In the early eighteenth century, French forces occupied parts of the territory for a short time during the Napoleonic wars. After the defeat of Napoleon, a period of modernization of villages and industrialization brought the first railway line connecting Slovenia to Vienna and Trieste. The Spring of Nations European nationalism in 1848 heralded the first Slovene political movement to unite all those regions settled by Slovenes as a single country under the wing of the Hapsburg monarchy.

The First World War imposed many losses. Under fascism, Slovenes in the Italian zone suffered violent italianization in the years between the two wars and even more during World War II. The other part of Slovenia that was occupied by the Germans, suffered violent germanization.



After the liberation in 1945, the tactics of the Communist party, following the Soviet example, led to the so-called extra-judicial massacre of Slovene civil and military personnel and labour and concentration camp returnees. To date, around 600 mass-burial sites have been identified under the leadership of the Commission on Concealed Mass Graves. Today, Slovenia is a democratic parliamentary republic.

Economy

The majority of farms in Slovenia are small family holdings using extensive farming methods. Due to conditions unfavourable for arable farming, the greater part of agriculture is animal husbandry based on permanent grassland, some of the fodder for livestock also being produced in the fields. Most important is milk production.

Since its independence in 1991, Slovenia has continued to be the wealthiest and most politically open country of the former Yugoslav republics. Almost two thirds of the population is employed in the services sector and one third in industry and construction. The main industries are the production of motor vehicles, electric and electronic equipment; machinery; wood products; pharmaceuticals and commodities.

Cuisine

In the past, country people simply ate what they produced, primarily potatoes, beans, cabbage and turnips, which they also pickled. Fresh meat was eaten only on Sundays and feast days, otherwise a small piece of meat (or just bones) was used to flavour a vegetable stew. Fish were eaten only on the coast. There were also many cereal products, from barley, millet and buckwheat; bread was baked in a variety of forms.

Education

By law, all Slovenes should have access to education. It is free at all levels above kindergarten. Parents pay according to their means, up to a maximum of 80% of the economic cost for schooling children from 1 to 6 years of age. Women have the same access to education as men, as is seen in the very similar figures for students, graduates and doctoral students in the universities.

Health And Social Welfare

Social welfare provides access to health services, social assistance, and education to people in need. The unemployed, elderly, and persons going through exceptional circumstances (like a death in the family) are entitled to financial help.

The State assigns 9.2% of GDP to health. Most health care is provided by public institutions, even though people need to pay for supplementary insurance and to wait to access the service. For those whose insurance is unpaid, there are four pro bono

outpatient services funded by donations. As in many other countries, substance abuse is a problem, the most significant substance being alcohol.

Low paying jobs, high housing prices and the general socio-economic conditions in the country mean that young people tend to live longer with their parents. Retired grandparents—especially grandmothers—help their offspring who are unemployed or on seasonal wages to care for their children. Also, due to low levels of pensions many of these grandparents are themselves having to work at least part time. Unemployment and homelessness were virtually unknown under the socialist regime, which makes them even more devastating for those now affected by either or both.

Religion

Slovenia has long seen different peoples and cultures bring different cults and religions with them. Despite the subsequent Counter Reformation, the Lutheran Reformation of the sixteenth century made the most singular contribution to the core of the Slovene identity. The first books and the Sacred Scriptures in the Slovene language were produced by two Protestants: Primož Trubar and Jurij Dalmatin.

The Communist government after World War II scorned religious convictions. Believers experienced discrimination, restricted access to jobs, persecution and imprisonment. Following the independence of Slovenia in 1991, religious institutions regained their social role even though, culturally, some prejudices remain. The four strongest religious groups in Slovenia are Roman Catholic (approx. 60%), Orthodox and Islam (each 2.5%) and Lutheran (approx. 1 %).

Women

Women make up 50.5% of the population of Slovenia, as they have a slightly longer lifespan than men. The predicted life expectancy for girls born after the year 2000 is 82 years. The female employment level is close to 65%, which is 8% lower than for men. Women are almost equally present in public services and teaching, although their remuneration is on average 7% lower than for men.

This material is part of the worship service and educational resource for the World Day of Prayer 2019 annual celebration.