Serb community

Community profile

Historical population estimates; the 2024 census results are at **Kosovo Agency of Statistics (ReKos 2024).**

The profile gives estimates based on the OSCE's 2010 Community Profiles and 2013 Municipal Profiles. The 2011 census did not take place in northern Kosovo and participation among Serbs in southern Kosovo was limited.

EUROPEAN CENTRE
FOR MINORITY
ISSUES KOSOVO

COMMUNITY PROFILE: SERB COMMUNITY

1. POPULATION SIZE AND LOCATION

The Serbs comprise the largest minority community in Kosovo. The 2011 Kosovo census did not take place in northern Kosovo, and was boycotted by considerable numbers of Serbs in southern Kosovo. Therefore, estimates of the Serb community in Kosovo have to be based on alternative sources. Based on OSCE 2010 Community Profiles and 2013 OSCE Municipal Profiles, around 146,128 Serbs are estimated to reside in Kosovo, making up around 7.8% of the total population.

The Serb community is approximately equally divided between northern Kosovo (70,430 Serb residents) and southern Kosovo (75,698 Serb residents). There are a total of ten municipalities where the Serb community constitutes a numerical majority. The largest Serb communities reside in the four northern municipalities, and in the southern municipalities of Gračanica/Graçanicë and Štrpce/Shtërpcë.

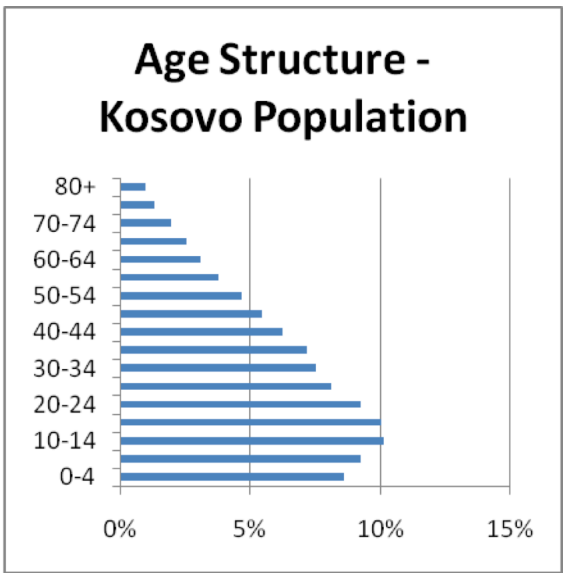
Smaller Serb communities can also be found throughout Kosovo below the Ibar River, particularly in Central and Eastern Kosovo.

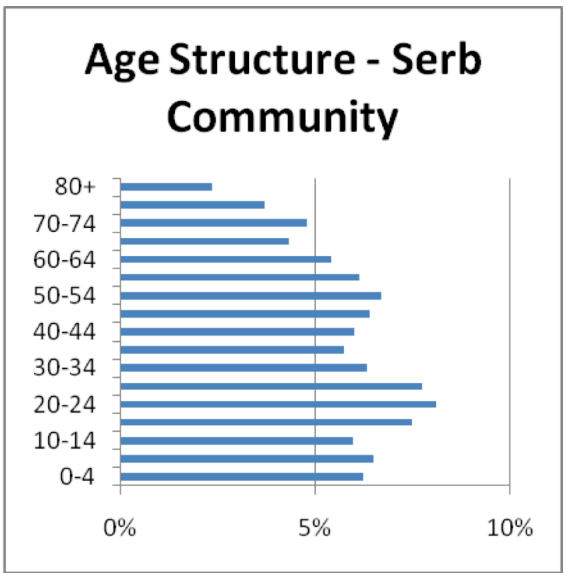
Serb community in Kosovo according to OSCE Reports*		
Municipality	**Percentage**	**Number of community members**
Mitrovicë/Mitovica North	76.48%	22,530
Gračanica/Graçanicë	82.15%	21,534
Leposavić/Leposaviq	96%	18,000
Zvečan/Zveçan	96.1%	16,000
ZubinPotok	93.29%	13,900
Štrpce/Shtërpcë	70.58%	9,100
Novo Brdo/Novobërdë	61.46%	5,802
Ranilug/Ranillug	97.15%	5,718
Parteš/Partesh	99.96%	5,300
Gjilan/Gnjilane	5.29%	5,000
Kllokot/Klokot	71.23%	3,500
Vushtrri/Vučitrn	4.79%	3,500

Kamenicë/Kamenica	8.01%	3,019
Obiliq/Obilić	12.37%	3,000
Lipjan/Lipljan	3.37%	2,000
Prishtinë/Priština	1%	2,000
Istog/Istok	4.16%	1,700
Rahovec/Orahovac	1.76%	1,000
Pejë/Peć	1.03%	1,000
FushëKosovë/Kosovo Polje	2.51%	900
Klinë/Klina	1.53%	600
Skenderaj/Srbica	0.59%	300
Viti/Vitina	0.59%	280
Prizren	0.13%	237
Ferizaj/Uroševac	0.06%	60
Shtime/Štimlje	0.18%	49
Deçan/Dečane	0.11%	46
Gjakovë/Đakovica	0.02%	17
Mitrovicë/Mitovica South	0.02%	14
Podujevë/Podujevo	0.01%	12
Dragash/Dragaš	0.02%	7
Suharekë/Suva Reka	<0.01%	2
Kaçanik/Kačanik	<0.01%	1
Total	**7.8%**	**146,128**

**Sources: Data on municipalities not affected by the decentralisation are based on the 2010 OSCE Community Profiles (OSCE field teams estimations), while the data on municipalities affected by the decentralisation process and municipalities in northern Kosovo are based on the 2013 OSCE Municipal Profiles.*

The average age among the Serb population is notably higher than the Kosovo average. Based on the 2011 census data, the meanage of the Serb community is 37.6 years old, while the Kosovo average is 29.5 years old.





2. CULTURE AND RELIGION

The Serb community is believed have settled in South-Eastern Europe around the sixth and seventh century AD, as part the migration of Slav tribes to this region in that period.[1] The Serb community in Kosovo is Orthodox Christian, and the Serbian Orthodox Church continues to play a central role in Serb identity today. Great value is attached to the large number of important monasteries and churches built in Kosovo in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and particularly to the relocation of the seat of the Archbishop of the Serbian Orthodox Church to Pejë/Peć at the end of the thirteenth century. Many of these churches and monasteries remain in Kosovo today and are considered an important part of Serb cultural heritage.

Kosovo was also the location of the 'Battle of Kosovo', fought in 1389 against Ottoman forces. This battle continues to play an important part in Serb history and myth today and is still commemorated annually on 28 June through the celebration of 'Vidovdan'.

3. LANGUAGE

The political break-up of Yugoslavia was accompanied by a linguistic split within what was previously known as 'Serbo-Croatian' and four new languages emerged: Serbian, Bosnian, Croatian and Montenegrin. Speakers of any of these four languages can understand the other three languages without serious difficulties.

The Serb community in Kosovo speaks Serbian which, alongside Albanian, is one of the two official languages of Kosovo. Both the Latin and Cyrillic scripts are used by the Serb community in Kosovo. Serbian language schools in Kosovo do not teach the Albanian language and only a minority of Serbs in Kosovo speak Albanian.

4. POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

The Serb community has a minimum of ten (10) seats guaranteed in the Kosovo Assembly,[2] and five (5) representatives in the Community Consultative Council (CCC).[3]

In the 2009 municipal and 2010 general elections, the Serb community in southern Kosovo, despite calls for a boycott by the Serbian government, cautiously participated. However, both elections were boycotted by the Serb community residing in northern Kosovo. In the 2013 municipal elections, the Serbian government encouraged the Serb community in Kosovo to vote. This resulted in high turn out rates for the Serb community in southern Kosovo; in all Serb-majority municipalities in southern Kosovo the turnout was higher than the Kosovo average of approximately 47%. In northern Kosovo, participation rates also increased considerably, but remained comparatively low at just over 20%.

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[1] Malcolm, Noel, 'Kosovo: A Short History', London: Pan Macmillan Ltd, 1998, pp. 22-24.
[2] Constitution, Article 64.
[3] Law on Communities (03/L-047), Article 12.6.

Recent elections have seen large numbers of Serb political subjects competing in Kosovo elections, with, for example, 27 Serb political subjects competing in the 2013 municipal elections. However, only a small number of parties have been able to sustain a presence in Kosovo politics. Currently, the main Serb political subjects are 'SamostalnaLiberalnaStranka' (SLS), a Kosovo based political party competing in Kosovo elections since 2007, and G.I.SRPSKA, which is a political subject established in 2013 and backed by the Government of Serbia.

Total number of votes for main Serb political parties in Kosovo elections since 2007 (local and general)

	2007 (Gen.)	2007 (Mun.)	2009 (Mun.)	2010 (Gen.)	2013 (Mun.)
SLS	855	500	4,331	14,352	8,284
G.I.SRPSKA					21,761
JSL				6,004	
SDSKiM	939	329	303	1,008	
S.SDS				829	
SNS	224	26		749	

5. RETURNS

According to UNHCR estimates, around 200,000 Serbs were displaced within and outside of Kosovo during and immediately after the 1999 conflict,[4]and the majority of this displaced population remains outside of Kosovo, mostly in Serbia.In addition, UNHCR estimates that around 9,556 Serb community members remain displaced within Kosovo, with the majority residing in northern Kosovo. Issues such as the lack of economic opportunities, property issues and security concerns continue to adversely affect the returns process for the Serb community. From January 2000 until June 2013, 10,236 Serbs returned voluntarily and 114 were forcibly returned between January 2011 and June 2013.[5]

Voluntary and forced returns of the Serb community, Jan. 2000 – June 2013 (UNHCR, June 2013)

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Voluntary	1826	679	966	1550	818	740	615	585	231	439	895	464	359	69
Forced	No data available											64	41	9

6. SECURITY AND FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

Overall, the security situation for the Serb community in Kosovo is perceived to have improvedover the past few years, but feelings of insecurity persist. In particular, Mitrovicë/Mitrovica remains a major flashpoint of inter-ethnic violence and security incidents also continue to affect return sites.[6]

[4] UNHCR Refugees Magazine Issue 116, 'Kosovo: One last chance', 1999.
[5]UNHCR Office of the Chief of the Mission, Pristina, Kosovo, 'Statistical Overview: Update at end of June 2013'.
[6]OSCE Kosovo, 'An Assessment of the Voluntary Returns Process in Kosovo', October 2012.

The main institutions responsible for the security of the Serb community in Kosovo, as for all other communities, are the Kosovo Police, EULEX and KFOR. However, satisfaction with security institutions among Serbs is low, at 16%, as opposed to 62% among Kosovo Albanians.[7]

The Serb community generally feels free to travel through Kosovo with private vehicles, although they remain hesitant to use Kosovo public transport. Moreover, Serbs living in larger communities, particularly in Serb-majority municipalities, mostly feel safe in their neighbourhoods of residence. Whether Serbs feel safe to travel to and move freely in Albanian-majority areas differs considerably by region; Serbs feel significantly less safe to travel to and move freely in areas that were particularly affected by the 1999 conflict.

7. ECONOMY

According to UNDP (2012), the Serb unemployment rate is 38.35%, which is lower than the general unemployment rate of 45% in Kosovo, but nevertheless, remains substantial.[8]The Serb community is relatively well represented in the Kosovo civil service, with 973 Serb civil servants, making up 5.5% of all Kosovo civil servants.[9] These numbers roughly reflect the Serbs' share of the Kosovo population (excluding northern Kosovo, where Serbs have, until present, largely boycotted Kosovo institutions). However, it deserves mentioning that Serbs are more likely to be represented at professional and administrative positions than at the managerial level.[10] Moreover, within publically owned enterprises, some of the biggest employers in Kosovo, the community is significantly underrepresented, making up only 0.8% of all employees.[11]

Perceptions among the Serb community in relation to the economic direction of Kosovo are extremely negative. In August 2013, 0.9% of Serbs in Kosovo were satisfied with Kosovo's economic direction, as opposed to 6.0% of Kosovo Albanians.[12]

Many of the economic and employment obstacles faced by the Serbs are a consequence of Kosovo's overall poor economic situation. The community, however, faces additional difficulties due to language barriers and the community's general lack of integration into Kosovo socio-economic networks. The Serb community in northern Kosovo is generally wealthier than the more rural Serb population in southern Kosovo.

8. EDUCATION

[7]UNDP,'Public Pulse Report 6', August 2013.
[8]UNDP, 'Kosovo Human Development Report 2012: Private sector and employment.'
[9]Office of Community Affairs, 'Assessment on the employment of members of non-majority communities in the Kosovo civil service and publicly owned enterprises',May 2013.
[10]Office of Community Affairs, 'Assessment on the employment of members of non-majority communities in the Kosovo civil service and publicly owned enterprises' 2013.
[11]*ibid*
[12]UNDP,Public Pulse Report 6, August 2013.

As of yet, the Kosovo government does not offer a Serbian language curriculum, and as a consequence cannot offer Serbian language education. The Serb community in Kosovo attends schools and follows a curriculum managed by the Serbian Ministry of Education. While pre-school, primary and secondary education is offered in most areas with significant Serb communities, tertiary education in the Serbian language is primarily offered by the University of Prishtinë/Priština, located in North Mitrovica/Mitrovicë, with faculties of this university also located in Gracanica/Graçanicë and Leposavic/Leposaviq. Large numbers of Serb students also follow their university education in Serbia.

The main issues that face the Serb community in the context of education are listed as follows:

- A lack of qualified teachers;
- An absence of high-quality school infrastructure;
- A lack of equipment (school books, computers, etc).

9. ACCESS TO PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

Access to Kosovo public institutions differs considerably between the majority of Serbs that reside in Serb-majority municipalities and the minority that reside in Albanian-majority municipalities. While the former can generally access Kosovo municipal services without significant difficulties, the latter still reports obstacles in accessing municipal services, particularly due to perceived discrimination and language barriers, caused by a lack of compliance by institutions with the *Law on the Use of Languages*. These same obstacles are also often reported in relation to access to central level government services.

Many aspects of Serb public life, especially in the north of Kosovo where Kosovo institutions are less present, are still largely administered by the Serbian government; Serbia continues to fund public services in parallel to the services provided by the Kosovo Government,includinghealth care, education and a social welfaresystem.

However, since the establishment of new Serb-majority municipalities in 2009, a trend has been visible in southern Kosovo, with increasing numbers of Serb community members making use of the services provided by these new municipalities. This trend is likely to intensify, following the 2013 municipal elections, which saw a high participation rates among the Serb community, as described above. Additionally, it is likely that this trend will also slowly expand to northern Kosovo in the upcoming years.

