

SERBIA

Serbia is a landlocked country with northern plateaus and ski resorts to the south. It borders Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro, and claims a border with Albania through the disputed territory of Kosovo. The capital city of Belgrade is home to Communist-era architecture and the site of the Belgrade Fortress, held successively by the Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman empires. Stari Grad, the old city, is home to 19th century mansions, as well as the opera and ballet. Serbia became a sovereign republic in 2006 after Montenegro voted in a referendum for independence from the Union of Serbia and Montenegro. The end of this union marked the closing chapter in the history of the separation of the six republics of the old Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia. The official language is Serbian and the currency is the dinar.

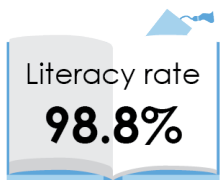


Population
8,703,961



29,913 MI²

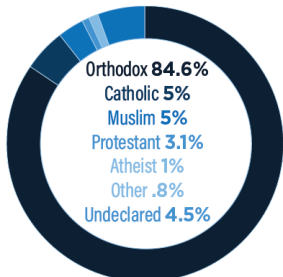
Slightly smaller than
South Carolina



Ethnicities

- Serb 83.3%
- Hungarian 3.5%
- Romani 2.1%
- Bosniak 2%
- Other 5.7%
- Undeclared or Unknown 3.4%

Religions



FAMILY LIFE

Households in Serbia usually consist of 2-3 generations, and families have an average of two children in most parts of the country. It is common for both parents to work and often both parents are financially responsible for the family. Communication between family members is informal and direct.

It is considered normal for family members to spend time alone and pursue their own individual activities and, even though meals are commonly eaten together, family members may have meals separately depending on schedules. It is not common for family members to share personal items, so asking permission when borrowing is expected.

It is common for children to help out with household chores which typically follow traditional gender roles. Family and gender dynamics are slowly changing as single parent households are becoming more common.

Parents strongly encourage teenagers to learn independence and responsibility, and they thus often take a back seat approach to encourage this growth. Because of privacy laws, parents are not permitted to monitor their children's online activity once they reach 16 years of age, but parents will limit time spent on the computer.

Owning pets is not common for Serbian families.

FRIENDSHIP

Friendships in Serbia are often formed through school, extracurricular activities and extended networks of relatives. It is acceptable for teenagers to socialize in groups or one-on-one with friends of both genders. The term "friend" is used sparingly and only to refer to very close relationships. Friends often spend time together at shopping malls, parks, or cafes. Serbian teenagers prefer to have many acquaintances and just a few friends. Sharing money between friends is normal in Serbia, but it is always expected to be returned.

SCHOOL LIFE

In Serbia, students generally take 13-15 subjects which do not all meet every day. Students are evaluated through both written and oral exams, and class participation is slowly becoming more important in grading. Students generally study in the same group and move between classrooms

for different subjects. They study each subject at the same level of difficulty, but teachers employ different strategies to work effectively in a class with various ability levels. Students choose different types of gymnasiums or vocational schools depending on their study preferences, including computer programming, languages, fine arts, industrial arts, and others. There are no additional electives from which the students can choose, but this is slowly changing.

Students usually dress informally for school and uniforms are not common. Parents often provide their children with money or an allowance for buying lunch at school, since it is not common for teenagers to work. Students may also have lunch at home or bring food to school with them.

Bullying and fighting are common issues in schools. There is an anti-bullying movement developing across the country due to some more serious incidents; it mostly addresses physical violence, rather than name calling or other forms of harassment. Cheating is against school policy but it is a common practice among students. Many teachers overlook incidents of cheating, but students can be expelled if caught.

The relationship between students and teachers is very formal. Students show respect to teachers by being engaged learners in class, but they do not usually have close relationships with their teachers. Sometimes students have a less formal relationship with younger teachers, but most teachers are older. Schools are not allowed to comment on a student's behavioral or academic performance to parents without the student being present. Parents do not get report cards unless they request it, and students need to be informed before these report cards are shared. Parents stay in touch with teachers by attending teacher meetings. There is a class teacher for each group of students and this teacher acts as a mediator between a student's other teachers and their parents.

It is uncommon for schools to offer extracurricular activities. Opportunities to participate in music classes, foreign languages clubs or sports activities are commonly available in the community for a fee.

FOOD

Meat plays a large role in Serbian cuisine and pork is not eaten in areas of the country with large Muslim populations. Vegetarianism is uncommon, but is increasing in popularity among younger people. Physical fitness is important and people try to maintain a healthy diet and avoid gaining excess weight.

RELIGION

Serbians are mostly secular and do not attend religious services regularly. Attending religious services is more common in areas of the country with high Muslim populations. Religious centers are seen as places of worship rather than community centers, and religious doctrine is not commonly embraced by younger people. Christmas decorations, presents, and carols are not common in celebrating Christmas. Most holidays are celebrated privately with close friends and family. Gifts are commonly given on birthdays or for the New Year.

PERSONAL CARE

Serbians usually shower daily and change clothes after one use. Teenagers are expected to clean up after themselves but this depends on the family.



The Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) program is sponsored by the U.S. Department of State. FLEX provides competitively selected secondary school students from 22 countries in Europe and Eurasia with the opportunity to spend the academic year in the U.S. living with a volunteer host family and attending a host high school. Begun in 1993, FLEX now has over 29,000 alumni.