



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

BACKGROUND

Land and Climate

Kosovo lies on the Balkan Peninsula in southeastern Europe. The country covers an area slightly smaller than Jamaica and slightly larger than the U.S. state of Delaware. The terrain consists of broad plains, hills, and mountains. Đeravica, a mountain in the west, is the highest point, at 8,714 feet (2,656 meters).

The climate is continental. Winters (December–February) are cold, with average high temperatures rarely exceeding 41°F (5°C). The weather is sunny and warm during summer (June–August), when highs average around 82°F (28°C). At higher elevations, snow remains on the ground well into the spring and supports a small ski industry.

History

Illyrian Settlement and the Serbian Empire

The land that makes up present-day Kosovo has been inhabited for thousands of years. Members of the Illyrian tribe of Dardanët were some of the earliest inhabitants of the region and formed the Kingdom of Dardania, which grew into a powerful state. The area then changed hands a number of times. It was conquered by the Roman Empire in the first century BC and became part of the Byzantine and Bulgarian

empires during the Middle Ages.

During this time, Slavic tribes had settled in the area and much of the population converted to Christianity. In the 12th century, the Serbs took control of what is now Kosovo and made it the political and religious center of their empire. Ottoman forces invaded and defeated the Serbs at the Battle of Kosovo in 1389, ushering in five hundred years of Ottoman rule.

Ottoman Rule and Yugoslavia

The beginning of Ottoman rule deepened ethnic and religious tensions that can still be felt in the region today, with many modern Serbs regarding Kosovo as their sacred ancestral heartland and modern Albanians seeing it as the land of their ancestors, the Dardanët. The introduction of Islam to the region divided much of the population along religious lines, with many Albanians and Turks following Islam while many Serbs remained Christian. Conflict during this time led many Serbs to leave the region, and Albanians became the largest ethnic group in Kosovo.

Kosovo and the surrounding Balkan states remained under Ottoman rule until the First Balkan War (1912–13), when a coalition of Balkan forces ousted the Ottomans from the region. Kosovo became part of Serbia and, at the end of World War I, was incorporated into the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, which was later renamed Yugoslavia. After World War II, the country established itself

as a socialist federation of six republics, in which Kosovo was a district of the republic of Serbia.

In 1968, demonstrations pressed Yugoslavia into granting Kosovo greater self-government. When Yugoslavia redrew its constitution in 1974, Kosovo became a semiautonomous province within the federation and was allowed to form its own provincial government. Still, Kosovar Albanians continued to demand the right to become a republic, a division equal to that of Serbia and the other five Yugoslav republics.

Divisions within Yugoslavia

As president of Yugoslavia, Josip Broz Tito deterred conflict between the country's various ethnic groups, but deep-seated divisions reemerged after Tito's death in 1980. When Serb nationalist Slobodan Milošević became president of Serbia in 1989, he reversed the constitutional provisions for Kosovo's autonomy.

The province's leaders reacted by declaring independence within Yugoslavia, but Milošević suspended the Kosovar government and used Serb forces to keep dissension in check. Elsewhere in Yugoslavia, ethnic discord was dissolving the federation. By 1992, Serbia and Montenegro were the only Yugoslav republics to remain united. Kosovo remained a province of Serbia.

Kosovo War

The push to achieve independence gained momentum in 1998, leading to combat between Serb forces and a Kosovar Albanian rebel group, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). Yugoslav and Serbian government forces responded with a brutal crackdown on the rebellion, driving thousands of ethnic Albanians from their homes and beginning an ethnic cleansing campaign of torture and mass executions. As fighting escalated and Milošević refused to sign a treaty, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) launched air strikes against Serb targets in March 1999. After three months of bombings, Serb forces withdrew from Kosovo. The United Nations (UN) took over the administration of the province, NATO deployed peacekeepers, and the KLA disarmed. In all, the 1998–99 conflict cost a total of 15,000 lives on both sides, and hundreds of thousands were displaced from their homes.

Independence and Relations with Serbia

Sporadic conflict continued to erupt in the region as Kosovo pursued independence. In 2006, Serbia and Montenegro dissolved their union, and the United Nations sponsored talks between Serbian and Kosovar leaders on the future of Kosovo. The talks marked the first time the two sides had spoken directly since the Kosovo War, but they did not resolve the conflict. On 17 February 2008, Kosovo unilaterally declared independence from Serbia. Some 40 UN members recognized the move, while Russia and Serbia rejected it as a violation of international law. Kosovo was approved for full membership by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in 2009, and international support for Kosovo's independence continued to grow. In 2010, the UN's International Court of Justice ruled that Kosovo's declaration of independence was legal, and Kosovo became a fully independent state in 2012.

Amid sustained ethnic tensions that occasionally turned violent, Serbia and Kosovo continued to negotiate to resolve

their dispute, coming to an agreement in early 2012 and marking the first time Serbia agreed to recognize Kosovar representation in international forums. In 2013, the European Union (EU) brokered a deal between Kosovo and Serbia that was seen as a step toward normalizing relations between the two countries. The agreement gave the Serbian population in the north of Kosovo limited autonomy and allowed Serbia and Kosovo to progress toward membership in the EU. However, Serbia continues to refuse to recognize Kosovo's independence.

Kosovo Today

Today, Kosovo faces many challenges, including ongoing tensions with Serbia and political turmoil, as it attempts to find its footing in the international community and form a stable government at home. In 2018, Kosovo's parliament approved legislation to transform the existing Kosovo Security Force into a full-fledged army, despite Kosovo's constitution banning any armed force other than NATO to operate in the country. The move sparked criticism from NATO and the EU and prompted a warning from Serbia, who stated it was prepared to use its own army to protect ethnic Serbs living in Kosovo. However, Kosovo moved forward with the plan after garnering support from the United States.

Kosovo continues to attempt to reconcile with its violent past. In 2020, President Hashim Thaci resigned and was arrested for his role in war crimes committed during the Kosovo War. Along with other leaders of the Kosovo Liberation Army, he will face trial at The Hague. Kosovo continues to seek membership in the EU and aspires to join the United Nations and NATO once its independence is fully recognized.

THE PEOPLE

Population

About 93 percent of Kosovo's population is ethnic Albanian. The other 7 percent includes Bosniaks, Serbs, Turks, Ashkali, Egyptians, Gorani, and Roma. The Serbs are concentrated along Kosovo's northern border, around Prishtina (the capital), and in the southeast. Prishtina is the largest city. Other major cities include Prizren, Peja, and Mitrovica.

Language

Albanian and Serbian are Kosovo's official languages. Albanian is written in the Latin alphabet and has two dialects: Tosk and Gheg. The two were officially combined into a unified Albanian language in 1972. Unified Albanian is the official language and is used in schools, government, business, and the media, but in everyday exchanges most Kosovars speak Gheg. Serbian is a Slavic language written in both Cyrillic and Latin alphabets.

Before the 1998–99 war, Kosovo's Albanians and Serbs had more contact and communication, so most older Kosovars speak both Albanian and Serbian. Younger Kosovars are likely to speak only Albanian or Serbian. Many of the younger generation also speak English, French, or German. People belonging to minority groups usually speak one or both official languages in addition to their mother

tongue (e.g., Roma, Turkish, or Bosnian).

Religion

More than 95 percent of the population is Muslim—including most ethnic Albanians, Bosnians, Roma, Turks, Ashkali, and Egyptians—but religion does not factor largely into people's daily lives. Few attend mosque regularly or otherwise worship according to Islamic traditions. Most drink alcohol but abstain from pork (both of which Islam prohibits). Serbs are primarily Serbian Orthodox Christians. A small number of Kosovars belong to other Christian denominations, the Roman Catholic Church being chief among them.

General Attitudes

Because Kosovar Albanians believe they are descendants of the Illyrians and therefore indigenous to the region, most have long felt that self-government is their right. In contrast, Serbs have typically viewed Kosovo as the cradle of their culture and an integral part of Serbia. Despite these conflicting views, Kosovo's Albanians and Serbs generally enjoyed good relations until the period of Yugoslavia's ethnic discord that began in the 1980s. Today, strained relations between the two groups continue—Albanians and Serbs rarely interact socially—but there has been improvement since the 1998–99 war, and people generally get along without conflict in formal situations, such as in business transactions and the workplace.

Many Kosovar Albanians value a traditional concept called *besa*, which roughly translates as “trust” or “covenant” and today is evident in a general sense of duty and hospitality. It originated in a customary set of laws called the *Kanuni*, which were used as early as the 15th century to settle feuds, among other things. Answering the question *Më jep besën?* (Promise me?) in the affirmative indicates a binding oral agreement, one that elderly Kosovars still occasionally take part in.

Personal Appearance

Most Kosovars place importance on a neat, clean appearance and tend to dress casually but well during their leisure time, even if only going on a short outing. Casual clothes might include khaki pants or jeans and a collared shirt or T-shirt. Teenagers may wear fashions influenced by musical genres (rap, rock, etc.). Professionals don suits or business casual outfits.

Elderly men generally wear suits and hats, such as the traditional *plis* (a rounded white hat made from wool). Elderly women wear dresses or skirts. Traditional Albanian costumes are worn at weddings and other celebrations. For men, these consist of wool pants, a white shirt, a vest, a scarf tied around the waist, and a *plis*. Traditional women's outfits include a colorful embroidered dress and vest and a red headscarf.

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Greetings

Typical Albanian greetings are *Mirëmengjes* (Good morning), *Mirëdita* (Good afternoon), and *Mirëmbrema* (Good evening). Another common greeting is *Tung* (Hi). Young

people greet each other with *Cka po bë?* (What's up?) and may respond *Sen hic* (Nothing). Older people greet each other with *Tungjatjeta* (Long life to you) or *Tungat* (an abbreviation of *Tungjatjeta*), followed by *Si jeni?* (How are you?). Typical Serbian greetings include *Zdravo* (Hello) and *Dobar dan* (Good day).

Women usually kiss and hug when greeting friends. Men shake hands and hug occasionally. In formal situations, Kosovars use the titles *Zoteri* (Mister), *Zonje* (Madam), or *Zonjushë* (Miss). Younger people address older people with terms of respect such as *Axhe* or *Bac* (which mean “Uncle”) and *Tete* or *Inxhe* (which mean “Aunt”).

Gestures

Kosovars use many gestures common to Europeans, such as winking when sharing a joke, tapping the temple with the index finger to indicate something or someone is crazy, and putting the index finger to the tip of the nose to say “Do not talk.” Placing the left hand over the chest and moving the head slightly shows appreciation. Facial expressions and hand motions are not particularly important to conversation, but maintaining eye contact shows that a person is interested in the discussion.

In a formal setting, it is not appropriate to eat or chew gum. Traditionally, in a social gathering it has been considered rude for an unmarried woman to cross her legs either at the knee or with an ankle on the knee. Among younger people, this is not considered inappropriate.

Visiting

Kosovars, particularly in urban areas, usually call ahead if they plan to visit someone's home, though close friends or family members might drop by unannounced. Short visits usually take place in the afternoons. While families generally visit each other in the home, young people prefer to socialize at pubs or coffee shops, called *kafene*.

Hosts typically greet their guests at the door. They are then invited in and seated. Usually they are offered cookies or cake. Tea and coffee are served toward the end of a visit. If guests arrive at mealtime, they are invited to share the meal. It is considered rude for a host to inquire how long guests plan to stay. Guests who have made a long journey are offered food when they arrive. They are also offered lodging, and it is often considered disrespectful if the visiting party chooses to stay at a hotel instead.

Eating

During the week, few families eat breakfast (*mëngjes*) together due to varying schedules, but they may gather for the meal on weekends at around 10 a.m. Work and school schedules also dictate whether lunch (*dreka*) or dinner (*darka*) is the day's main meal, which family members usually share. This meal may include a meat dish (such as stew), salad, and bread. If lunch is the main meal, dinner is typically light, consisting of leftovers or soup with rice or pasta.

Foods are placed in the middle of the table in large dishes, and people are either served by the hostess or help themselves to servings on their individual plates. When guests are present, seating arrangements are based on age, with the

oldest person sitting at the head of the table. Tea is consumed between meals and is accompanied by a snack such as nuts or cookies.

Young people go out to eat for lunch or dinner often, perhaps several times per week, while families do so less frequently. Tipping is uncommon unless the service has been exceptionally good.

LIFESTYLE

Family

Structure

For most Kosovars, the family is the most valued part of their lives, and they take pride in family members' achievements. Households generally average two children per family, but families in the countryside may be larger. Families typically consist of a married couple and their children. However, elderly couples often reside with their youngest son, so many families also include the father's parents, if they are still alive. Children usually live with their parents until they have a good job and a house or apartment. Married couples may also stay with the husband's family until they can afford a place of their own.

Parents and Children

Children are taught to help with the housework as they grow up. Girls tend to help their mothers with cooking and cleaning in the house, while boys often help their fathers in the garden and with household repairs.

Parents often save money for their children's education and help children buy a house when they get married or leave home. Grown children support their parents financially when needed, and parents often support their married children financially if they are able. It is common for couples to inherit money from their parents and to pass it on to their children.

Gender Roles

Today, men and women play more equal roles in the family, though patriarchal attitudes still exist, especially in rural areas. As a result of greater access to education and changing attitudes toward women in the workforce, more women now work outside the home than in previous generations. Many women seek education and employment as a way of ensuring that they will be able to support themselves and make their own decisions. More job opportunities are available in urban areas than in rural areas. Men participate more in household duties than they did in the past. Both parents are generally active in raising the children and making decisions related to household and family matters.

The government ensures women the right to 12 months of maternity leave. The first six months are paid by the employer at 70 percent of salary, while the next three months are paid by the government at 50 percent of the average salary in the country. It is possible to extend leave for another three months unpaid. Due to economic circumstances, most women return to work after the first six months. Some employers get around maternity leave policies by limiting their hiring of women. Kosovar law states that at least 30 percent of political party candidates must be women.

Housing

Most adults own a house or an apartment. Houses or land may be passed down through generations. Building a house on family land can usually be inexpensively done with the help of family members.

Houses are often made of brick and mortar, are generally two storeys, and typically have four to six rooms, with some houses also including a basement. Exteriors are usually painted in neutral colors. Most houses have a small patio and garden.

Rural and urban houses are of similar size, but rural houses often have surrounding land for more extensive gardening. Apartment complexes tend to be located near city centers and usually are no higher than 13 storeys.

Dating and Marriage

Dating and Courtship

In rural areas, Kosovars rarely date casually. Dating is seen as a path toward marriage. Relationships often begin early, many of them in high school, and are taken seriously from the start. At first, dating is done within groups, whether at school or in pubs and cafés. Upon becoming exclusive, a couple will inform their families of their relationship within a few months as an indication of their level of commitment. After that, they usually date for several more years before becoming engaged.

In urban areas, dating relationships also start early but are more casual and are less likely to end in marriage, particularly for those under the age of 25. Couples usually meet at school, in their neighborhoods, or in the workplace. They are often introduced by a mutual acquaintance or a sibling.

Engagement

In the past, engagements were often initiated by an intermediary (usually a friend or family member of the prospective husband) communicating to the woman's family the couple's desire to marry, but this is less common now. However, the man still usually meets with the woman's family prior to proposing to her. Once the families meet, the couple is considered engaged. After the engagement has been formalized, the couple organizes a formal dinner or some other type of celebration. A typical engagement lasts from six months to a few years.

Marriage in Society

Most people marry in their late twenties to early thirties. Marriage is considered a sacred institution, and Kosovars are expected to marry and then begin a family shortly thereafter. Cohabitation is not popular but is becoming more accepted among the younger generation. Same-sex marriages are not legally recognized.

Weddings

Wedding festivities typically last about a week, with the ceremony traditionally taking place on Sunday. Two days of celebration are paid for by the bride's family, while the groom's family pays for three or four days plus the main celebration.

Brides usually wear long, white dresses, though in some regions the dress is red. Grooms in urban areas typically wear elegant suits, while those in rural areas often wear traditional folk attire. The bride typically waits with her family at home for the groom and his family to arrive by car. In some

villages, the groom and his family arrive on horseback. The groom then escorts the bride to where the wedding will be held. In the past, the ceremony was held at the groom's home and the bride's family was not present. Now, weddings are commonly held either at the groom's home or another venue (such as a hotel reception hall), with both families attending.

In rural areas, traditional wedding food includes *byrek* (a baked pastry or pie made with thin layers of dough and stuffed with cheese, meat, and vegetables), *flija* (a dish created by layering pancakes), and baklava for dessert. In cities, the wedding party dines on antipasto, salads, and main dishes of meat and vegetables. Wedding cake is served for dessert.

Both Albanian and Serb weddings include traditional music, dancing, food, and drink. Albanian couples are usually not married in a religious ceremony. Instead, they go to the city hall to do the paperwork either before or after the celebration. Serb weddings tend to be more religious, and Serbs hold tightly to Orthodox traditions.

Divorce

Divorce used to be rare, but in urban areas it is no longer as uncommon as it once was. Still, divorce usually happens only after couples exhaust every option to save their marriage. Divorced women tend to have fewer opportunities to remarry, especially if they have children from a previous marriage.

Life Cycle

Birth

Traditionally, a Christian baby's godparent, who was a family member or a respected friend, was chosen as soon as the baby had hair or fingernails long enough to cut. The godfather or godmother usually performed the first haircut or was the first to cut one of the child's fingernails. After this act, the family held a party in celebration. However, this custom is rarely observed now.

Children's names are often meaningful, chosen with the family's heritage or historic heroes in mind. Certain names are passed down through generations.

Milestones

Kosovars are considered adults, both legally and socially, when they turn 18. At this point, they can vote, marry, and change their religion if they so choose. Though the transition to adulthood is usually quiet, the 18th birthday is a special day and is celebrated by family and close friends. University graduation is a milestone generally marked with a large family dinner in honor of the graduate. Young people are encouraged to marry after graduation.

Death

Upon the death of a Muslim, the body is cleaned by close family members and usually buried the same day. Family members and friends gather to share lunch before the burial ceremony. A funeral procession begins at the home of the deceased; participants travel on foot to the cemetery. The next day begins a seven-day mourning period. Extended family members help the deceased's immediate family prepare the house for the reception of guests, who may visit anytime between roughly 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. throughout the mourning period. They are served food or light refreshments with coffee or tea.

Diet

Kosovars generally place great importance on meals, devoting much time and effort to their preparation. Kosovar cuisine reflects a variety of influences, the most prominent being from Turkey. Kosovar meals tend to be hearty and nutritious. Staple foods include potatoes, rice, beans, and pasta. Meat is usually grilled and served with side dishes of stewed potatoes and vegetables. Chicken, beef, and lamb are the most typical meats. Commonly eaten vegetables include tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, onions, garlic, carrots, cabbages, and leeks. Vegetables are often bottled and stored to be eaten in the winter. Fresh bread is an important part of a Kosovar's diet and typically is eaten with every meal. Kosovars often make homemade jams and juices from fruit they grow themselves. Milk and dairy products play a large role in the Albanian cuisine enjoyed by Kosovars. Kosovo is known for its homemade regional wines made from local grapes. *Raki*, a popular wine, is made from grapes and sometimes pear or plum juice.

Çorbë (Albanian goulash with beans, cabbage, potatoes, and other vegetables) is one of the most common national dishes. Peppers stuffed with meat and rice, kebabs, and *sarma* (meat wrapped in grape or cabbage leaves) are also favorites. Another popular dish is *byrek*, a pie made of phyllo dough layered with a filling of spinach, feta cheese, leeks, cabbage, and pumpkin. It is commonly accompanied by *tarator*, a mixture of yogurt, garlic, and diced cucumbers. *Flija* (thin layered pancakes) and *mantia* (small dough balls filled with meat and onions) are two common pastries, usually served with sour milk and yogurt.

A typical breakfast is a light meal consisting of fresh (often homemade) bread served with jam or honey, *pallacinka* (a type of crepe), and scrambled or fried eggs eaten with feta cheese and fried peppers. Sometimes a side of fried peppers and tomatoes with cheese is also served. Milk is a typical breakfast beverage. Lunch is often a heavier meal, including different kinds of meat and bread. Kosovars tend to eat at least one salad a day, typically made with tomatoes, cucumbers, cabbage, feta cheese, and onions. *Turshia* (pickled vegetables such as peppers, tomatoes, carrots, and cabbage) is a favorite lunch salad. After lunch, Kosovars usually eat servings of fruit, such as pears, grapes, figs, plums, apples, peaches, watermelon, or strawberries.

In rural areas, people follow lunch with black tea served in the Turkish style known as *gjygyra*—two stacked kettles, the bottom kettle with water and the top one with tea. Once the water is hot, it is combined with the tea and poured into small glasses. Kosovars also enjoy Turkish coffee made with roasted and finely ground coffee beans that are boiled in a pot called a *xhezve*. Favorite desserts include baklava, *sutliash* (rice pudding with cinnamon and raisins), and *sheqerpare* (traditional sweet, syrup-soaked cookies).

Recreation

Sports

Both watching and participating in sports play a large role in the daily life of most Kosovars. The most popular sport is soccer. There are both amateur and professional leagues.

Following the war, Kosovo was not allowed to have a national soccer team that could officially play in international competition, so some players from Kosovo played for teams in other countries, such as Albania and Switzerland. But starting in 2016, FIFA, the international governing body of soccer, recognized Kosovo as a member, so now the country is eligible to play for the World Cup if its team can qualify. Other popular sports are basketball, volleyball, handball, tennis, and ping-pong.

Leisure

In their leisure time, people enjoy visiting each other, having drinks in coffee bars and pubs, watching movies at home, or attending plays and other cultural events at the theater. Kosovars love board games, especially chess and dominoes, and card games are also popular. The elderly often gather at parks in the spring and summer to relax and enjoy themselves. Picnicking near a river or lake is common during the summer, as is vacationing in nearby countries. Music helps connect people of all ages and from all areas of the country. People often get together to sing, to go to nightclubs and listen to live music, and to participate in karaoke.

Vacation

The Albanian coast and the south of Montenegro or Greece are the preferred destinations for families enjoying summer holidays. For those who can afford it, European cities are favorite locations. In the winter, people may visit the local Brezovica ski resort and other mountain tourist sites.

The Arts

Though not well funded, Kosovo's national theater association presents quality plays, including comedies, which appeal to the often sarcastic nature of Kosovars and represent a way that they have dealt with misfortunes. In Prishtina, the Kosovo Philharmonic Orchestra performs classical pieces throughout most of the year, and the National Ballet of Kosovo is also located there.

Folk music is popular among rural inhabitants and elderly urban Kosovars and varies according to ethnic group. Kosovar Albanian folk music is played with a *cifteli* (a two-stringed acoustic instrument), *fyell* (a variety of flute), *lahuta* (a one-stringed instrument similar to a violin), *def* (tambourine), drum, accordion, clarinet, and violin. Serbian, Bosnian, and Croatian folk music follow Slavic traditions. Many folk dance ensembles perform in Kosovo. Most dances embellish a story being told by the lyrics of accompanying music and may include separate parts for men and women or a collective circle formation. Many youth enjoy painting, sculpture, graphic design, and rock and rap music.

Holidays

Public holidays in Kosovo include New Year's Day (1 January), Independence Day (17 February), Catholic and Orthodox Easter (Sunday and Monday), *Dita Punës* (Workers' Day, 1 May), Constitution Day (9 April), European Day (9 May), *Bajrami Madhë* (the feast at the end of *Ramadan*, the holy month of fasting), *Bajrami Vogël* (the Feast of the Sacrifice, celebrated approximately 70 days after *Bajrami Madhë*), and Christmas (25 December for Catholics; 7 January for Orthodox Christians). Major holidays such as

Bajrami Madhë and *Bajrami Vogël* are celebrated by gathering with family members and eating large meals with foods such as beef, chicken, stuffed cabbage, and baklava. Kosovar Serbs celebrate *Vidovdan* (28 June), which is both a religious holiday and a commemoration of the Battle of Kosovo.

New Year's

New Year's is the most celebrated holiday in Kosovo. Kosovars celebrate on New Year's Eve as well as on the first and second of January. They usually get together with their families and relatives on New Year's Eve to celebrate the end of the year with special meals and drinks. Children look forward to the holiday for weeks ahead of time. They help clean and decorate their homes in preparation and enjoy watching a fireworks show on New Year's Eve as well as setting off their own smaller fireworks that night and the following day. Teenagers and young adults often go out after midnight to celebrate with their friends, watch fireworks, dance, sing, and wish each other the best for the coming year. The following two nights mainly consist of organized events in restaurants with entertainment including comedians, patriotic music, and other artistic performances.

Independence Day

Independence Day marks Kosovar independence, which was achieved in 2008. Activities and cultural programs are held throughout Kosovo. The Kosovo Philharmonic Orchestra plans concerts that fit with the holiday theme. Children participate in Independence Day programs at school. There are plays, marches, poetry competitions, and other artistic activities. A common tradition is giving speeches to honor Kosovar independence. It is customary for the citizens of Prishtina to go downtown and enjoy traditional concerts that take place in the city center.

Flag Day

Flag Day is celebrated on Albania's Independence Day. Before Kosovo declared its independence, Flag Day used to be a public holiday and it was considered to be a national day for Kosovar Albanians. Although it is no longer an official holiday, many Kosovars nevertheless celebrate it enthusiastically every year. Schools may organize activities such as dances, plays, and concerts. In many of the activities, participants are encouraged to dress in black and red in order to honor the Albanian flag.

SOCIETY

Government

Structure

Kosovo is a parliamentary republic. The president, largely a ceremonial role, is head of state and serves a five-year term. The prime minister is head of government. Both are elected by the unicameral legislative body, the Kosovo Assembly. Of the Assembly's 120 delegates, 100 are directly elected. Ten seats are reserved for Serbs, and ten seats are reserved for other ethnic minorities. Members serve four-year terms. The highest level of the judicial branch includes the Supreme Court and the Constitutional Court. Kosovo is divided into 38 municipalities.

Political Landscape

Kosovo has a multiparty system in which it is virtually impossible for one party to form a government alone. Parties must form coalitions, which need at least 61 seats in the Assembly to have a governing majority. The coalitions are frequently unpopular. For the most part, political parties are split along ethnic lines. The two largest parties are the center-left Movement for Self-Determination (Vetëvendosje), the center-right Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), and the center-right Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK).

Kosovo seeks full integration into the international community and eventual membership in organizations such as the European Union (EU), the United Nations (UN), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). One of the key challenges Kosovo faces is lowering tensions with Serbia, which is a requirement for joining the EU. Efforts are being made to gradually give greater autonomy to Kosovo's ethnic Serbs.

Government and the People

Freedom of expression is generally protected, except speech that inflames ethnic hostility. Human-rights protections remain weak in Kosovo. Journalists and human-rights defenders frequently endure threats and attacks. Despite reforms, the justice system continues to have a large backlog of cases. Roma, Ashkali, Egyptians, and other minority ethnic groups often suffer discrimination. Corruption remains a serious problem, and attempts at reform have been only modestly successful thus far.

Kosovars can vote at age 18. During the past decade, voter turnout has averaged around 45 percent. Elections are considered generally free and fair.

Economy

Kosovo is one of the poorest countries in Europe, though recent forecasts show that the country's economy is growing steadily. Unemployment is high, at around 25 percent. The majority of those who are employed work in the public sector or in small family businesses. Most of the population lives in rural areas, and many are dependent on near-subsistence farming. The transition to an open-market economy, including privatizing many industries formerly controlled by the government, is still in progress. Many Kosovars depend on money sent from relatives who have emigrated, especially those in Germany, Switzerland, or Nordic countries.

In the past, mining accounted for a large portion of the economy, as Kosovo is rich in mineral resources; however, this industry has declined in the last decade due to war and lack of investment. The country has received technical and financial assistance from the U.S. government and the World Bank to improve its mining sector. Most of the economic development since the war has been concentrated in the retail, trade, and construction sectors.

Since the independence declaration, the government has sought to attract more foreign investment, but potential investors have many concerns, including corruption and inadequate and unreliable electricity. The official currency is the euro, but the Serbian *dinar* is also sometimes used illegally in predominantly Serb areas.

Transportation and Communications

Most people use Kosovo's public transportation system, which includes buses, trains, and taxis. For short distances, urban dwellers tend to walk or take a taxi, while buses are reserved for longer trips. Young people typically ride bicycles or motor bikes. Some families own a car but drive little because of the expense of gas. Most roads are paved, but many are very narrow or poorly maintained.

Telephone access, both landline and cellular, is available in nearly every city. Young people have turned to the internet as their most frequent medium of communication. People in rural areas usually have access to a landline in their village's post office, though most families also own a cellular phone. Television provides the main source of news, though many newspapers are available, some claiming political neutrality and others supporting particular political parties or leaders. Dozens of radio stations broadcast in Kosovo, mainly in Albanian, though the main public broadcaster transmits news and other programs in Albanian, Serbian, Bosnian, Roma, and Turkish. While Kosovo's laws guarantee both freedom of expression and freedom of the press, the laws prohibit defamation and expressions that incite ethnic hostility. The press is often subjected to political interference, and journalists occasionally are harassed or denied access to information.

Education

Structure and Access

Education in Kosovo is free and available to all. Elementary school begins at age six and lasts for five years. Middle school lasts for four years. Both elementary and middle school are mandatory. An exam is given to assign students to a specialized high school, some of which may prepare them for a specific area of university study or for various technical jobs. Private high schools that do not require an entrance exam are also available. All children are entitled to an education, no matter their ethnicity, religion, gender, or socioeconomic background.

School Life

Primary students study math, language, grammar, literature, biology, and history. In addition to these subjects, secondary students also study art, sports, English, chemistry, and music. In secondary school, students are able to choose their courses depending on their field of interest and the focus of the school. Public schools teach in Albanian, Serbian, Turkish, Croatian, or Bosnian, depending on which language is dominant in the area.

Classes traditionally follow a lecture format. However, in recent years, other teaching methods have become increasingly popular, including group work, discussions, and other active approaches to learning. Students have daily homework assignments to complete. In addition to their academic activities, students participate in poetry reading and compete in various sports and competitions that the school organizes.

Higher Education

The state-owned University of Prishtina used to be the only public university in Kosovo. Today, there are several public

universities. They have small tuition fees each semester and offer scholarships to outstanding students. Books, supplies, and other needs are the responsibility of the student. Private colleges and universities are available for those who can afford them, usually as a second choice after not being accepted to a public university.

Many young people go abroad (to elsewhere in Europe or the United States) for university study. Kosovars highly value education, so families often make financial sacrifices to ensure that their children earn a university degree.

Health

Health care is free and available to all citizens. Hospitals lack advanced equipment and are often poorly maintained. Hospital staff often lack training, although there are increasing opportunities for doctors to receive training abroad. There are regional hospitals in major cities, while villages have clinics, which provide only basic health services. Patients who can afford the fees prefer treatment at private health clinics, which have better facilities, and often go abroad for major operations.

AT A GLANCE

Contact Information

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Country and Development Data

Capital	Pristina
Population	1,952,701 (rank=147)
Area (sq. mi.)	4,203 (rank=161)
Area (sq. km.)	10,887
Human Development Index	NA
Gender Inequality Index	NA
GDP (PPP) per capita	\$11,900
Adult Literacy	NA
Infant Mortality	27.12 per 1,000 births
Life Expectancy	74 (male); 79 (female)
Currency	Euro