

UKRAINE (Україна)



QUICK FACTS

Population: 44 million

Area: slightly smaller than Texas, second largest country in Europe (after Russia)

Capital: Kyiv (2.6 million)

Languages: Ukrainian (official) 67%, Russian 24%, other 9%

EDUCATION

The education system in Ukraine has experienced numerous reforms over the past two decades. It currently has a compulsory 11-grade education system for ages 6-17. Grading is on a 5-point scale (5=excellent, 4=good, 3=acceptable, 2=unacceptable). The literacy rate for 15 and over is 99.7%. As of 2010, 70% of students attend Ukrainian-language schools and 29% attend Russian-language schools. Traditionally greater emphasis has been placed on rote-learning rather than inquiry-based or critical thinking and exams are typically oral. According to the World Bank, Ukrainian students outperform their American counterparts in math and science, but fall to the bottom when it comes to critical thinking and problem solving.



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Children in traditional Ukrainian clothing

Ukraine traces its roots to Kievan Rus, the first eastern Slavic state and predecessor to modern Ukraine, Belarus and Russia. The name Ukraine comes from the term “borderlands”. It is incorrect to call the country “The” Ukraine. Ukrainian and Russian are both Slavic languages, yet distinct and not mutually intelligible. While Ukrainian is the official language, there are significant ethnic Russian populations in the east and Crimea in the south for whom Russian is the native language. Known for its fertile lands, Ukraine has been compared to Iowa and is the historic “bread basket” of Europe.

RELIGION

There is no official state religion, however the Eastern Orthodox Church has been the dominant religion since the 10th century. Ukraine’s Jewish population dates back to Kievan Rus and comprised 1/3 of Ukraine’s urban population before WWII. Recently Ukraine has been dubbed the Bible Belt of Eastern Europe and a hub of evangelical church life. Religion was forbidden during the Soviet period but has enjoyed a resurgence since independence. Ukrainian Orthodox—Kiev Patriarchate 50%, Ukrainian Orthodox—Moscow Patriarchate 26%, Ukrainian Greek Catholic 8%, Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox 7%, Roman Catholic 2%, Protestant 2%, Jewish 0.6%

ETHNICITY

Ukrainian can imply a nationality, ethnicity or language and not all citizens are ethnic Ukrainians. While Ukrainians make up 78% of the population, there are also many ethnic Russians (17%) predominantly in the east and south as well as Ukrainian citizens of Belarusian, Moldovan, Crimean Tatar, Bulgarian, Hungarian, Romanian, Polish, and Jewish heritage.

FAMILY, RELATIONSHIPS & CUSTOMS

Due to tradition as well as social and economic factors, Ukrainian youth tend to live with their parents through their education and after marriage. Grandparents often play a significant role in the upbringing of grandchildren. “Thank you” and other polite words commonly used by Americans are reserved for more formal exchanges. Their omission by Ukrainians should not be perceived as impolite. Flowers are a common gift, given in odd numbers for auspicious occasions and even for sad occasions. Ukrainians never interact over a door threshold. Some major holidays include: Orthodox Christmas (January 7 according to the Julian calendar), Women’s Day (March 8), Orthodox Easter, Labor Day (May 1 and 2), Victory/Memorial Day (May 9) and Independence (August 24).



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CONTEMPORARY UKRAINE

Caught between larger powers, the 20th Century saw Ukraine gain independence from the Russian and Austrian empires, only to be divided and conquered soon after by the Soviet Union. In the 1930s, over 7 million peasants died as a result of man-made famines and another 7 million perished during World War II (The Great Patriotic War). The population experienced further hardship in 1986 when a reactor at Chernobyl nuclear plant exploded releasing a radioactive cloud, killing over 10,000 and affecting the health of millions. Today Ukraine has the fastest de-population rates in Europe attributed in part to declining fertility rates and high mortality rates largely due to chronic disease.

With the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, a newly independent Ukraine embarked on a challenging path of political and economic reform oscillating between Russia and the West. Following the 2004 presidential elections, accusations of vote rigging in favor of Prime Minister Yanukovich led to weeks of massive street protests known as the Orange Revolution. The results were annulled and Viktor Yushchenko, a leader of the protests, won the revote. However, with the 2008 economic crisis and cracks in the Orange Revolution mounting, Viktor Yanukovich staged a comeback and won the presidency in 2010, reorienting political and economic policies toward Russia. Ukraine remains dependent on Russia for its gas supplies, but also serves as a major transit country, finding itself once again caught between global powers.

In 2011, only 30% of survey respondents indicated that they are satisfied with their life, an 8 point drop since 2006 and lower than the regional average. 50% believe they live in a country with few liberties and fewer believe Ukraine has law and order (16 %), a strong political opposition (19 %) or a court system that protects the rights of individuals against abuse by the state (11 %).



Swallow's nest at Yalta

UKRAINIANS IN THE USA

While the first Ukrainian may have arrived in the Jamestown colony in 1608, large-scale immigration did not begin until the 1880s. Still the largest wave was only after 1990 with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Significant numbers of migrants were Jewish, but there are many Pentecostal immigrants as well. There are just under 1 million Ukrainian Americans in the US today with the largest populations in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, LA and Detroit.



The flag of Ukraine was first adopted in 1918 and then restored in 1992. Yellow represent the golden wheat fields of Ukraine and blue represents the sky.



Traditional Ukrainian Easter Eggs

NAMES

First names, or given names often originate from the Orthodox or Catholic faiths. Surnames can have both masculine or feminine versions with the latter designated by the ending *-a*. Patronymics (ending in *-ich* or *-na*) are often used in lieu of family names when addressing teachers or in formal or professional situations. Due to transliteration from Cyrillic, there can be variation in spelling.

FAMOUS UKRAINIANS

A few famous Ukrainians include: Golda Meir, Vitali Klitschko, Mila Kunas, Max Levchin (co-founder of Pay Pal), Karina Smirnoff and Maksim Chmerkovskiy. Many more famous Americans have roots in Ukraine including: Sylvester Stallone, Stephen Spielberg and Dustin Hoffman.

UKRAINIAN WORDS

Hi	<i>Pryvit</i>
Bye	<i>Pa-Pa!</i>
Good morning	<i>Dobroho ranku</i>
Yes	<i>Tak</i>
No	<i>Ni</i>
Please/You're welcome ..	<i>Proshu, bud'laska</i>
Thank you	<i>Dyakuyu</i>
How are you?	<i>Yak spravy?</i>
I do not understand	<i>Ya ne rozumiyu</i>
Do you understand?	<i>Rozumiyesh?</i>
What is your name?.....	<i>Yak vas zvut?</i>
My name is	<i>Mene zvaty...</i>
Where are you from?	<i>Zvidky Vy?</i>

USEFUL LINKS

[CIA World Factbook: Ukraine](#)
[BBC Country Page: Ukraine](#)
[National Geographic: Ukraine](#)
[Kyiv Post English](#)