Ukraine

The Ukraine is a country in Eastern Europe. It is the second-largest European country after Russia, which it borders to the east and northeast. It is also bordered by Belarus, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and by Romania and Moldova. It has a coastline along the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov.

Ukraine covers approximately 600,000 square kilometres (230,000 sq mi). Prior to the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian War, it was the eighth-most populous country in Europe, with a population of around 41 million people.

The capital city of Ukraine is Kyiv. It is also the country's largest city. It is in north-central Ukraine along the Dnieper River. As of 1 January 2021, its population was 2,962,180, making Kyiv the seventh-most populous city in Europe.

The country's national language is Ukrainian, and most people are also fluent in Russian.
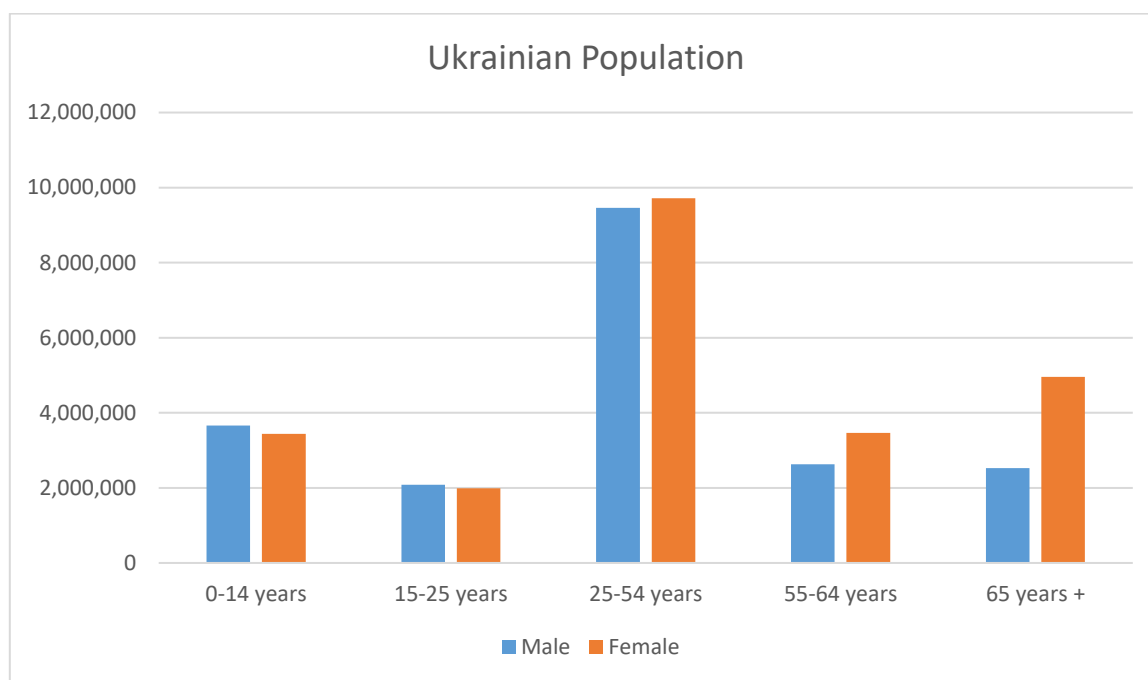
Flag

The National Flag of Ukraine consists of two equal horizontal bands of azure (top) and golden yellow (below).

The colours actually date back to medieval heraldry, but in modern times they are sometimes claimed to represent grain fields under a blue sky

Population

Most of the people are Ukrainians. Russians form the next largest group. There are also small groups of Moldovans, Tatars, and Belarusians. Ukrainian is the main language. Most people live in cities or towns.

Ukrainian Population

16.16% of people living in Ukraine are aged 0-14 years.

9.28% of people living in Ukraine are aged 15-24 years.

43.66% of people living in Ukraine are aged 25-54 years.

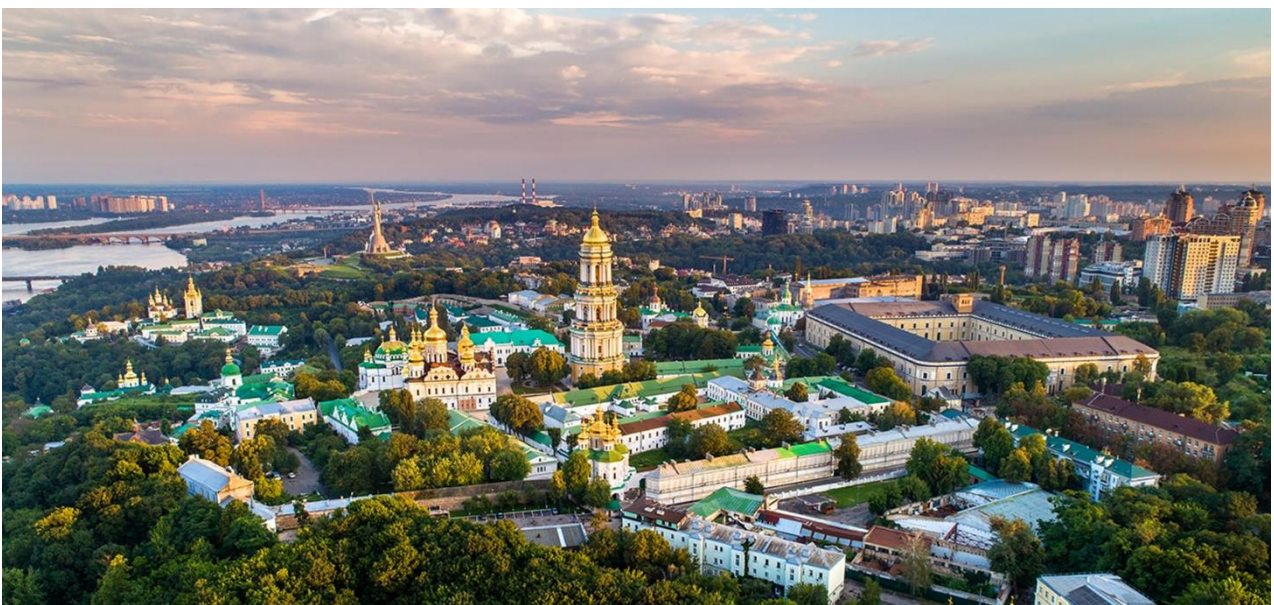13.87% of people living in Ukraine are aged 55-64 years.

17.03% of people living in Ukraine are aged 65 years and over.

*all these figures are from before the current war

City Life

69.9% of the population in Ukraine live in towns and cities.

Kyiv is the capital city of Ukraine, and it is also the most populous city in the country. It is in north-central Ukraine along the Dnieper River. As of 1 January 2021, its population was 2,962,180, making Kyiv the seventh-most populous city in Europe.

After a rough and turbulent history, the town has become an interesting array of old and new buildings. More and more of the culture is being influenced by the characteristics of both Western and European customs, yet the Ukrainians who live here still cling proudly to tradition.

HIGHLIGHTS OF KYIV

1. Saint Sophia's Cathedral
2. St. Michael's Golden-Domed Monastery

3. Saint Vladimir Hill
4. St Andrew's Church
5. Maidan Nezalezhnosti
6. Khreshatyk street
7. Golden Gate
8. St Volodymyr's Cathedral
9. Kiev Pechersk Lavra

10. The Motherland Monument
11. National Museum of the History of Ukraine in the Second World War
12. Vydubychi Monastery
13. Mariyinsky Palace
14. House with Chimaeras
15. People's Friendship Arch
16. Kiev Funicular
17. Podil
18. Taras Shevchenko National University

Other Ukrainian cities include:

<u>Odessa</u> – a major port and the largest city along the entire Black Sea, the 5th largest city in Ukraine and arguably the most important city of trade. It is beautifully situated on green rolling hills, overlooking a small picturesque harbour. Odessa has a total population of about 1.1 million people.

<u>Vinnitsa</u> - located in Central Ukraine, with direct train and bus connections to Kyiv, L'viv, Odessa, Moscow, Bratislava and other major Eastern European cities. It is a bi-lingual city, with most residents speaking both Ukrainian and Russian.

<u>Kharkiv</u> - The second largest city in the Ukraine, situated in the northeast of the country and serves as one of the main industrial, cultural and educational centres in the country. It has a population of just over 1.4 million people.

Kharkiv was founded during the 17th century and has had a university since 1805. From 1917 to 1934 it served as capital of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. Perhaps Karkiv's most notable population increase was during the Holodomor famine of the 1930s which saw many people arriving at the cities in search of food.

Lviv - an important centre of commerce in Ukraine. The city is responsible for the manufacture of electronic equipment, cars, agricultural machinery, chemicals, processed food and textiles. It has under a million inhabitants and a number of people commute from the surroundings suburbs daily. It is also one of the Ukraine's leading cultural centres.

Ukraine Regions

The Ukraine is divided into 27 regions.

The region of Crimea was annexed and claimed by Russia in 2014.

Amid an ongoing invasion of Ukraine in September 2022, Russia unilaterally declared its annexation of four Ukrainian oblasts – Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson.

History

Tribes of people called Slavs arrived in what is now Ukraine during the 400s and 500s. Viking invaders called Varangians later mixed with the Slavs. They set up a state that became the powerful kingdom of Kyivan Rus. Kyivan Rus lost power when Mongols invaded in the 1200s.

Poles and Cossacks

In the 1300s Lithuania took control of most of Ukraine. Poland ruled most of Ukraine after 1569. The Poles made many Ukrainians into serfs, or farmers who had to work on land that they did not own.

Some serfs escaped and joined a military force called the Cossacks. In 1648 the Cossacks led a fight against Polish rule. The Cossacks asked Russia to help them defeat the Poles. The Cossacks won independence from Poland, but their new state soon became part of the Russian Empire.

Soviet Control

In the 1700s Russia slowly gained control over almost all of Ukraine. By 1922 Ukraine had become part of the newly formed Soviet Union. The Soviets took over Ukraine's farms. During the 1930s about five to seven million Ukrainians died from starvation.

During World War II Germany invaded Ukraine. German forces made millions of Ukrainians into slaves and killed about 600,000 Ukrainian Jews. The Soviets drove the Germans out of Ukraine in 1944.

Independence

In 1991 the Soviet Union broke apart, and Ukraine became independent. In 2004 many Ukrainians protested the results of a presidential election. They thought the election had been unfair. The protests, known as the Orange Revolution, led to a new election. However, Ukraine's political problems continued.

In March 2014 Russian troops invaded Crimea, a part of Ukraine. Soon after, Russian President Vladimir Putin claimed that the people in Crimea voted for independence from Ukraine. Putin then signed a treaty that made Crimea part of Russia. Most other countries and the United Nations condemned Russia's actions. Tensions between Ukraine and Russia remained high. Later in 2014 rebels in two areas of eastern Ukraine fought against Ukraine troops. The rebels wanted to separate from the country. They were backed by Russian troops. The two areas declared themselves as independent republics, but they were not recognized by other countries. Fighting continued between the rebels and Ukrainian troops. Thousands of people were killed during the ongoing conflict.

War with Russia

Tensions between Ukraine and Russia intensified in 2021 when Russia began building up troops along the border with Ukraine. Many people feared that Russia would invade Ukraine. On February 21st 2022, Putin officially recognized the separatist republics in eastern Ukraine and sent troops into the regions. Three days later Russia invaded Ukraine and began bombing cities and military targets. Leaders around the world condemned the attacks.

Ukraine forces fought against the Russians, but the fighting continued for several weeks. More than 2 million people left Ukraine to escape the attacks. The refugees fled to Poland and other countries in Europe.

Geography

Almost all of Ukraine is flat. The grassland that covers the central and southern parts of the country is called the steppe. In northern Ukraine are the Pripet Marshes, one of the largest wetlands in Europe.

The Carpathian Mountains rise in the west. The Crimean Mountains cross the Crimean Peninsula, a piece of land that extends south into the Black Sea. Ukraine's longest river is the Dnieper.

Most of Ukraine's forests are in the mountains in the west. Some trees grow among the swamplands and in central Ukraine. The southern grassland has few trees.

Most of Ukraine has warm summers and cold winters. It rains mainly in June and July.

The country's animals include deer, wolves, bears, foxes, wildcats, beavers, weasels, and badgers.

Breadbasket of Europe

Ukraine is often called the "Breadbasket of Europe" because it boasts the ideal conditions for growing wheat, and is a major producer of it.

The country is one of the world's major grain producers. The country mainly grows and exports wheat, corn and barley. According to the European Commission, Ukraine accounts for 10% of the world wheat market, 15% of the corn market, and 13% of the barley market. With more than 50% of world trade, it is also the main player on the sunflower oil market.

Food

Paska is a special dish for Easter. This sweet bread is usually taken to church to be blessed on Easter morning.

The classic paska shape is cylindrical, with creamy frosting and sprinkles on top. It is made with yeast, milk, eggs, butter, and sugar. Its shape imitates the Tomb of Jesus.

Chicken Kyiv is one of the most famous dishes in Ukrainian cuisine, known beyond the country's borders. In the classical version, the chicken bone is retained, nowadays, the boneless version is more popular. To prepare this Ukrainian dish, the chicken fillet is flattened and wrapped around cold butter. Then, the chicken is coated with a mix of grated cheese, parsley, dill, mushrooms, and pepper, dipped in beaten egg yolk, and fried. It is traditionally served as a main dish.

The Olivier Salad is a pretty old dish with the first documented recipe which dates back to 1894. It is a staple cold appetizer of the Ukrainian New Year celebration. Nowadays, the salad includes five key elements: meat (usually boiled sausages), eggs, potatoes, pickles, and mayonnaise. Eggs and potatoes are boiled and cut into cubes. Meat and pickles are cut into cubes as well and then mixed in with mayonnaise. The dish can be stored in the fridge or served immediately.

Kapusniak is one of the oldest dishes in Ukraine. It used to be prepared for weddings, funerals, and Christmas dinners. Nowadays, Ukrainians enjoy this soup throughout the year. The key ingredient is sauerkraut, which is thoroughly washed before cooking to give the soup its transparent colour. It is cooked in meat or mushroom broth with potatoes, onions, carrots, and bay leaves. Traditionally kapusniak is served with sour cream and chopped parsley.

Varenyky dumplings are usually made with savoury fillings, like meat, potatoes, mushrooms, and cabbage. Cottage cheese or cherries are typically served for sweet varenyky. They are commonly served with sour cream and sugar on top.

Piroshki patties are considered Ukrainian comfort food. The boat-shaped pastries have a range of fillings, from sweet fillings such as cherries or apples to savoury fillings such as ground meat and mushrooms. Piroshki are typically baked, though some families in Ukraine opt for frying. The dough is flattened, filled with a preferred filling, and pinched around the edges. After about 25 minutes in the oven, the piroshki batch is ready. This delightful Ukrainian food is enjoyed by people from all walks of life.

Why not find out about more Ukrainian foods:
https://nomadparadise.com/ukrainian-food/

Culture

Because of where the country is placed geographically, Ukrainian culture is influenced by the cultures of Western Europe and Russia.

Ukrainian cities have broad sidewalks and lots of areas of greenery. Ukrainians generally do a considerable amount of walking, either to get around or simply for enjoyment. Parks are plentiful and popular for strolling or picnicking, a common pastime among city dwellers, most of whom live in apartments. The cities also feature numerous kiosks, which sell all manner of wares.

Most of Ukraine's major cities have ornate theatres with their own opera or ballet companies. Song-and-dance ensembles, most notably the Verovka State Chorus and the Virsky Dance Ensemble, have made Ukrainian folk music and dance into an impressive stage art.

In the countryside, horse-drawn carts with rubber wheels have not quite disappeared.

The khata ("house"), made of mud and thatch and typically whitewashed, is still found as

well. These homes often contain such traditional handiwork as embroideries, weavings, and handmade feather duvets and oversized pillows. Their inhabitants are predominantly elderly Ukrainians.

Visual Arts:

Over the centuries the Ukrainian people have evolved a varied folk art. Embroidery, wood carving, ceramics, and weaving are highly developed, with stylized ornamentation that represents many regional styles. Intricately patterned Easter eggs (pysanky) have become popular in many countries that have Ukrainian immigrant populations.

Music:

Folk music in Ukraine is still popular. Ritual songs, ballads, and historical songs (dumy) were sung a cappella or accompanied by folk instruments, of which the bandura (a multistringed lutelike instrument) is the most popular. Itinerant blind musicians known as kobzars or lirnyks (depending on their instrument of choice) were a common feature of the Ukrainian countryside until the 20th century.

The hopak, an energetic folk dance composed of leaps and kicks, received renewed attention in the 21st century as martial arts practitioners integrated its movements into a self-defense technique based on ethnic Ukrainian traditions.

Sports:

Ukraine benefited immensely from the Soviet emphasis on sports and physical education, which left the country with hundreds of stadiums, swimming pools, gymnasiums, and other athletic facilities. Popular sports include track and field, volleyball, shooting, basketball, swimming, and gymnastics. Football, however, is by far the favourite sport, and archrivals Shakhtar Donetsk and Dynamo Kyiv are two of the country's most popular clubs. Ukraine was the cohost of football's European Championship tournament in 2012. Chess is also considered a sport.

Holidays and celebrations:

Social gatherings like Vechornytsi have a long history in Ukrainian culture, and so do traditional holidays like Ivan Kupala Day, Maslenitsa, Koledowanie, and Malanka, where people gather in large groups. "Razom nas bahato, nas ne podolaty" is a popular cultural and political statement of both traditional and modern Ukrainians. It translates as "Together we are many! We cannot be defeated!"

Weddings:

Traditional Ukrainian wedding celebrations have many rituals that involve music and dancing, drinking and eating, and crowds of people. The wedding consists of three separate parts that can last for days or even weeks.

First there's a betrothal, then a ceremony, followed by a big celebration.

The betrothal involves the groom going to the bride's parents to seek their blessing and bargain the ransom he will pay for the bride. There are many stories in Ukrainian folklore of a bride being stolen without the groom paying ransom. The stolen bride is often a willing participant and the couple elopes without her parent's permission. Alternatively, the bride can refuse an offer of marriage. In which case, it is customary for the parents to meet the groom at the door with a pumpkin to convey the message.

If a pumpkin is given then the bridegroom can find one of the friends of the bride to see who is interested and begin the courtship process again.

Religion:

Religion is practiced throughout the country. Eastern Orthodox Christianity and Eastern Catholicism and Roman Catholicism are the three most widely practiced religions. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church is the largest in the country. Faithful of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, the second largest, practice Byzantine rites, but are in communion with the Roman Catholic Church which means that they are also fully Catholic.

Volodymyr Zelenskyy

Likely the most famous Ukrainian at the moment is the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

He was born 25 January 1978 to a Ukrainian Jewish family. Zelenskyy grew up as a native Russian speaker in Kryvyi Rih, a major city of Dnipropetrovsk Oblast in central Ukraine.

Zelenskyy obtained a degree in law from the Kyiv National Economic University. He enrolled in 1995, and graduated five years later in 2000 with a law degree. He is also fluent in English.

His career took a very different direction though as he stepped into comedy and acting. He created the production company Kvartal 95, which produced films, cartoons, and TV shows including the TV series Servant of the People, in which Zelenskyy played the role of the Ukrainian president. The series aired from 2015 to 2019 and was immensely popular.

Zelenskyy announced his candidacy in the 2019 Ukrainian presidential election as a political outsider. His party won a landslide victory and he became the 6th President of Ukraine on 20 May 2019.

Volodymyr Zelensky is married and they have 2 children.

Money - Hryvnia

The official currency of Ukraine is the Hryvnia (UAH). has been the national currency of Ukraine since 2 September 1996. The hryvnia is divided into 100 kopiyok.

It is named after a measure of weight used in medieval Kyivan Rus'.

₴ The hryvnia sign is a cursive Ukrainian letter He (ɘ), with a double horizontal stroke (₴), symbolizing stability

Ukraine – Some Facts

Ukraine became an independent country on August 24, 1991, after the fall of the Soviet Union. Over 92% of people voted for independence after the fall of the USSR.

Ukraine is the largest country completely in Europe.

It borders 7 countries... Russia, Belarus, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Moldova. It also has a coastline along the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov.

The National University of Ostroh Academy, founded in 1576, was the first university in eastern Europe.

Like many other Eastern European and South Asian countries, Ukrainians wear their wedding rings on the ring fingers of their right hands.

In 2014, there was a Ukrainian revolution in which the president was overthrown. Following that, Russia invaded a part of Ukraine called Crimea and annexed it into the Russian Federation. It continues to be administered by Russia, although most the world still recognizes the Crimean peninsula as part of Ukraine.

Ukrainians celebrate Kupala Night near the summer solstice. Legend goes that if a boy and girl can continue holding hands while jumping over a log fire, then their love will last forever!

Ukraine means "Land on the edge". It is an apt name for a country on the eastern fringe of the European steppe.

The horse was first domesticated in Ukraine!

Ukrainian was ranked as the second most melodious language in 1934, only behind Italian. And was also ranked as the third most beautiful language in the same year, behind only French and Persian.

The world's longest wind instrument is the Ukrainian trembita. It is a wooden trumpet that ranges in length from 2.5 to 8 metres and has a diameter of roughly 30 mm. In mountain villages, the trembita was used as a means of communication to notify events like the start and conclusion of the workday, childbirth, marriage, impending danger and more.

Arsenalna, a metro stop in Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine, is the second-deepest station in the world with a depth of 105.5 metres. Our deepest London Underground station below ground level is Hampstead on the Northern line, which runs down to 58.5 metres. That's really deep, but not even close to Arsenalna!

Ukrainian President Volovdymyr Zelensky used to be an actor. In fact, in the Ukrainian version he is also the voice of Paddington Bear!

Screengrab from video uploaded on YouTube by VLGFILM Ukraine