

Background notes on Ukraine

Ukraine is the second largest country in Europe, after Russia, at about two and a half times the size of the UK. It is mostly fertile steppe, with two comparatively low ranges of mountains; the Carpathians in the west, and the Crimean Mountains to the south. All major rivers flow south to either the Black Sea or the Sea of Azov. The Danube forms the border with Romania in the south west.

In 2019 the total population was believed to be between 43 and 45 million, made up of 80% ethnic Ukrainians and 17% Russians. Ukrainian is the national language, in which education is offered. Many Ukrainians speak Russian or Polish, as well as Ukrainian. There are similarities between Ukrainian and Russian, and Ukrainian and Polish, but they are not easily mutually understood. Ukraine has the world's second largest Christian population (82%), mostly belonging to Orthodox Churches (and divided between the Church of Ukraine and the Moscow Patriarchate). About 10% are Roman Catholic, most of whom are members of the autonomous Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, which is in full communion with Rome, but has retained Orthodox/Byzantine liturgy. There are about 400,000 Roma in Ukraine, many of whom have fled. They face particular difficulty due to lack of identity documents and prejudice. Also refugees in Ukraine, from the Middle East or northern Africa, are finding it particularly difficult to find safety and to cross borders.

Ukraine lost 6 million people during World War 2, with the German occupation (with many historic buildings destroyed, especially in Kyiv). After the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine gave up its large arsenal of nuclear weapons (the third largest in the world) in order to become a neutral country in 1996. In 2013, President Victor Yanukowych broke economic ties with Europe in favour of the Russians, which provoked public protests and then a vote in Parliament to remove him. In turn, this triggered the Russian invasion of the Crimea (southern Ukraine) and movement into the Donbas region in the east, in spring 2014. In elections held in October of that year, Petro Poroshenko was elected president. He negotiated a 'cease-fire' which limited further incursions on Ukrainian soil. In 2019, the Servant of the People Party was elected to Parliament and Volodymyr Zelenskyy was installed as president.

Ukraine is quite heavily industrialised, with its major industries and mines concentrated in the east of the country. But before the war it was described as a 'low to middle' income country, and one of the poorest in Europe. It also has significant air and water pollution problems, in addition to the radiation aftermath of the Chernobyl nuclear accident. The main source of income for the country is from grain production – and it was one of the world's largest exporters of cereals. The country does have a well-structured rail network, with a high level of usage.

There is free healthcare and education in Ukraine. Primary education is from 6 to 10 years, secondary from 10 to 15 years, and upper secondary from 15 to 18 years old. The final school leaving certificate is used as a basis for university admission.

With the strong influence of the Orthodox Church many families continue in traditional patterns of family life, and grandparents often very involved in the raising of their grandchildren. The main festivals observed in Ukraine are New Year, the Orthodox Christmas and Orthodox Easter. In the west of Ukraine, St Nicholas Day (mid December) is the main gift-giving day over the Christmas period (see the calendar at the end of this hand-out). The main sport followed in the country is football, and chess is a very popular activity.

Some Ukrainian second names (as with other eastern European languages) have differing masculine and feminine forms, so that members of the same family may appear to have different names, e.g. Tsarnovskyi (masculine form) vs. Tsarnovska (feminine form). However, others (such as the distinctively Ukrainian names ending in -enko) do not change in this way.

The UK 'Ukraine Family Scheme'

Currently, those Ukrainians already in this country can have their visas extended. Those outside of the UK can gain entry if they have extended family here (including grandparents, grandchildren, uncles, aunts, cousins etc.). If successful, visas will be issued for 3 years, and will entitle the holders to seek work, and access public funds etc. For further details go to: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-for-a-ukraine-family-scheme-visa>

The UK 'Homes for Ukraine' Scheme

The exact details of this scheme are still being worked out and for most up-to-date information please go to:
<https://homesforukraine.campaign.gov.uk/>



Ukrainian Festivals and Holidays 2022

Orthodox Christmas Day 7th Jan

Mainly a religious observance. Some Ukrainians have no food or drink during the day before, and break their fast as the first star appears on Christmas Eve. This is traditionally a twelve course meal to represent the twelve disciple, with a wheat sheaf as a centre-piece.

Orthodox Easter Day 24th April

An overnight service on the Saturday or early services at sunrise, celebrated with feasting. Decorated eggs are exchanged.

Mother's Day 8th May

Independence Day 24th August

A relatively new holiday, to celebrate independence from the USSR in 1991. Since the Russian invasion of Crimea and the Donbas area in 2014, this has become a more low key remembrance of lives lost in defending the country. This year it will almost certainly take on an even deeper significance.

St Nicholas Day 6th December

A festival particularly observed in western Ukraine or by Catholics, and marks the beginning of the Christmas season. Gifts are exchanged, children write letters to St Nicholas and donations made to charities.

New Year's Eve 31st December

Contact and Resources

On-line Trauma and Resilience Support for Ukrainians

At 5.30 pm (UK time) every day for 45-60 minutes, led by experienced therapists and trauma coaches, with Ukrainian translation: <https://saneukraineonline.org/>

Mental Health Support

Mindline Somerset

Tel: 0800 138 16922

Email: support@openmentalhealth.org.uk

Ukrainians in the UK

Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain

Website: www.augb.co.uk

Taunton Welcomes Refugees

Website: <http://www.tauntonwelcomesrefugees.co.uk/>

Nearest Ukrainian Catholic Church

The Good Shepherd Ukrainian Church, Derby Road, Gloucester GL1 4AE

Tel: 01452 529069

Email: ugccgloucester@gmail.com

Nearest Orthodox Churches

Eastern Orthodox Church of the Nativity, University Road, **Bristol** BS8 1SP (Services mostly in English, with some Slavonic + Romanian. Largest orthodox community in Bristol)

Website: www.bristol-orthodox-church.co.uk

Orthodox Church, Old Tiverton Road, **Exeter** EX4 6LA (Patriarchate of Constantinople, invites 'all backgrounds and all languages'. Services in English in the Russian tradition.)

Website: www.orthodoxdevon.org

Greek Orthodox Church of St Peter and St Paul, Lower Ashley Rd, Easton, **Bristol** B35 0UL

Website: www.greekcommunitybristol.org.uk

Bristol Romanian Orthodox Church, 1 Thomas Lane, Redcliffe, **Bristol** BS1 6QR

Website: www.bisericaortodoxaromanabristol.org.uk

Local Roman Catholic Churches

St Joseph, Binford Place, **Bridgwater** TA6 3NJ

Tel: 01278 422 703

Website: www.bridgwatercatholicchurch.wordpress.com

St Stanislaus, 4 High Street, **Dulverton** TA22 9HB

Tel: 01643 702 201

Website: www.westsomersetcatholics.org.uk

Sacred Heart, 8 Townsend Road, **Minehead** TA24 5RG
Tel: 01643 702 201
Website: www.westsomersetcatholics.org.uk

St George and St Teresa of Lisieux, Billet Street, **Taunton** TA1 3NE
Tel: 01823 272 700
Website: www.tauntoncatholicchurch.co.uk

St John Fisher, 57 Mantle Street, **Wellington** TA21 8AX
Tel: 01823 662 283
Website: www.our-parish.org

St James, 40 Old Rd, **Tiverton** EX16 4HJ
Tel: 01884 252292
Website: www.plymouth-diocese.org.uk/church/tiverton-st-james/

Basic Ukrainian Phrases

There are various translation services on-line, such as <https://www.17-minute-world-languages.com> – but there are also an increasing number of short video clips covering simple helpful phrases, so have a look at some of those. Here is a useful one on how to greet someone appropriately:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XM0YZg2VOxM>

Other phrases (on-line versions will give you help with the pronunciation)

Welcome to the UK: Laskavo prosymo do Velykobrytaniyi (Ласкаво просимо до Великобританії)

Thank you: Dyakuui (Дякую)

Hello: Zdravstvuyte (Здравствуйте)

Goodbye: Do robachennya (До побачення)

Yes: Tak (Так)

No: Ni (Ні)

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These notes are provided by:

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