

# Facts on the European Dimension of Displacement and Asylum: Ukraine

January 2016

## Overview

### Demographic Structure

Population	45.4 million
Growth rate	-2.8% <sup>2</sup>
Ethnic groups	78% Ukrainian, 17% Russian, 0.5 % Crimean Tartar; over 130 nationalities in total
Languages	68% Ukrainian, 30% Russian and 17 other minority languages
Religion	52% Orthodox, 9% Greek Catholic, 4% Muslim, 3% Protestant, 2% Roman Catholic, Jewish minorities
Median age (EU 28)	40.1 years (42.2 years)

(Figures are for 2015, except <sup>1</sup>2014, <sup>2</sup>2013; \*excl. Crimea and Sevastopol; arrows: change from previous year)

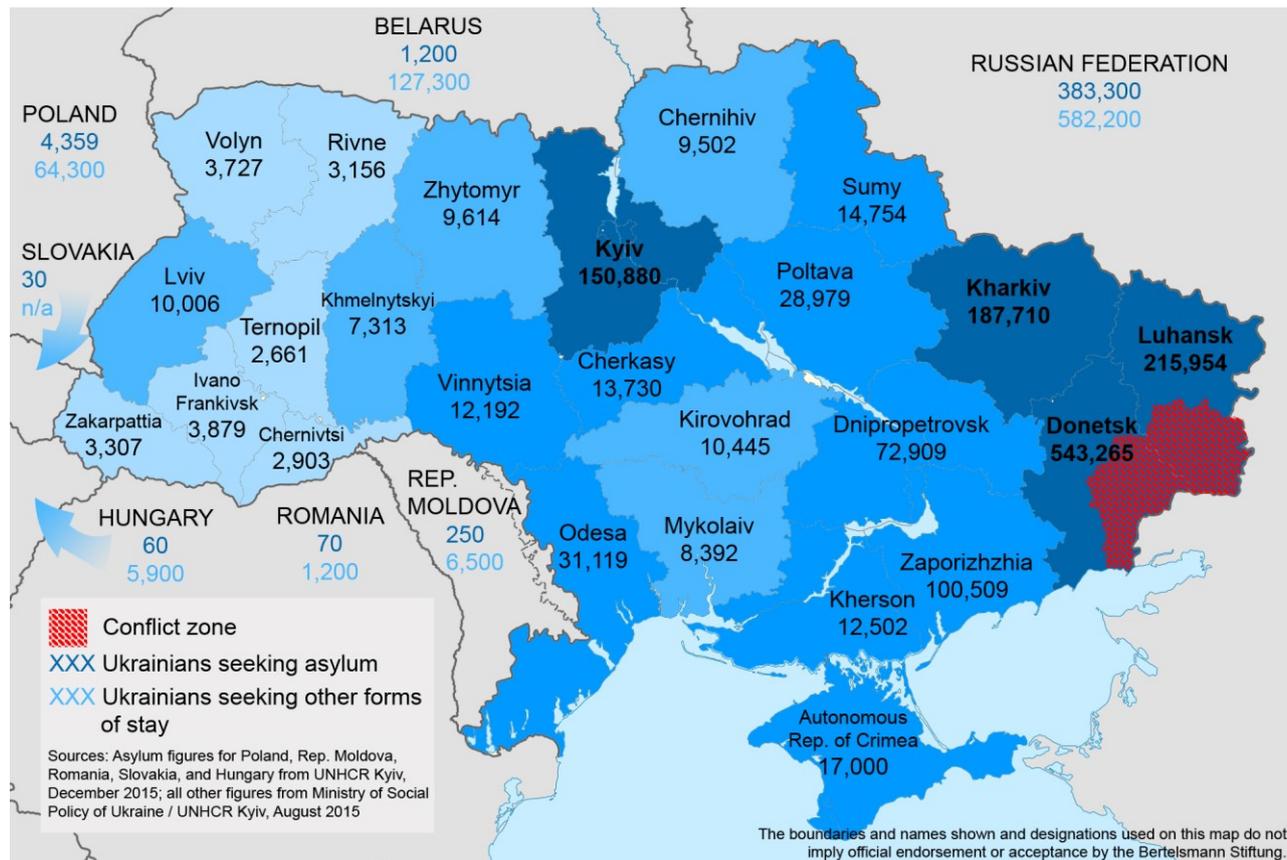
### Economics & Employment

GDP (per capita)	\$90.1 bn (\$2,108)	↓
GDP growth	-9.0 %	↘
GNI (PPP) (per capita)	\$366.2 bn (\$8,560) <sup>1</sup>	↘ (↗)
Inflation (CPI)	49.9 %*	↑
Unemployment	9.3 % <sup>1</sup>	↗
Youth unemployment (15-24 years)	16.9 % <sup>1</sup>	↗
FDI (inflows)	\$847.0 mn <sup>1</sup>	↓
Share of EU 28	57.3 % <sup>2</sup>	↗
Imports of goods	\$54.4 bn* <sup>1</sup>	↓
Share of EU 28	38.7 % <sup>1</sup>	↗
Exports of goods	\$53.9 bn* <sup>1</sup>	↓
Share of EU 28	31.6 % <sup>1</sup>	↗

### Political System and Relations with the EU

Type of state/government	Republic / semi-presidential system
Degree of democratization	Bertelsmann Stiftung, Transformation Index 2016 Democracy status: 6.75 (out of 10, higher = better), defective democracy Rank: 38/129; comparable to Paraguay, Georgia and Moldova
Human rights and protection of minorities	UN OHCHR, Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine 2015 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cases of torture, ill-treatment and arbitrary detainment in all regions; cases of forced labor in the self-proclaimed people's republics of Donetsk and Luhansk</li> <li>Restricted freedom of the press and expression (Crimea), no freedom of the press and expression (Donetsk/Luhansk), unlawful refusal of entry for foreign journalists (areas controlled by the government)</li> <li>Significant infringement of freedom of assembly in Donetsk and Luhansk</li> <li>Infringement of freedom of religion for Christian minorities (Donetsk and Luhansk ) and Jewish minorities (areas under government control)</li> </ul>
Corruption	Transparency International, Corruption Perceptions Index 2014 Rank: 142/175, comparable to Uganda and Bangladesh
Freedom of the press	Freedom House, Freedom of the Press Index 2015 Status: partly free Score: 58 (out of 100, lower = better), comparable to Macedonia and Republic of the Congo
Relations with European Union	Status: associated country, priority partner within the bilateral European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the multilateral Eastern Partnership (EaP)  Previous steps to integration: Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (1994), Association Agreement (2014) incl. DCFTA (implemented in January 2016) and visa-free travel (expected implementation in early 2016)

**UKRAINE: INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS AND MIGRANTS TO NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES**



Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung based on the map by NordNordWest / Wikimedia Commons – CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en>

**REFUGEE SITUATION IN UKRAINE**

Category	Country of origin, country of destination
Number of refugees in Ukraine	<p>1.8 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) were registered by UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, in December 2015. According to UNHCR, at least 800,000 IDPs are living in the areas under government control alone. Ukraine also has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a large number of non-registered IDPs</li> <li>• some 600,000 people living in IDP-like conditions</li> <li>• 7,100 displaced persons and asylum-seekers from other countries</li> </ul>
Number of refugees outside of Ukraine	<p>1.1 million, according to UNHCR. The three main destination countries are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Russia, with 858,000 (disputed) (~78%)</li> <li>• Belarus, with 127,000 (disputed) (~11.5%)</li> <li>• Germany, with 6,540 (&lt;1%)</li> </ul>
Housing for internally displaced persons	<p>According to UNHCR, efforts to provide IDPs with long-term housing are progressing slowly. A majority of IDPs live in private households or with people providing voluntary assistance, or are renting cheap, mostly decrepit accommodations. Government facilities are usually meant only for short-term stays; anyone who remains there too long is threatened with eviction.</p>
Status of internally displaced persons	<p>Registered IDPs receive access to government support and benefits. However, the registration process is difficult in a number of respects (see below).</p>
Funding	<p>UNHCR appealed for \$41 million for its activities in Ukraine in 2015. Some 61% of the funds had been received from donors by December 2015.</p>

Even in the years before the so-called Euromaidan protests, a number of factors – dissatisfaction with the political situation, rampant corruption and generally low living standards – were resulting in migration outflows from Ukraine among significant segments of the population. An estimated 2 to 7 million Ukrainians are living in Russia and the European Union. (The sizeable spread stems from variations in definition, source, year and season.) The country has one of the world's largest diasporas, with 5 to 6 million Ukrainians living elsewhere around the globe, not least (although not only) because of the current trend toward emigration.

People from eastern Ukraine, Russian speakers and Ukrainians with low levels of education are gravitating toward Russia, while people from the country's western areas and those with more education tend to move west, either to the EU or in some cases to the United States. As a result of demographic change and migration, the country's population has been continuously declining from its 1991 level of 52 million.

The election of Petro Poroshenko as president with a pro-European reform agenda, the annexation of Crimea by Russia and the outbreak of the conflict in eastern Ukraine have had both positive and negative repercussions. The subsequent wave of patriotism and the strengthening of a Ukrainian identity, for example, fueled the hope that the envisioned reforms would succeed and that emigration and the resulting brain drain would be reduced.

However, the new government's reform efforts fell victim to the war in the east and the necessity of defending the country. Political and institutional change was thwarted and the hope that people had for rapid improvement evaporated. Despite the new democratically elected government, there is no end in sight to corruption, one of the main catalysts for the Euromaidan protests; this situation has been reinforced by the relatively limited headway made in reducing the influence of oligarchs throughout the country. Moreover, the economy has suffered because of the war and millions of people have been forced into poverty as a result.

Even if most Ukrainians are still happy about what the Euromaidan protests achieved, the optimism people felt about further democratization and the eradication of corruption has disappeared. Some

are now calling for a second social revolution, others are talking (once more) about emigrating.

Euromaidan, war and the economic crisis are thus the main drivers of Ukraine's migration flows. People are (1) being forced to migrate as IDPs and refugees from the war in Donetsk and Luhansk and the annexation of Crimea, (2) emigrating in order to avoid being drafted into the military and (3) leaving in order to find work or get an education.

### **Internally displaced persons**

Many ethnic Ukrainians and Crimean Tartars, a Muslim minority, fled Crimea after it was annexed by Russia. An estimated 50,000 to 60,000 people left entirely, while another 17,000 moved to another part of the peninsula. Crimean Tartars in particular departed as a result of reprisals, persecution, abduction, restrictions on their right to assemble, and armed searches of their homes and mosques. Many do not intend to return to Crimea as long as it is under Russian control. A speedy, consensual resolution of the conflict should not be expected.

Moreover, hundreds of thousands of people have left contested areas in Donetsk and Luhansk. Despite the ceasefire negotiated in Minsk last August, OSCE observers have reported renewed fighting since November, especially in the city of Donetsk.

According to UN OHCHR, the considerable restrictions on freedom of movement experienced along the contact line since January 2015 remain one of the major problems for inhabitants in the disputed territories. In the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, there are only five corridors open allowing people to enter areas controlled by the government. That means it is very difficult to purchase food, seek medical treatment, apply for government aid or reunite with family members. The situation has been made even more difficult by the minefields installed along the contact line and by the Ukrainian winter.

### **Avoiding military service**

As the situation in the east escalated, the Ukrainian government introduced general conscription for all men between the ages of 20 and 27. Since then, many young Ukrainians abroad have apparently been making use of various possibilities for

avoiding the draft, including finding employment, studying at university, entering training programs or doing internships. Parents are shielding their sons from danger by sending them abroad. Other young men are evading mobilization by not registering once they move to a new address. In 2014, as conscription was taking place in 13 regions, 85,792 men who had been summoned did not appear at their local draft office. According to official statistics released by the Ukrainian army, almost 10,000 were illegally avoiding service.

### **Employment and education migration**

Like others, Ukrainian migrants looking for work have felt the impact of the EU's economic crisis. Until 2014 Ukrainians were the fifth largest group of non-EU citizens in the European Union. They are also the third largest group to receive Schengen visas, after Russians and Chinese. At the same time, considerably fewer visas have been issued to Ukrainians since 2013. The reasons for this are lower incomes, which have resulted in less travel to the EU, and the Euro crisis, which has reduced the demand for Ukrainian workers (along with those from other countries) in some EU member states.

Conversely, war and Ukraine's economic crisis have led to a steep rise in the number of workers who would like to find a job abroad. Most first-time applications for an EU residence permit include a request for a work permit.

As reflected by visa applications for short-term stays (Type C) in 2014, the most "popular" countries among Ukrainians are, in descending order, Poland, Greece, Hungary and Germany, with Switzerland, Spain and Portugal also experiencing high demand.

In view of the situation at home, it is not unlikely that a considerable share of the 1.5 million Ukrainians who have received Type C Schengen visas are hoping to work in the EU legally and, above all, illegally.

Since the outbreak of war, Ukrainian students have also been voting with their feet. Some 33,000 were residing in the EU in order to study or undergo training (Type D visa) in 2014, and in the first months of 2015 alone, the share of Ukrainians entering Poland in order to study rose by 50

percent, to 23,000 students. Yet the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine is not the only reason for studying in Poland, where Ukrainians make up more than half of foreign students. In addition, it is relatively easy to obtain a student visa for Poland; fees for tuition are relatively low, as is true in Ukraine; and Ukrainian students are charged less than others. Moreover, Poland's university programs and degrees are seen as reputable – and there is less corruption.

Finally, Ukrainians have also acquired citizenship in other countries (100,000 Ukrainians, for example, became Hungarian citizens based on their ethnic background).

## **ASSESSMENT AND OUTLOOK**

### **Difficult registration procedure**

Given the tense security situation and problems securing everyday necessities in the disputed oblasts of Donetsk and Luhansk, it is highly likely that the number of refugees (IDPs and others) will continue to rise. The situation cannot be expected to improve given that the Minsk agreement still has not been fully implemented. In 2015 alone, the number of refugees more than doubled, so that a clear majority of the people from the Donbas region are registered as IDPs, have left the country or are living in refugee-like conditions. Of the 4.4 million inhabitants in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, 2.8 million require protection according to UNHCR criteria. These figures are not conclusive, since many IDPs were counted twice, especially at the outbreak of the conflict. Moreover, UNHCR believes there are many unreported cases of IDPs and other refugees.

In December 2014 the Ukrainian government stopped payments for all pensions and social insurance benefits to people living in areas not under government control. Since then, anyone who wants to apply for government aid must register as an IDP at a center outside of the Donbas. That, however, means overcoming a number of obstacles.

First, the contact line must be passed at one of the few, chronically crowded checkpoints. Anyone wanting to cross needs official permission and some form of identification. Individuals without an ID, true of many Roma, are thus thwarted by the

requirements – something that also applies to those in bad health and those who fear that their homes might be plundered or that relatives left behind might be accused of treason.

Those who make it to a registration center must present a valid ID that shows their original place of residence is in one of the contested regions recognized by the government. Yet the list maintained by the authorities often does not reflect current realities. Moreover, many Ukrainians have never had their ID updated to show their present place of residence.

A new law (No. 2166), which was signed at the beginning of January by President Poroshenko, has strengthened the rights and freedoms granted to IDPs. Minors can now be registered by other people or agencies in addition to a parent or guardian. In the past, students could not register as IDPs if their university had relocated to a government-controlled area but their parents remained in their original place of residence. In addition, recognized IDPs are no longer required to inform the State Migration Service if their address changes. Finally, foreigners and stateless persons can now register as IDPs.

### **Inner-Ukrainian solidarity**

Currently there are IDPs throughout the country. The refugees who left Crimea have mostly settled in Ukraine's western provinces; those from eastern Ukraine have mostly remained in the area. More than half of all IDPs are registered in the east, where government assistance is limited. Most have been taken in by other family members or friends. Solidarity among Ukrainians was quite strong in the beginning, but resentment has since grown in some areas, above all against Russian-speaking IDPs from the "renegade" eastern provinces. How the Russian-Ukrainian conflict develops and is resolved will depend on whether people are able to create a new life and integrate in those places they have fled to, or whether they return to their original homes or leave the country entirely.

### **Leaving for Russia and the EU**

As a result of the conflict, many Ukrainians have moved abroad, most to Russia and many to the EU. Politically, the large number of people who

have fled to Russia and Belarus is being instrumentalized, even though the figures can only be verified in part and are therefore not conclusive. The Russian government wants to place the blame for the conflict on the Ukrainian government and therefore claims to have taken in many refugees. Yet it is possible that many Ukrainians who have repeatedly gone to Russia to work over the years are taking advantage of the current situation to register as refugees and thus legitimize their status.

In 2014, 14,040 Ukrainians applied for asylum in the EU, 13 times more than the year before. Most chose Germany as their destination, followed by Poland, Italy, France and Sweden. However, only 22 percent of the asylum applications submitted in 2014 were approved.

### **Reform measures**

The long-awaited local-level elections held in October were a major step toward democratization and gave Poroshenko and the governing coalition a boost, although they did little to change the balance of power within the country. On the contrary, they demonstrated that in some regions the oligarchs' power is still intact, while in others the party of former President Viktor Yanukovich retains its influence.

The economic situation is slowly improving. The government has put deregulation measures in place; it has also taken – limited – steps to change the legal framework and combat corruption. The increasing violations of the ceasefire in the Donbas are, however, a cause for concern. The way the conflict unfolds will also determine in part whether the attempts at decentralization are successful or whether they are thwarted before they can take hold.

### **Fewer visa restrictions?**

As the fighting increases in eastern Ukraine and reforms fail to gain speed, people are becoming less hopeful that change will occur. Emigration is again increasing, although not dramatically.

The war and sanctions imposed by the west on Moscow have also led to an economic crisis in Russia, the country traditionally favored by the majority of Ukrainians who have migrated to find

work. The resulting decrease in demand for labor has been accompanied by a steep devaluation of the ruble, so that Ukrainians no longer see Russia as their destination of choice when looking for work. The annexation of Crimea, Moscow's role in the war in eastern Ukraine and its anti-Ukrainian propaganda have further decreased Russia's appeal. Ukrainians are increasingly looking westward instead.

The degree to which this migration abroad is manageable will depend on the EU. At the end of 2015 the European Commission announced visa-free travel beginning in mid-2016 for Ukrainians traveling to the EU, a change that explicitly does not include permission to work. Yet the prospect of being able to travel to the EU without a visa combined with further reforms at home and, above all, effective anti-corruption measures could be the deciding factors that lead many Ukrainians to remain in their native land.

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