

World Watch Research

Ukraine: Background Information

September 2024



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Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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Copyright and sources

World Watch Research has divided up the previously named Full Country Dossier into two separate documents:

- Background country information (published annually in summer)
- Persecution dynamics (published annually in January).

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Map of country



Luhansk and Donetsk provinces are often referred to as the Donbas Region.

Ukraine: Population (UN estimate for 2024)	Christians	Chr%
37,938,000	33,834,000	89.2

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., *World Christian Database*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

Recent history

Although Ukraine overwhelmingly voted for independence in 1991, democracy and prosperity remained elusive as the legacy of state control, patronage politics, and endemic corruption stalled efforts at economic reform, privatization, and civil liberties.

A peaceful mass protest referred to as the "Orange Revolution" in the closing months of 2004 and early 2005 forced the authorities to overturn a rigged presidential election and to allow a new internationally monitored vote that swept into power a reformist slate under Viktor Yushchenko. Soon, however, internal squabbles in the Yushchenko camp allowed his rival Viktor Yanukovich to stage a comeback in legislative (Rada) elections. He became prime minister in August 2006 and was elected president in February 2010.

President Yanukovich backtracked on a trade and cooperation agreement with the EU in November 2013 - in favor of closer economic ties with Russia. Subsequently, security forces violently quelled protests by students, civil society activists and other civilians who had carried out a three-month protest occupation of Kyiv's central Maidan square. The government's use of violence to break up the protest camp in February 2014 led to scores of deaths, international condemnation, a failed political

deal, and the president's abrupt departure for Russia. New elections in Spring allowed pro-West President Petro Poroshenko to assume office in June 2014; he was later succeeded by Volodymyr Zelenskyy in May 2019.

Russia's 2014 invasion

Shortly after Yanukovych's departure in late February 2014, Russian President Putin ordered the invasion of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula claiming the action was to protect ethnic Russians living there. Two weeks later, a "referendum" was held regarding the integration of Crimea into the Russian Federation. In mid-2014, Russia began supplying proxies in two of Ukraine's eastern provinces with manpower, funding and equipment for beginning an armed conflict with the Ukrainian government. By early 2022, more than 14,000 civilians had been killed or wounded as a result of the Russian intervention in eastern Ukraine.

Russia's 2022 invasion

On 24 February 2022, Russia escalated its conflict with Ukraine by launching a full-scale invasion of the country on several fronts in what has become the largest conventional military attack on a sovereign state in Europe since World War II. Russia made substantial gains in the early weeks of the invasion but by the end of 2022, Ukrainian forces had regained territory in the north and northeast and made some advances in the east and south. Nonetheless, in late September 2022, Russia unilaterally declared its annexation of four Ukrainian 'oblasts' - Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia - even though none was fully under Russian control. The annexations have remained unrecognized by the international community.

The World Russian People's Council, led by Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch Kirill, labeled the invasion of Ukraine as a "holy" endeavor, seemingly aiming to bring the region under Russian dominion. The declaration frames the war as a key moment in Russia's battle against the "criminal Kiev regime" and Western "Satanism," calling it a "special military operation." The decree, published by the Moscow Patriarchate, originated from a synodal congress on 27 March 2024 at Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, with Patriarch Kirill presiding (Source: [Christian Post, 6 April 2024](#)).

According to the February 2024 [Institute for Religious Freedom](#) report entitled "The Impact of the Russian Invasion on Faith-Based Communities in Ukraine", in the period from 15 July 2022 to 1 December 2023, Russian troops damaged or wholly destroyed at least 630 churches, prayer houses, and other religious facilities in Ukraine. The IRF research contains the results of monitoring and surveys on the situation of Ukrainian religious communities in the territories occupied by Russia. Release International also confirmed that Christian leaders are being "killed, tortured and disappeared" in parts of Ukraine that are occupied by Russia (Source: [Christian Today, 25 March 2024](#)).

Political and legal landscape

Ukraine is defined in its 1996 Constitution as a republic ruled by a president and a cabinet. Since 2004, Ukraine has gone through unstable times. Since the last pro-Russian president, Yanukovych, was ousted in 2014, the country has been ruled by pro-Western governments. However, at the same time Russia took steps to ensure it kept its influence in the country. Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, and in the same year it made sure that two Ukrainian provinces (Donetsk and Luhansk – a.k.a.

Donbas) separated themselves from the rule of the Ukrainian government. This led to long-lasting conflict between Ukraine and the Donbas.

Russia's interference has resulted in a growing sentiment among the Ukrainian population to join western bodies like NATO and the European Union, which in turn caused Russia to step up its activities in Ukraine. On 24 February 2022, Russia took the step of launching a 'special military operation' which consisted of a large-scale invasion of Ukraine. The war has led to a huge exodus of Ukrainian refugees (mainly to Europe). The social, economic and military impact of the war has been enormous – and most observers expect it to last for several years.

Ukraine's Constitution provides for freedom of religion, including worship. By law, the government may restrict this right only in the "interests of protecting public order [or] the health and morality of the population or protecting the rights and freedoms of other persons." The Constitution provides for the "separation of church and religious organizations from the state" and stipulates: "No religion shall be recognized by the state as mandatory."

According to the US State Department ([IRFR 2023 Ukraine](#)):

- "The constitution protects freedom of religion and provides for 'the separation of church and religious organizations from the state.' By law, the objective of domestic religious policy is to foster the creation of a tolerant society and provide for freedom of conscience and worship. The law does not provide for alternative service during military mobilization and martial law."
- "The law restricts the activities of foreign-based religious groups and defines the permissible activities of noncitizen clergy, preachers, teachers, and other representatives of foreign-based religious groups. By law, foreign religious workers may 'preach, administer religious ordinances, or practice other canonical activities,' but they may do so only for the registered religious organization that invited them and with the approval of the government body that registered the statute of the organization. Missionary activity is included under permissible activities."
- "The law on freedom of conscience and religious organizations requires religious organizations with a 'governing center' in a country designated by law as a state that 'committed military aggression against Ukraine and temporarily occupied Ukraine's territory' to use the full title of the foreign religious organization within its name."
- "A 2022 National Security and Defense Council (NSDC) resolution ordered the drafting of legislation 'making it impossible' for religious organizations affiliated with centers of influence in the Russian Federation to operate in Ukraine. The resolution also required that the bill meet Ukraine's international religious freedom obligations. The legislation remained pending at year's end."

Following Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, restrictions on the exercise of the right to freedom of religion or belief and other human rights were extended to the newly-occupied parts of the Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) and the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR), as well as other Ukrainian territory under Russian occupation. On 19 October 2022, Russia imposed martial law on the parts of the Ukrainian regions of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia which it has occupied and annexed. (Source: [Forum 18](#), 13 October 2023)

On 24 August 2024, President Zelenskyy signed into law legislation banning religious organizations linked to the Russian Orthodox Church from operating in Ukraine. The Russian-linked Ukrainian

Orthodox Church (UOC) declared it had severed all ties with the Moscow Patriarchate in 2023 due to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. However, the Ukrainian authorities accuse it of maintaining ties and there have been dozens of criminal investigations into UOC clerics. "In June [2024], Ukraine handed over Metropolitan Ionafan -- a UOC diocese head who was sentenced to five years in prison after being convicted of supporting the Russian invasion -- to Russia in a prisoner swap. He was received with honors by Patriarch Kirill" (Source: [RFE/RL, 24 August 2024](#)).

Religious landscape

Ukraine: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	33,834,000	89.2
Muslim	611,000	1.6
Hindu	4,500	0.0
Buddhist	17,200	0.0
Ethnic religionist	9,000	0.0
Jewish	32,500	0.1
Bahai	210	0.0
Atheist	620,000	1.6
Agnostic	2,800,000	7.4
Other	8,342	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., *World Christian Database*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

According to the World Christian Database (accessed May 2024), 89.2% of the population are Christian, the majority being Orthodox believers (73.2%). The rest are made up mainly of Roman Catholic (14.3%), Protestant (2.4%) and Independent (2.3%). Despite decades of atheistic propaganda by the Communists during the Soviet era, most Ukrainians consider themselves Christians and part of the Orthodox Church. This Orthodox community is deeply divided since 2018, when the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople recognized the Ukrainian Orthodox Church as independent from Moscow. This division was deepened even further when Moscow Patriarch Kirill stated he fully agreed with the Russian government's decision to start a war in Ukraine. In Ukraine there are now two Orthodox communities - the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) which is linked with Moscow, and the autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU).

Russian forces have committed war crimes and other atrocities in Ukraine, including widespread use of torture. They have carried out indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks that killed and severely injured civilians ([Human Rights Council, 15 March 2023](#)). Russian and Russian-backed officials and

soldiers have, particularly in newly-occupied areas, seized and tortured religious leaders. A country expert describes one of many instances where religious leaders have been murdered at the hands of Russian forces: In November 2022, the deacon of the local Church of Evangelical Christians and his son were abducted by Russian forces and later found dead. They had been shot in the forest near the city.

While religion is not the primary driver of the war between Russia and Ukraine, the Russian Orthodox Church wants to retain its influence in Ukraine. A country expert states that Christian leaders "... are often interrogated, jailed, expelled, and fined in occupied territories". In Luhansk all Protestant church leaders and their family members are special targets of harassment and threats. In Donetsk all activities of Protestant churches including training leaders are closely monitored and hindered. Crucially, Luhansk is outside the control of the Ukrainian government.

According to the US State Department ([IRFR 2023 Russia-Occupied Territories of Ukraine](#)):

- "Since its invasion of Crimea and portions of Donbas in 2014, numerous reports document the Russian Federation and its proxies have committed extensive, ongoing, and egregious abuses of the right to freedom of religion or belief as well as physical and psychological abuse of members of religious minority groups. Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Russia's forces intensified these practices and carried them into other occupied territories against members of all religious groups suspected of being pro-Ukrainian. There were reports of widespread regional bans of minority religious groups, including evangelical Christians, Roman and Ukrainian Greek Catholics, and non-Ukrainian Orthodox Church communities; illegal imprisonment, physical abuse and disappearances of religious leaders; and the deliberate destruction or seizure of religious buildings. Sources continued to state it was difficult to gain a full accounting of Russia's extensive violations of religious rights given heavy censorship of media, abuses against human rights activists, and denial of access for international observers."
- "According to a December report by the Religious Freedom Initiative of Mission Eurasia, a Christian organization promoting evangelism in Eurasia, Russia's occupation authorities persecuted 'almost all religious communities, except for those Orthodox communities that fell under ROC control'."
- "The Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the four other oblasts Russia purported to annex remain within Ukraine's international borders and subject to the constitution and laws of Ukraine. In the aftermath of Russia's occupation, however, Russian occupation authorities in Donetsk, Luhansk (the Donbas), Kherson, and Zaporizhzhya continue their implementation of the laws of the Russian Federation. The Muslim religious-political group Hizb ut-Tahrir is considered a terrorist organization under Russian Federation law but not under Ukrainian law. According to Jehovah's Witnesses, Russian occupation authorities continue to ban Jehovah's Witnesses in Crimea and other occupied areas under a 2017 ruling by the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation."
- "Most religious communities have found it difficult or impossible to comply with occupation authorities' law. Until their purported annexation by Russia in September, parts of Luhansk and Donetsk Oblasts are under the control of Russia-installed 'authorities' purporting to represent the 'Luhansk People's Republic' and the 'Donetsk People's Republic'. Both so-called 'republics' place restrictions on religious groups not approved by Russia, including Jehovah's Witnesses and Hizb ut-Tahrir, both of which are banned in Russia."

According to the US State Department ([IRFR 2023 Ukraine](#)):

- “The constitution provides for freedom of religion, including worship. By law, the government may restrict this right only in the 'interests of protecting public order [or] the health and morality of the population or protecting the rights and freedoms of other persons'. The constitution provides for the 'separation of church and religious organizations from the state' and stipulates, 'No religion shall be recognized by the state as mandatory'.”
- “According to numerous sources, Russia’s military forces committed widespread religious freedom abuses in both occupied and Ukrainian government-controlled areas, such as shelling religious institutions and cultural heritage sites and detaining clergy. A nongovernmental organization (NGO) identified 532 burial sites or places of worship damaged or destroyed between February 24, 2022, and April 30, 2023. Another NGO reported Russia’s occupying authorities had destroyed, damaged, or looted at least 630 religious buildings, institutions, and sacred sites. An October SBU report documented attempts by Russia’s intelligence services to recruit Ukrainian teenagers in Radomyshl, Dnipro, Lviv, and Vinnytsya to perpetrate antisemitic acts.”
- “The ROC and the UOC continued to label the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) a 'schismatic' group and to urge other Orthodox churches not to recognize it. UOC and OCU representatives continued to contest some parish registrations and affiliations. According to the Razumkov Center, a nongovernmental public policy think tank, OCU affiliation grew to 42.2 percent of the population during the year, compared with 36.4 percent in 2022, while UOC membership declined to 5.6 percent from 6.5 percent in 2022. The UOC again reported violent threats and attacks on some of its congregations and buildings, accusing the OCU of seizing churches belonging to the UOC. The OCU said that parishioners, rather than the OCU, had initiated the transfers of affiliation within the provisions of the law. Both OCU leaders and some UOC bishops continued to voice opposition to ROC Patriarch Kirill’s support of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The UOC continued to assert its independence from the Moscow Patriarchate, although the OCU spokesman, the government, and civil society groups continued to state that the UOC remained subordinate to the ROC.”

Due to the old Soviet educational system, virtually 100% of all Ukrainian citizens are able to read. As a result, Christian materials potentially have a big market. Christians have been able to do printing, importing and distributing religious materials without problems in mainland Ukraine, but these activities are strictly monitored and hindered in Russian-controlled areas.

Economic landscape

According to the [World Bank Ukraine data](#) (accessed 23 May 2024):

- **GDP (current US\$) (billion):** 160.5 (in 2022)
- **GDP growth (annual %):** -29.1% (in 2022)

According to the [World Factbook Ukraine](#) (accessed 23 May 2024):

- “Ukraine continues to be a significant supplier of food commodities for the world; however, according to a 2023 analysis, at least 17.6 million people are estimated to be in need of multi-sectoral humanitarian assistance in 2023 due to the war, including over 11 million in need of food

security and livelihood interventions; the harvest of the 2023 winter cereal crops, mostly wheat, is ongoing and will be concluded by August; as a result of a smaller planted area, the 2023 wheat harvest in areas under government control is estimated at 18.5 million mt, about 8% below the already war-affected 2022 output; despite decreased cereal production, food availability at the national level is reported to be adequate, but access remains a major challenge; the country has already experienced elevated levels of food price inflation in the past, due to the economic impact of the conflict in eastern areas; in addition, rising energy costs, amidst high unemployment rates and limited livelihood opportunities, are reducing households' purchasing power and driving more people into poverty (2023)."

According to Bertelsmann Stiftung Transformation Index [Ukraine Country Report 2024](#) (accessed 20 March 2024):

- "The war hit the economy hard. Real GDP dropped by more than 30% in 2022, just after economic growth began picking up following the COVID-19 pandemic. International assistance has become the key to the country's survival after its defense expenses grew tenfold, reaching nearly half of the overall fiscal spending. In 2022, Ukraine received approximately \$32 billion in international funds, not including military assistance."

Ukraine is primarily known for its huge agricultural production. Its output of grain and potatoes is among the highest in Europe, and it is among the world's largest producers of sugar beet and sunflower oil. Ukraine's livestock sector lags behind the crop sector, but its total output is still considerably larger than that of most other European countries. Ukraine has extremely rich and complementary mineral resources in high concentrations and close proximity to each other. Rich iron ore reserves located in the vicinity of Kryvyi Rih, Kremenchuk, Bilozerka, Mariupol, and Kerch form the basis of Ukraine's large iron-and-steel industry. Another mining sector is coal which is found in the Donetsk Basin. The coal mines of Ukraine are among the deepest in Europe. Many of them are considered dangerous because their depth contributes to increased levels of methane; methane-related explosions have killed numerous miners in the past.

Ukraine is heavily dependent on fossil fuels and nuclear power for its energy needs. Hydroelectricity accounts for less than 10 percent of the country's electricity production, and the contribution of other renewable sources is negligible. Although coal production is substantial, Ukraine relies on imported oil and natural gas to satisfy its energy requirements (Source: [Britannica](#), accessed 20 March 2024). However, the Ukrainian economy and infrastructure suffered immensely when Russian forces invaded. It became very difficult to continue exporting grain as Russia blocked the trade routes in the Black Sea. There have also been problems with the Zaporizhzhya nuclear power station.

Social and cultural landscape

According to the [World Factbook Ukraine](#) (accessed 23 May 2024):

- **Main ethnic groups:** Ukrainian 77.8%, Russian 17.3%, Belarusian 0.6%, Moldovan 0.5%, Crimean Tatar 0.5%, Bulgarian 0.4%, Hungarian 0.3%, Romanian 0.3%, Polish 0.3%, Jewish 0.2%, other 1.8% (2001 est.)
- **Main languages:** Ukrainian (official) 67.5%, Russian (regional language) 29.6%, other (includes small Crimean Tatar-, Moldovan/Romanian-, and Hungarian-speaking minorities) 2.9% (2001 est.); in

February 2018, the Constitutional Court ruled that 2012 language legislation entitling a language spoken by at least 10% of an oblast's population to be given the status of "regional language" - allowing for its use in courts, schools, and other government institutions - was unconstitutional, thus making the law invalid; Ukrainian remains the country's only official nationwide language

- **Urban population:** 70.1% of total population (2023)
- **Literacy rate:** 100% (male: 100%, female: 100%) (2021)

According to the [UNDP Human Development Report Ukraine](#) (accessed 24 May 2024):

- **HDI score and ranking:** 0.734 (0.741 for females, 0.726 for males), ranking 100 (2022)
- **Total population:** 39.7 million (2022)
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 68.6 years (73.9 for females, 63.5 for males) (2022)
- **Expected years of schooling:** 13.3 years (13.5 for females, 13.1 for males) (2022)
- **Gender Inequality index:** 0.188 (2022)
- **Labor Force Participation Rate (% ages 15 years and older):** Female: 47.8, Male: 62.9 (2022)

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, poverty in Ukraine had been gradually declining. In 2019, the real disposable income of households grew by 6.5%. In 2020, households' welfare inevitably worsened due to the pandemic-triggered economic downturn in Ukraine and in global markets more generally. However, preliminary data suggest that Ukraine's households were reasonably resilient to the shock. Real household incomes increased by 3.2% in the third quarter of 2020, after a lockdown-driven drop of 7.3% in the second quarter of 2020 (both figures vis-à-vis the third quarter of 2019). In Q4, the income recovery continued. Real wages continued growing in 2020 amid low inflation, while unemployment stayed close to historical averages for the last several years.

In 2019, Ukraine continued improving its position in the Human Development Index, ranked at 74th place out of 189 countries, with a score of 0.779. The country's overall loss in HDI due to inequality was 6.5%, one of the world's lowest such figures.

According to the latest World Bank (pre-war) estimate, the Gini coefficient for Ukraine is 26.1, signaling a fairly equal distribution of incomes within the country. The World Bank reported that in 2018, 0.4% of the population in Ukraine lived on less than \$3.20 a day at 2011 international prices adjusted for purchasing power parity. According to Ukrstat, the Gini coefficient did not change significantly in 2020, being 26.2 in the first half of 2020 as compared to 25.5 in the same period of 2019.

There are no specific social barriers associated with religion, but some ethnic minorities, especially the Roma, experience social exclusion. Disabled people and people living with HIV/AIDS also continue to experience social exclusion (Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung Transformation Index, [Ukraine Country Report 2022](#) (accessed 11 October 2023)).

Refugees/IDPs

The invasion by Russia has also created Europe's largest refugee crisis since World War II. As of 14 March 2024, there were 6.5 million Ukrainian refugees recorded globally, and 3.69 million people were internally displaced as of December 2023. Nearly 30,460 civilian casualties had been reported, as of January 2024 (Source: [CIA World Factbook](#), accessed 23 May 2024).

Gender perspective

The country has moved closer to a state of gender equality, with its score on the Gender Inequality Index improving from 0.270 in 2018 to 0.234 in 2019 and 0.188 in 2022. Women have equal access to education, social protection and the labor market, and recently have seen their representation in parliaments at both local and national level improve substantially. However, women still tend to receive lower wages, and the risk of poverty is considerably above average for single mothers.

Technological landscape

According to [DataReportal Digital 2024: Ukraine](#) (23 February 2024) / survey date - January 2024:

- **Internet usage:** 79.2% penetration
- **Social media usage:** 64.9% of the total population. As of January 2024, 52.9% of Ukraine's social media users were female and 47.1% male.
- **Active cellular mobile subscriptions:** 148.7% of the total population

According to the [World Factbook Ukraine](#) (accessed 23 May 2024):

- “Ukraine’s media landscape is dominated by oligarch-owned news outlets, which are often politically motivated and at odds with one another and/or the government; while polls suggest most Ukrainians still receive news from traditional media sources, social media is a crucial component of information dissemination in Ukraine; almost all Ukrainian politicians and opinion leaders communicate with the public via social media and maintain at least one social media page, if not more; this allows them direct communication with audiences, and news often breaks on Facebook or Twitter before being picked up by traditional news outlets”.
- “Kyiv created a unified news platform to broadcast news about the war following Russia's full-scale invasion; the government's ‘United News’ television marathon is a round-the clock framework which untied the Ukrainian public broadcaster and top commercial TV channels' programming; Ukraine television serves as the principal source of news; the largest national networks are controlled by oligarchs: Studio 1+1 is owned by Ihor Kolomoyskyy; Inter is owned by Dmytro Firtash and Serhiy Lyovochkin; and StarlightMedia channels (ICTV, STB, and Novyi Kanal) are owned by Victor Pinchuk; a set of 24-hour news channels also have clear political affiliations: pro-Ukrainian government Channel 5 and Pryamyi are linked to President Petro Poroshenko; 24 is owned by opposition, but not pro-Russian, politicians; UA: Suspilne is a public television station under the umbrella of the National Public Broadcasting Company of Ukraine; while it is often praised by media experts for balanced coverage, it lags in popularity; Ukrainian Radio, institutionally linked to UA: Suspilne, is one of only two national talk radio networks, with the other being the privately owned Radio NV (2021)”.
- There has been considerable damage to the communications infrastructure in more than 10 out of 24 regions of Ukraine since the war with Russia began in February 2022.

According to Freedom House's [Freedom on the Net 2023 report](#):

- The February 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian military continues to undermine Internet freedom in the country. Russian military attacks have severely damaged Ukraine's Internet infrastructure, but collaborative efforts between the government, internet and mobile

service providers, and international partners helped individuals maintain access during the coverage period. The eastern regions of Ukraine have been particularly affected by the conflict. Occupying Russian authorities in some of those areas rerouted the internet through Russian networks, with the result that social media platforms, messengers, VPN services, and media websites that are blocked in Russia also became unavailable in parts of Ukraine. Restoring connectivity in places where the internet became inaccessible due to war damage has been a priority for Ukrainian forces upon retaking territories. According to Meta, Ukraine was the second-most targeted country in the world for coordinated inauthentic behavior networks in 2022, with most of these networks originating from Russia. Similarly, cyberattacks by Russian-affiliated actors against critical sectors, state institutions, and media remained regular, but Ukrainian government agencies mitigated the most severe threats.

According to [BBC Country profile Ukraine](#) (accessed 22 May 2024):

- National media adopted a united patriotic agenda following the Russian annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in February/March 2014.
- "Ukraine has banned relays of leading Russian TVs; in turn, areas under Russian or separatist control have seen pro-Kyiv outlets silenced."
- "The authorities also block access to some popular Russian websites and social networks."
- Since the start of the full-scale war in 2022, social media has replaced TV as the top news source for Ukrainians.

Russia, Ukraine, and China have been named as the world's cybercrime hotspots in a new study ranking the most significant sources of cybercrime threats. The World Cybercrime Index, published in the journal PLOS One, said Russia housed the greatest cybercrime threat, followed by Ukraine, China, the USA and Nigeria. The ranking -- compiled by academics with the University of Oxford and the University of New South Wales Canberra -- was based on surveys of almost 100 cybercrime experts who were asked to identify the most significant sources of five major types of cybercrime (Source: [RFE/RL, 10 April 2024](#)).

Security situation

Ever since Russian support allowed the Donetsk and Luhansk provinces to rebel against the central government in Kiev, there have been tensions in the region. Since Russia launched its full-scale war against Ukraine in February 2022, missile and rocket attacks have caused widespread death, destruction of homes and businesses and severely damaged energy infrastructures in Ukraine. The energy crisis is disrupting public access to water, electricity, heating, healthcare, education and social protection.

As reported by [UN News on 28 August 2024](#):

- Since 24 February 2022 – the date of Russia's full-scale invasion, the UN human rights office, OHCHR, has documented 11,662 civilian killings and 24,207 injuries .
- There is heightened concern over nuclear safety after drone strikes very close to both Ukrainian and Russian nuclear power plants.
- Women comprise 56% of the 15 million people in need of assistance in Ukraine.

Russia's war on Ukraine is the overwhelmingly dominant factor influencing human rights in Ukraine, especially abuses carried out at a local level. Most of the engines of persecution experienced by Christians in Ukraine are as a result of Russia's invasion and influence rather than by the Ukrainian government or other local authorities. On 30 September 2022, Russia declared its annexation of four Ukrainian oblasts – Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson.

Christian origins

Ukraine has a long Christian tradition, dating from the 10th century. Today there are over 22,000 religious communities in Ukraine and about 80 different Christian denominations, as well as other religions. However, the atheist policy of the Soviets has left its mark and many Ukrainians today have little contact with Christian faith.

In 988 Prince Volodymyr the Great established Christianity in its Byzantine-Slavic rite as the national religion of his country, Kievan-Rus. His baptism in 988 was celebrated in 1988 with great pomp by the USSR leadership.

The Kievan Church was challenged by the Protestant Reformation and the renewed Catholicism of that period (16th century) and also underwent a serious internal crisis. The traditional Eastern rite of the Kievan Church was preserved and its ethnic, cultural and ecclesial existence was guaranteed, This was confirmed at the Council of Brest in 1596, which is the beginning of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church as an institution.

Torn by internal division, the Central and Eastern sections of Ukraine passed under the control of the ruler of Moscow in 1654. Soon the Orthodox Kievan Metropolia was under the authority of the Moscow Patriarchate (1696). As the Tsarist Empire grew, it repressed the Greek Catholics and forced "conversions" to Russian Orthodoxy (1772, 1795, 1839, 1876).

The war on religion was the ideology of the Communist regime and no effort was spared. Church buildings were burnt down, many Orthodox and Catholic Christians (as well as representatives of other religions) were arrested and either shot or deported to a Siberian gulag; church communities were confined to underground activities or entirely destroyed. Both the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church at the beginning of the 1930s and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in Halychyna and in 1949 in Transcarpathia were closed down. The Roman Catholic and Protestant communities survived in only a handful of carefully monitored churches. Even the activities of the Russian Orthodox Church (which functioned as a state church) were limited and it furthermore suffered from infiltration by Soviet security agents.

In the 1980s, the suppression of church life ceased. The formerly forbidden Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church emerged from the underground and communities of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church were created in 1989. The declaration of Ukrainian independence in 1991 created a new context for the activities of all the churches in this territory. Thus, official religious freedom in Ukraine opened the way for religious pluralism.

(Source: [EWTN News](#), accessed 20 March 2024)

Church spectrum today

Ukraine: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	27,768,000	82.1
Catholic	4,837,000	14.3
Protestant	823,000	2.4
Independent	764,000	2.3
Unaffiliated	9,300	0.0
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-368,000	-1.1
Total	33,833,300	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	473,000	1.4
Pentecostal-Charismatic	1,274,000	3.8

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., *World Christian Database*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

Orthodox: Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox. **Roman Catholics:** All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. **Protestants:** Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world's 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. **Independents:** Christians who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). **Unaffiliated Christians:** Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. **Doubly-affiliated Christians:** Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. **Evangelical movement:** Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. **Pentecostal-Charismatic:** Church members involved in renewal in the Holy Spirit, sometimes known collectively as "Renewalists".

The current war has increased the internal tensions in the Orthodox community. In mainland Ukraine, members of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), which is linked to the Moscow Patriarchate, are regarded as traitors because the leaders of the Moscow Patriarchate openly support the Russian invasion. This had led to violence, damage to churches and confiscation of properties. In Russian-controlled areas of Ukraine exactly the opposite has occurred: here members of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) have been attacked, and properties damaged, closed or confiscated.

According to the World Christian Database (accessed May 2024), the largest official denominations in Ukraine are:

- Ukrainian Orthodox Church: (P Kiev)
- Ukrainian Orthodox Church: (P Moscow)
- Catholic Church in the Ukraine
- Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church
- Russian Orthodox Church in Exile
- Other Independents
- Old Ritualist Church Belokrinitsa Concord
- Christians of the Evangelical Faith (Pentecostal)

- Church of God of Prophecy
- Bulgarian Orthodox Church
- Reformed Church in Carpatho-Ukraine
- Union of Evangelical Christian-Baptists

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.

These are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom):

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Ukraine>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>.

External Links

- Recent history: Christian Post, 6 April 2024 - <https://www.christianpost.com/news/russian-orthodox-church-head-declares-war-in-ukraine-holy.html>
- Recent history: Institute for Religious Freedom - <https://irf.in.ua/files/publications/2024.03-IRF-Ukraine-report-ENG-web.pdf>
- Recent history: Christian Today, 25 March 2024 - <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/christian.leaders.killed.tortured.and.disappeared.in.occupied.ukraine/141547.htm>
- Political and legal landscape: IRFR 2023 Ukraine - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/ukraine/>
- Political and legal landscape: Forum 18 - https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2866
- Political and legal landscape: RFE/RL, 24 August 2024 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-russia-orthodox-religion-ban/33091200.html>
- Religious landscape description: (Human Rights Council, 15 March 2023) - https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/coiukraine/A_HRC_52_62_AUV_EN.pdf
- Religious landscape description: IRFR 2023 Russia-Occupied Territories of Ukraine - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/ukraine/russia-occupied-territories-of-ukraine/>
- Religious landscape description: IRFR 2023 Ukraine - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/ukraine/>
- Economic landscape: World Bank Ukraine data - <https://data.worldbank.org/country/ukraine>
- Economic landscape: World Factbook Ukraine - <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/ukraine/>
- Economic landscape: Ukraine Country Report 2024 - <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/UKR>
- Economic landscape: Britannica - <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ukraine>
- Social and cultural landscape: World Factbook Ukraine - <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/ukraine/>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNDP Human Development Report Ukraine - <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/UKR>
- Social and cultural landscape: Ukraine Country Report 2022 - <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/UKR>
- Social and cultural landscape: CIA World Factbook - <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/ukraine/#introduction>
- Technological landscape: DataReportal Digital 2024: Ukraine - <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-ukraine>
- Technological landscape: World Factbook Ukraine - <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/ukraine/>
- Technological landscape: Freedom on the Net 2023 report - <https://freedomhouse.org/country/ukraine/freedom-net/2023>

- Technological landscape: BBC Country profile Ukraine - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-18018002>
- Technological landscape: RFE/RL, 10 April 2024 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/cybercrime-russia-ukraine-index/32899381.html>
- Security situation: UN News on 28 August 2024 - <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/08/1153706>
- Christian origins: EWTN News - <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/overview-of-christian-history-in-ukraine-1751>