The Depopulation of Ukraine – a recurrent disaster revisited

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Abstract

Blessed by its geology but a prisoner of its geography, the inhabitants of Ukraine have suffered repeated destructive depopulation. The population loss in the Ukraine 1914–21 was over five million. The second modern depopulation culminated in 1932 during Stalin's manmade famine, with estimated total population losses of 4.6 million people. A third depopulation followed as over 7 million Ukrainians lost their lives in the Second World War.

Between the censuses of 1959 and 1970 population of Ukraine recovered briskly. Total fertility remained at about replacement level until the end of the Soviet Union, then declined. A relatively strong recovery of fertility was reversed in 2012, presumably as a consequence of the Russian invasion in Eastern Ukraine, and total fertility dropped to 1.2.

The population in early 2022 was around 37 million. The Ukrainian global diaspora is one of the most widely-distributed populations in the world, with 6.1 million Ukrainians living abroad already in 2020. After Russia's invasion in February 2022 thousands have died and millions have been forced to flee. The article ends by considering how Ukraine's demographic situation might evolve in the future.

This issue of the Yearbook was finalised after Russia attacked Ukraine the 24th of February, 2022. In this invited reflection, professor David Coleman provides an overview of Ukraine's demographic history and previous challenges. -Editor's note

Ukraine has had a precarious existence and a horrible history which this short text cannot hope adequately to unravel. A detailed account of Ukraine's previous calamitous demographic history is given by Romaniuk and Gladun (2015). There have always been 'Ukrainians' under various names but seldom an Ukraine. Emerging from the forests of antiquity, "barely visible bands of traders trekking along the rivers through the dense and sparsely populated northern forests; faint specks on a vast landscape … transient Scandinavians among Finno-Ugrian tribes" (Franklin & Shepard, 2013, xvii,) became a polity as 'Kievan Rus' in the ninth century. Destroyed by the Mongols in 1240, its first, brief flowering as a modern state had to wait until 1917. Literally the 'Borderland' ('krai' means 'border' in Ukrainian) it is blessed by its geology but a prisoner of its geography. As part of the vast East European plain it has no natural boundaries save the Carpathians in the South West. Thus poised without barriers between East and West it has felt the shock of power surges and population movement from both sides, and also open to North

and South by the mighty Dniepr/Dnipro. That highway brought down the Rus from the Nordic world colliding with the aboriginal nomad populations and then Muslim adventurers and slavers moving upriver from the South. Often on the verge of statehood, it has been innocent of military adventures itself. A history taker more often than a history maker, it has been the backdrop of battles of other powers, a disputed boundary between the Orthodox East and the Catholic West (Vollmer 2013), and always coveted for its vast productivity.

The strategic geographer Halford Mackinder (1904) saw Russia as the central Eurasian power, the 'pivot region of of the world's politics,' replacing the Mongol empire, and occupying the 'central strategical position held by Germany in Europe' impervious to maritime power but able to put pressure on its neighbours, Finland. Poland and others. This view remains powerful in the Kremlin today. Despite its nomad Cossacks having defended Russia from nomad Tatars, Ukraine's ambiguous location on the edge of this Eurasian heartland puts it at constant risk of absorption. Ukraine's inclination to the West, past and present, is regarded as a blow to Eurasian integration and strongly opposed.

Accordingly, the inhabitants of Ukraine have suffered repeated destructive depopulation. A new disaster is now in progress. It is the most demographically damaged state in Europe, alongside its borderland companions Belarus and Poland. Absorbed by the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in 1362, Kiev/Kyiv fell under Polish (Catholic) control from 1569 following the creation of the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth, the biggest state in Europe. A rebel (Orthodox) Cossack state on the left bank with Kyiv was absorbed by Moscow in 1654, a harbinger of modern divisions. After the collapse of the Polish-Lithuanian State after 1772 all Ukraine fell to Russian control, save Galicia (importantly including Lviv/Lvov), part of the Habsburg Empire. Prince Potemkin wrested Crimea and the Azov coast from Ottoman vassals in 1783, those areas remaining in Russia proper until Khrushchev's apparently whimsical 'gift' transferring Crimea from the RSFSR to the Ukrainian SSR in 1954. That agreement was really another example of Soviet demographic engineering. It transferred a big ethnic Russian population (75% of the 1.1 million inhabitants of Crimea) to the ethnically divided population of Ukraine, parts of which (Volhynia and Galicia) had violently resisted annexation to the Soviet Union.

The exceptional agricultural fertility of Ukrainian black earth soils supports an abundance of crops and a proliferation of people. The vast bounty of its chernozem soils comes from the fertility of the wind-blown loess leached by the winds from further east in glacial times made further fertile by biomass burning in antiquity. It is matched only by similar soils in the Prairies and Great Plains of North America. Together they comprise the world's breadbasket, as the world is now being painfully reminded: the bounty of Ukraine is once again threatened by war (Economist 2022b).

Population development

The founding civilisation of Kievan Rus, a flourishing clone of Constantinople since the conversion of Volodymyr in 988 introduced it to a wider world, was almost wiped off

the map by the Mongols in 1240. Up to then the capital Kyiv may have had some tens of thousands of people. In 1246 the Papal envoy to the Mongol Khan reported just a couple of hundred impoverished households in Kyiv, and fields full of bones. Moscow, far to the North and East, was also destroyed but flourished later as a vassal and sometime ally of the Mongols. Population estimates of the Kievan Rus (4.5–8 million) are all indirect, based on cultivated area and settlement area, the number of churches and estimates of militia. One population estimate, however, suggests only a modest drop in numbers from the peak of 7.5 to 7 million (McEvedy & Jones, 1978), implausible in view of the reported carnage after 1240. Population and what remained of power migrated to the inhospitable North around today's Moscow, in 1325 along with the Patriarchate; a remnant vassal state precariously preserved by dint of tribute.

Population censuses of a sort in Muscovy/Russia began in Mongol times to estimate tribute but have little to say about Kyiv and the area of Ukraine. Numbers are impossible to specify but clearly population was greatly diminished. Intensive slave-raiding by the Tatars to supply Ottoman demand prevented repopulation of the steppe lands north of the Black Sea until the end of the 15th century. There was no Ukrainian state, almost all the present territory being held by the Polish/Lithuanian Commonwealth until partitioned between Poland and Russia, lands East of the Dnieper falling under Russian control in agreements in 1654 and 1667 which remain controversial. By the 16th century an autonomous military society of 'Cossacks', of an usually democratic character, had developed on the southern margins of Ukraine from seasonal hunters, peasants fleeing serfdom and others in search of a free life, with their base in Zhaporozhia ('beyond the rapids') in the lands of lower Ukraine. Useful in war as guardians of the frontier against Tatars, Turks and Muscovites, their aspirations to an autonomous Hetmanate, sharpened later by fierce partisanship of Orthodoxy, provoked many revolts in times of peace. Heroic but doomed insurrections from the end of the 16th century onwards have been celebrated by romantic writers, and composers such as Janacek and Liszt. The autonomy of the Cossack Hetmanate on the 'Left Bank' was progressively curtailed within the Russian empire until its effective removal by 1775. Meanwhile Russian control over all Ukraine except Galicia followed the successive partitions of Poland between 1772 and 1795.

The language and cultural awareness were preserved, and revived in the 19th century, despite repeated bouts of Russification and Polonification. Finally recovering from these checks, Russia and Ukraine began a period of rapid population growth, fuelling the Ukrainian global diaspora which has made it one of the most widely-distributed populations in the world.

The relative freedom of late Tsarist times permitted many Ukrainians to emigrate from Russia and escape the poverty, heavy bureaucracy and absolutist autocracy of the time. No doubt the location of Ukrainian populations (often then called 'Ruthenian') on the edge of the West raised awareness of prospects abroad more than was possible for the inhabitants of *la Russe profonde*. Parts of Ukraine, especially in the West, became distinctly over-populated, as landholdings declined in average size. By the late nineteenth century the United States and Western Canada were favourite destination for emigrants. An obvious solution to peasant land-hunger was migration to the towns and cities where a late but rapid industrialisation was taking place. But instead many Ukrainians in the

late 19th century preferred to migrate further afield, either to the East (Siberia) where free land was available or to the South where imperial Russia was expanding into Central Asia. Over 1.5 million departed in the two decades before the beginning of World War One, out of an estimated population of about 30 million. After the establishment of Soviet control snuffed out the independent Ukrainian state in 1921, regular emigration was difficult although many escaped overseas by clandestine means. About 200,000 Ukrainians in newly-independent Poland were able to leave, and others from Czechoslovakia and Romania, first to the United States, then to Canada and Argentina.

By 1880 about 1.2 million Ukrainians were living outside the present-day territory and about 0.7 million in the rest of Russia, 200,000 in Austria, 100,0000 in Asian Russia and the same number in the United States. The first Russian census of 1897 counted 1.56 million expatriate Ukrainians, 1.2 million in European Russia, 300,000 in its Asian regions. After 1880 this exodus accelerated; Ukrainians in Galicia, part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, left for the Americas, and from the Russian Empire, to Siberia and to Central Asia. About 500,000 Ukrainians migrated to the Americas before the First World War, to the United States about 350,000, to Canada 100,000 and 50,000 to Brazil and Argentina respectively. Policy and propaganda directed Ukrainian flows from Brazil and Argentina to a warmer welcome, and free land, in Canada. Many settled as farmers in Manitoba and Saskatchewan where the prairie soils had familiar characteristics. (Satsewich, 2002; Denysenko, 2020.) Migration resumed after the First World War into the 1920s driven by revolution and conflict, Soviet persecution and manmade famine; the first of the emigrations that could be described as ‘political’. By the 21st century their descendants identifying as Ukrainians numbered over 47 million: 3.2 million in Russia, 1.4 million in Canada, 1.2 million in Poland, 1 million in the United States and 600,000 in Brazil.

Three periods of depopulation in the 20th century

In 1918 Ukraine briefly achieved statehood for the first time. That short-lived freedom was suppressed by the Bolsheviks in 1921 after years of confused fighting and vicious massacre involving half a dozen combatants. The Bolsheviks were keen to find a final solution to the ‘Cossack problem’. The Soviet model of the future emerged with the first operations of mass murder by the Cheka and mass forced movement of people, as ‘reliable’ workers and peasants were imported to replace and ‘dilute’ the Don Cossacks (Applebaum 2017). To make things worse famine struck in 1921, made more harsh by Soviet confiscations of food. Uniquely, international aid was requested. Few statistics are available. In 1914 the nine Governorates with a Ukrainian majority totalled 31 million people. In 1924 27.4 million were enumerated (Meslé et al., 2003), reflecting the scale of losses through mortality, flight and the depressed birth rate. By then population would have been augmented by three years’ natural increase (725,000 in 1924) and possibly the return of some deportees. So the population loss in Ukraine 1914–21 must have been over five million.

The second great modern depopulation culminated in 1932, provoked by Soviet collectivisation of agriculture and exacerbated by unrealistic targets, organised confiscations of food and even of the necessities for growing it. About five million died of this famine throughout the Soviet Union, and over 3.9 million Ukrainians. On top of the famine mortality, population fell further through the forced migration of hundreds of thousands of people, kulaks and others, and a great deficit of births. Among many academic estimates, Vallin, Meslé et al., (2003, table 5, p. 26) have calculated a total population loss from the famine of 4.6 million people: 2.6 million excess deaths, a birth deficit of 1.1 million and forced migration of 0.93 million to remote parts of the USSR or to the GULAG. A more recent study, estimated the excess mortality in Ukraine 1932–1934 to be 3.9 million, overwhelmingly among the rural population. 90 per cent of deaths occurred in 1933. The birth deficit was estimated to be 600,000. (Great Famine Project, 2022.)

The (mythical) threat of the better-off peasants or kulaks, portrayed as potential counter-revolutionaries and indeed as scarcely human, made them particular victims. Migration to avoid the growing catastrophe was forbidden (Basciani, 2011). But there were forced deportations, for example 75,000 kulak families to remote Kazakhstan, where many perished (Plockhy, 2015, p. 250). At the same time as the peasants starved, Stalin launched a campaign of repression against the intelligentsia; academics, clergy, bureaucrats, anyone connected with Ukrainian culture, language art or history. Then as now the idea was to eliminate Ukrainian national consciousness and any threat that it was thought to pose to Soviet unity, crushing any vestiges of Ukrainian independence. According to Anne Applebaum (2017), the famine destroyed the Ukrainian national movement – but evidently not permanently.

It was an artificially induced famine, provoked by confiscations and exacerbated by traditional Soviet brute incompetence and Marxist ideological perversions of genetics (Medvedev, 1969; Witkowsky, 2008). The facts of the crisis were denied and records destroyed. In a cruel paradox, the 1937 census board was blamed for failing to produce a satisfactory output of population growth. A population increase of 37.6 million had been projected from the 1926 census, to 186.4 million. The actual increase was only 7.2 million. To pay for this shocking indictment of evident Soviet backwardness and disaster, the chief of the Central Statistics Department was shot and most of his assistants followed him into oblivion or into the GULAG (Merridale, 1996).

Somewhat more favourable results were conjured up for the census of 1939. The whole census was kept secret until Soviet liberalisation in the 1980s during glasnost.

A resettlement programme in 1933 replaced the missing Ukrainians with Russians. Voluntary migration out of the Soviet Union was not officially allowed, although some escaped over the internal Soviet borders to neighbouring Russia proper and Belarus. These starving, ragged wrecks of people, trying to trade everything for food, were not welcome. Commenting in 1956 on the deportations of whole nationalities (Chechens, Karachai, Volga Germans, Crimean Tatars and others), Khrushchev remarked to general amusement that 'Ukrainians avoided meeting this fate only because there were too many of them and there was no place to which to deport them. Otherwise (Stalin) would have deported them all' (quoted by Applebaum, 2017, p. 293).

A third, even worse depopulation followed soon after, in the Second World War and

in its aftermath. Estimates agree that over 7 million Ukrainians lost their lives in the Second World War from 1941–45. 3.9 million civilians died and there were 1.4 million military casualties and deaths of prisoners of war. In addition over 2.2 million forced labourers were deported to Germany, most of whom perished, making a total of 7.5 million (Gregorovitch 1995, citing Kondufor, see Table 1). That includes a total of about 600,000 Ukrainian Jews. Over and above the excess mortality, which Vallin et al. (table 18, p. 69), put at 7.1 million from 1939–48, the birth deficit is estimated at 3.5 million and migration loss at 2.0 million, making a total loss of 12.6 million. In addition about four million were forcibly evacuated to the East by the Soviets while the NKVD was busy executing class enemies.

Even after the return of the survivors, the population of Ukraine was about ten million fewer in 1945 than it had been in 1941. Deportations continued after the end of the war. From 1944 to 1946, 780,000 Poles were removed from Ukraine west of the Ribbentrop-Molotov line to the new, former German, territory of Poland, while half a million Ukrainians, suspected of collaboration, were deported from the other side of that line to the Ukrainian SSR, This was one of the largest Soviet nation-building projects. In the long run, the chief beneficiaries were Ukrainian nationalists, as the Polish population was removed from Ukrainian territory (Halavach, 2021). A further 180,000 Western Ukrainians were deported to Siberia and other inhospitable areas of Russia, with a further 76,000 in 1947 (Pockhy, 2015, pp. 286–287). Armed nationalist resistance continued well after the war until 1951, the survivors escaping to the West. About 376,000 excess deaths are attributed to the ‘peacetime’ years 1939–40 and 1946–48.

Table 1. *Ukrainian casualties in the Second World War*

Civilians	3 898 497
Military and PoWs	1 366 498
Slave labour (ostarbeiters)	2 244 000
Carpartho-Ukraine	250 159
Total	7 759 154

Source: Yuri Kondufor, Institute of History, cited by Gregorovitch, 1995. Forum Ukrainian Review No. 92 Spring 1995.

In the Soviet period internal migration between Soviet republics (today’s independent countries) was strictly controlled through the internal passport system. Within Ukraine rural areas began to be depopulated as their inhabitants moved to cities in the course of continuous industrialisation. Between the censuses of 1959 and 1970 the population of Ukraine recovered briskly, by five million, but this pace soon ran out of steam. And much of the growth came from Russia; over one million migrated from Russia to Ukraine from 1959 to 1970. A Soviet policy of Russification of people, language and institutions

encouraged the immigration of ethnic Russians into Ukraine and other republics. The people were becoming Russified much as the local Party already had been (Applebaum, 2017, p.297–298). Ukraine was was at risk of becoming merely a geographical expression. Nevertheless, the Ukrainian language traditions and culture were preserved in everyday life, also in the more Russified Eastern and South parts.

Between 1979 and 1989 the population increased by only 1,949,000 (4%). Net migration accounted for only 153,000 (8% of the total increase), considerably less than in the other Western republics and the RSFSR itself (Table 2). The migration system was managed in order to favour the labour-intensive model of Soviet industrialisation and aid the levelling up of economic development between republics. There was little freedom of residential choice except for marriage, which may help to explain the remarkable trend to younger marriage (Hilevych, 2016). Together with the emigration of Ukrainians the proportion of ethnic Ukrainians fell from 77 per cent in the 1959 census to 73 per cent in 1991.

Later, however, that proportion recovered by 2001 to 78 per cent, 17 per cent being Russian and small numbers of other ethnic groups. About one quarter of the migratory increase in Ukrainian cities was by persons of Russian ethnicity up to the end of the century, although much less than in Latvia (54%) and Estonia (70%) (Pribytkova, 2011, table 2). Recently in some parts of Ukraine that trend must have been reversed sharply since the invasion and occupation of the Donbas in 2014 by Russian forces and separatists. Ukraine itself, and other Soviet republics received refugees from Transcaucasian republics (about 176 000) mostly to the Donbas and Southern oblasts, and others in 1989–90. It is difficult to make precise statements about migration trends in Soviet times as no direct data were published.

Table 2. *Population of the Soviet Union, Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) and Ukraine 1926–1989 (thousands)*

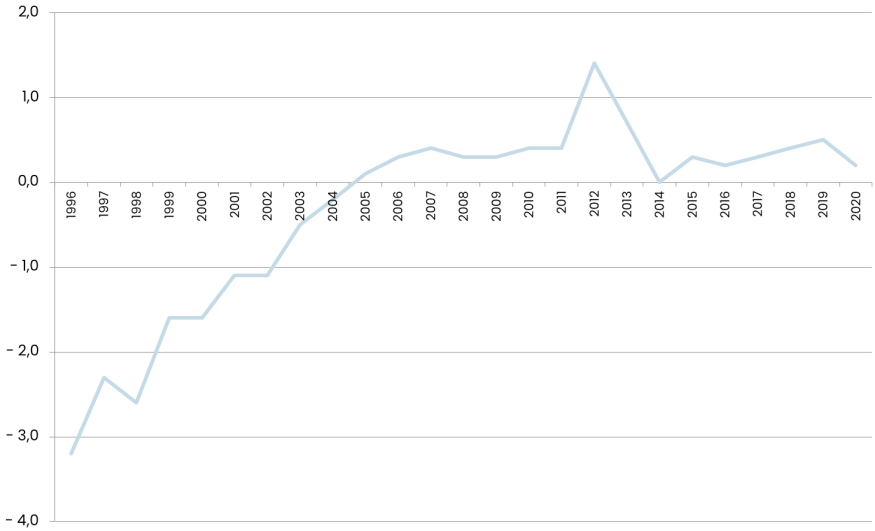
Year	USSR	increase	RSFSR	increase	Ukraine	increase
1926	14 7028		100 891		29 018	
1939	17 0557	23 529	109 397	8 506	30 946	1 928
1959	20 8827	38 270	117 534	8 137	41 869	10 923
1970	24 1720	32 893	130 079	12 545	47 126	5 257
1979	26 2436	20 716	137 551	7 472	49 755	2 629
1989	28 6717	24 281	147 386	9 835	51 704	1 949

Source: Naselenye SSSR, 1988, p. 8.

1991 – Freedom of movement

Everything changed with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. About twenty million Russians lived in the former Soviet countries of the 'near abroad'. Many chose to leave for Russia, escaping an uncertain future, conflict and civil war and turning Russia briefly in to the biggest recipient of migration in the world. (Vollmer & Malynovska, 2016.) More forced migration was to follow as both Slav and indigenous people in the Central Asian and Caucasus republics fled violence.

Figure 1. *Ukraine 1996–2020, net migration per thousand population plus statistical adjustment*



Source: Eurostat

Freedom of movement had arrived. For the first time Ukraine had to think of an international migration policy (Malynovska, 2006). Initially, from the early 1990s Ukraine lost population to the Russian Federation and to Belarus (Figure 1). In 2013 1.4 million Ukrainians were living in Russia, 128,000 with work permits. Much of it was short-time 'circular' migration. Some Ukrainians also left to find work in the West, such as to provide care services to ageing populations in Southern Europe. Economic disparities have become one of the major incentives to move – despite advances in reconstructing the country after independence, Ukraine remained one of the poorest countries in Europe (Table 3), with GDP per capita at no more than a developing world level ($13,054 on a PPP basis).

In 2012 the Human Development Index in Ukraine ranked only 78th out of 186 countries. Unemployment was 7.5 per cent and would have been 50 per cent higher without migration abroad, according to the International Organisation for Migration (2013). Relatively low wages and relatively high unemployment have driven many to seek employment abroad. Income in Ukraine has conventionally been higher in the industrial east (e.g. Donetsk) and the capital Kyiv; residents of Western Ukraine were more likely to leave in search of work. From 1994 on, these incentives turned Ukrainians for a while into a 'country of emigrants' for the first time in recent history. Since about 2004 the country was however in migration balance until the present crisis. (See Figure 1 above.)

The emigration created a serious brain drain of scientists and specialists. More generally, as often with Eastern European labour migrants, the jobs performed do not match the (higher) educational level of the workers. EU countries issued 200,000 residence permits to Ukrainians in 2011, although most were short term, the majority issued by Poland for seasonal employment. Top emigration countries were Russia, Germany, Israel, the United States, Belarus and the Czech Republic.

Table 3. *Per capita income, selected countries 2020, $ Purchasing Power Parity basis*

India	6 504
Sri Lanka	13 224
Ukraine	13 054
Belarus	20 239
Russia	29 812
Poland	34 240
UK	46 482

Source: World Bank

The accession of the Eastern European countries (A8) to the EU in 2004 prompted a major inflow of people from those countries to Western Europe, especially of Poles to Britain. Ukraine remains outside the EU for the time being and is not one of those accession countries. The UK government had grossly understated the likely inflow and the United Kingdom was the only major economy in the European Union to allow immediate entry for work after EU accession. To encourage European integration the EU had set the bar very low admission for these accession countries. Average real wages in the A8 countries were much lower than the EU average, encouraging emigration, and Poland and the Baltic States quickly developed labour shortages. Migration from Ukraine to Poland restored some of the deficit, adding to the already substantial Ukrainian population in Poland.
Ukrainian migration to the United Kingdom proceeds at a brisk pace. Following the

Brexit referendum in 2016, open access to the United Kingdom for EU citizens ended on January 1 2021. Emigration from EU countries to Britain fell sharply. Workers from Eastern European EU countries had been prominent among inflows to Britain, and in compensation employers sought migrants from outside the EU. Those inflows have expanded correspondingly in compensation. Ukrainians now predominate among seasonal temporary workers (mostly agricultural) in the United Kingdom. There were 19,920 in 2021, almost ten times the number of the next most popular countries of origin (Russia 2278, Bulgaria 1111, Belarus 1007). Ukraine now ranks second to India in the number of UK work visas issued in 2021; 20,485 compared with 35,009. These numbers have shot up from just 592 in 2018.

Where has all this left the recent Ukrainian diaspora?

In 2020 Ukraine ranked 13th in the world as a source of migrants, with 6.1 million Ukrainians living abroad (Table 4). The route from Ukraine to Russia was the fourth largest migration highway (and the Russia – Ukraine highway ranked fourth). Ukraine was twelfth in the world in receipts of remittances from abroad.

Table 4. *Ukrainians abroad. Persons born in Ukraine, or citizens enumerated in selected countries in recent years.*

Country	Population (thousands)	Date
Russian Federation	2 942,0	2010
Poland	2 275,5	2011
USA	328,4	2005
Italy	235,9	2021
Germany	135,0	*
Spain	107,2	*
Hungary	27,4	*
United Kingdom	25,0	*
France	20,3	*
Canada	15,6	2010
Australia	14,0	2011
Belarus	2,5	2010

* Walsh and Sumption 2022

Sources: UN DESA 202; UN Global Migration Database, 2022

Even up to about 2010, this can only give an approximate picture of the Ukrainian diaspora. Since then the war has hugely increased numbers in some countries. The data in Table 4 do not all refer to the same year. Most are based on country of birth but some on citizenship. Despite the efforts of international agencies, migration data are less trustworthy than data on vital events. Many of these numbers are in sharp contrast to the much larger number of Ukrainians who settled in the countries listed above in earlier periods leaving numerous descendants today (e.g. Canada, Australia). For example despite large inflows in the 19th and 20th century, fewer than one thousand persons born in Ukraine were enumerated in Mexico and Brazil in 2020.

Labour migrants are an important component of this emigrant diaspora (Table 5). Altogether, in 2010–12 almost half (46% of Ukrainian labour migrants) worked in the building trades, 18 per cent in domestic care, 11 per cent in agricultures, 9 per cent in wholesale and retail trades (International Organisation for Migration, 2013). Family migration and cross-border marriage are also important. Marriages between Ukrainians and Poles have comprised a high proportion of settlement migration in Poland (Gorny & Krepinska, 2004). But since the Russian annexations and subversions of 2014, refugees and asylum seekers have become prominent, overwhelmingly so since the invasion of Ukraine which began on 24 February, as discussed below. There were about 35000 refugees from Ukraine in 2020, despite a so-called 'cease fire' in Donets and Luhansk.

Table 5. *Destinations of labour migrants and job-seekers from Ukraine, 2010–2012*

	Percent	Persons (thousands)
Russia	43	516
Poland	14	168
Czech Republic	13	156
Italy	13	156
Spain	5	60
Hungary	2	24
Portugal	2	24
Other	8	96
All	**100**	**1200**

Source: International Organisation for Migration, 2013.

Immigration to Ukraine

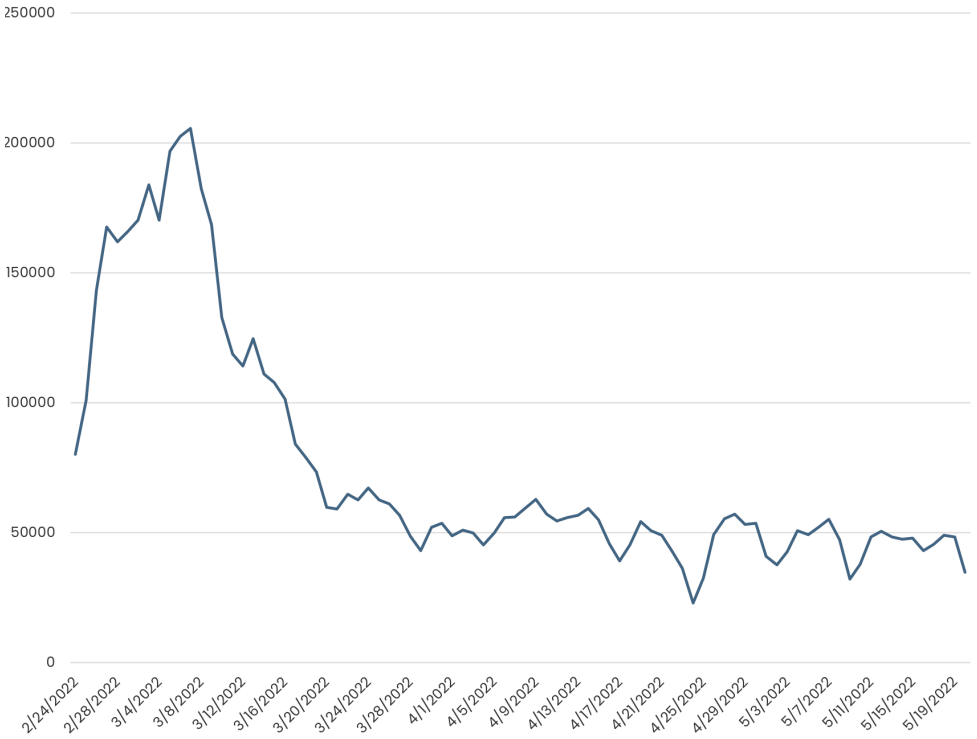
Until the recent crises, immigration and emigration flows had been roughly in balance as far as official statistics are concerned. By about 2005 Ukraine turned into a net migrant receiving country, although not on a large scale, thanks to migrants both from the CIS and from the 'far abroad'. In 2011 Irina Pribytkova reported that "the migration situation in Ukraine is stable now and in the migration balance that it has been trying to achieve for 20 years" (p.61). With about five million resident immigrants, Ukraine is 8th in the world as a destination country, and fourth in Europe. Migration from the Caucasus and Asian republics developed during the 1980s to Ukraine, to the Russian Federation, and Baltic Republics. Students from fraternal socialist countries and from the developing world had been admitted for some years. After 1991 novel flows emerged; short-range short-term cross border movement for trade involving Central Europe, longer range movements involving Turkey and China,, transit migration of illegal migrants from the developing world seeking work and security in Western Europe, from Vietnam, India, Pakistan Afghanistan as well as from some CIS countries, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and elsewhere (Uehling, 2004). Many entered on the pretext of tourism and through straightforward illegal migration promoted by traffickers. Refugees from the Transnistria conflict in Moldova (60,000 in 1992) were joined by others from the Transcaucasian republics and Chechnya as the revived Russian state suppressed dissent, Asylum seekers arrived from South Asia and many African countries, now on the move again. Most of those granted asylum are Afghans. Deported peoples were allowed to return; between 1989 and 1996 183, 000 Crimean Tatars returned from Central Asia and elsewhere.

War and refugees

Now all that is over. As of April 17th, the International Organisation for Migration (2022) estimated that there were 7.7 million internally displaced persons in Ukraine. Of these 13 per cent had already been displaced once from the areas of Donbas and Luhansk taken over by Russian separatists and Russian invaders in 2014. (Figure 2). The UNHCR estimates that between 24 February and 6 May 5.8 million have fled Ukraine altogether (UNHCR, 2022).

Together with almost six million who have fled Ukraine following the Russian invasion in 2022 that makes 13.5 million forced migrants, a quarter of the country's population. This is a staggering acceleration of forced migration, seen nowhere else on Earth since the Second World War (Figure 3). Some have been able to move to other European countries in the EU, the UK and elsewhere. These totals do not include those who have fled to Russia or, according reports, thousands of people deported forcibly from occupied Ukraine to remote parts of Russia. In all, according to UNICEF (24 March), over half of all the children in Ukraine – 4.3 million – have been displaced by the war either internally (2.5 million) or outside the country (1.8 million); the worst large-scale displacement of children since the Second World War.

Figure 2. *Refugees from Ukraine 24 February – 20 May 2022*



Source: UNHCR

As a consequence, neighbouring countries, especially Poland (Table 6), have received a sudden, huge and unlooked-for increase in their population, by 3.2 million. Those countries, too, need help if their welcome is to be sustained and the additional population cared for and to some degree dispersed elsewhere.740,000 are reported to have moved to Russia. There have been reports, impossible to confirm, of large-scale forced deportations of Ukrainians from occupied areas to various parts of Russia. The war also provoked emigration from Russia itself. According to press reports about 250,000 Russians, mostly from the cultural, financial, media and technical elite, have left for Turkey, Georgia and points west; a potentially serious 'brain drain' (see e.g. Economist, 2022). In April the Russian government restricted the ability of bank executives to emigrate. Up to 28 April, 1.3 million Ukrainians have moved back into Ukraine across its western frontier from Poland, Romania, Moldova, Slovakia and Hungary, mostly to re-unite with family or to return to areas now regarded as 'safe' (UNHCR, 28 April 2022).

Table 6. *Refugees from Ukraine to neighbouring countries ad 5/6 May 2022*

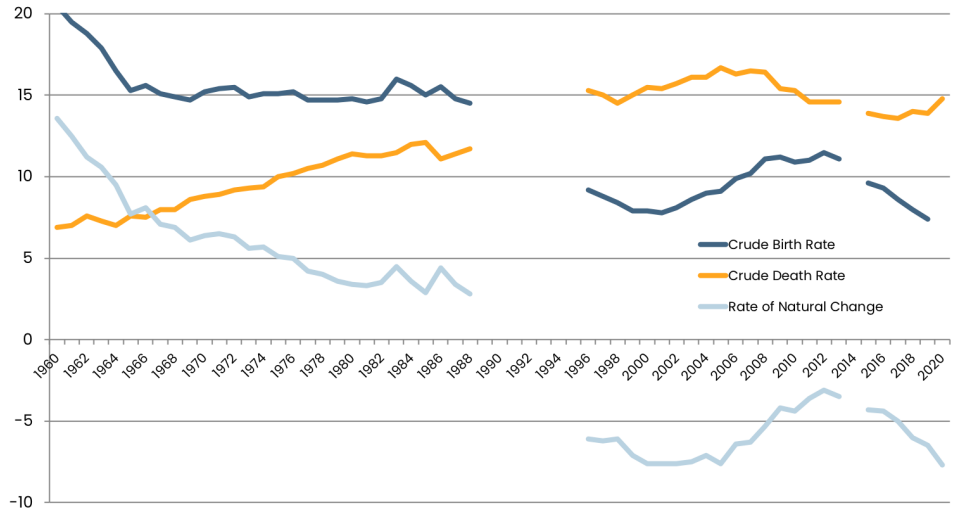
Country	Refugees from Ukraine
Poland	3 167 805
Romania	857 846
Russian Federation	739 418
Hungary	557 001
Republic of Moldova	453 848
Slovakia	391 592
Belarus	26 278
All	**6 193 788**

Source: UNHCR Operational Data Portal

The demographic situation

At the time of writing the war and the refugee situation change from one day to the next and the graphs and tables above rapidly become obsolete. Their evolution can easily be traced through the media. We should end by looking at the demographic situation in Ukraine just before this calamity and considering how it might evolve in the future.

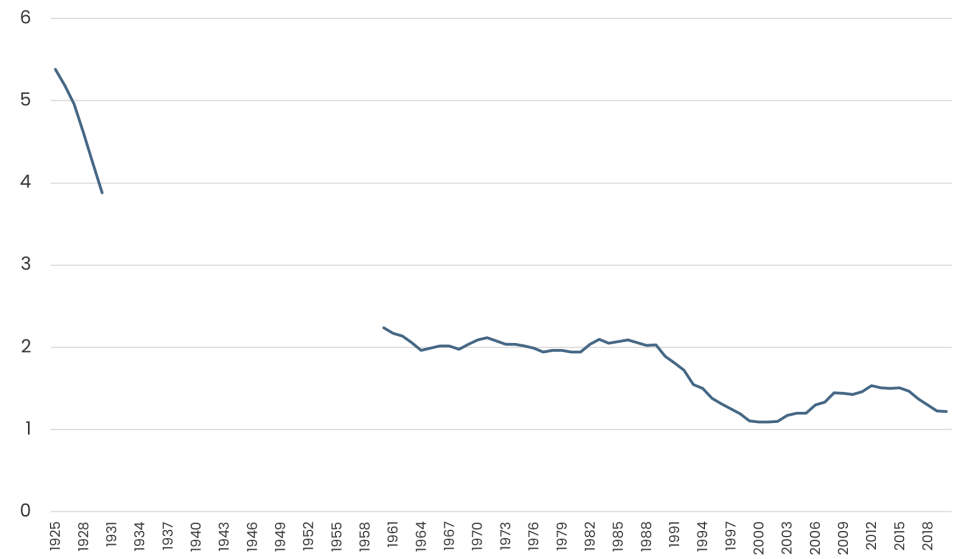
Figure 3. *Ukraine 1960–2020. Crude Birth Rate, Crude Death Rate , Natural Change, per thousand population.*



Sources: Naselenye SSSR 1988, p. 59; Eurostat

The demographic situation in the Soviet Union and its satellites was not always very satisfactory. In Soviet times the birth rate in Ukraine was maintained at a roughly constant level from the 1960s (Figure 3) although in parts of Eastern Ukraine and the city of Kharkiv it had fallen below replacement (1.95) by 1960 (Hilevych, 2020). But generally total fertility remained at about replacement level after recovery from the catastrophic crash during the collectivisation famine in the 1930s until the end of the Soviet Union (Figure 4). Afterwards, in common with all the European former Soviet republics, it has been well below replacement level. Few families remained childless, but many stopped at one child or waited for long before having a second (Hilevych, 2016).

Figure 4. *Total fertility, Ukraine 1925–2020*

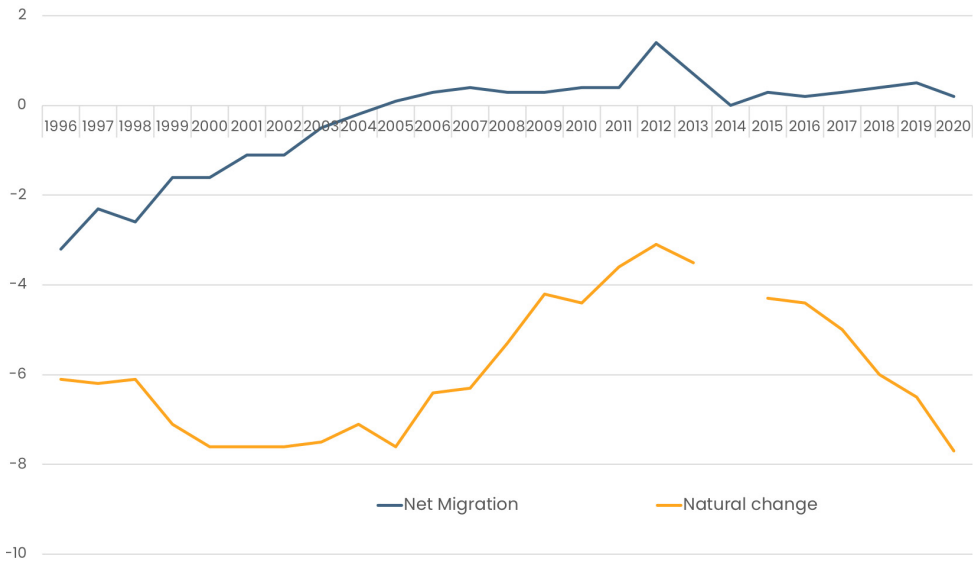


Sources of data: Sergei Scherbov, Naselenye SSSR, Ukraine Statistics.
Note changes of scale.

A relatively strong recovery in fertility to a 'safer' level was reversed in 2012, presumably as a consequence of conflict in the breakaway regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. At 1.2 total fertility was at the 'lowest-low' level, which if maintained would bring serious population ageing beyond remedy by non-demographic methods, and quite rapid population decline. The death rate compounds the problem of population decline; as in the rest of the former Soviet Union it has remained stubbornly high. In 2020 expectation of life at

birth was 76.2 years for females and 66.4 for males, over ten years less than the average for Western Europe and improving only slowly. Ukraine was approaching net natural decline even during Soviet times and was losing population at about -0.7 per cent per year just before the current war (Figure 5). Net migration, roughly in balance in recent years (+0.2% in 2020), offered little relief from this downward trend.

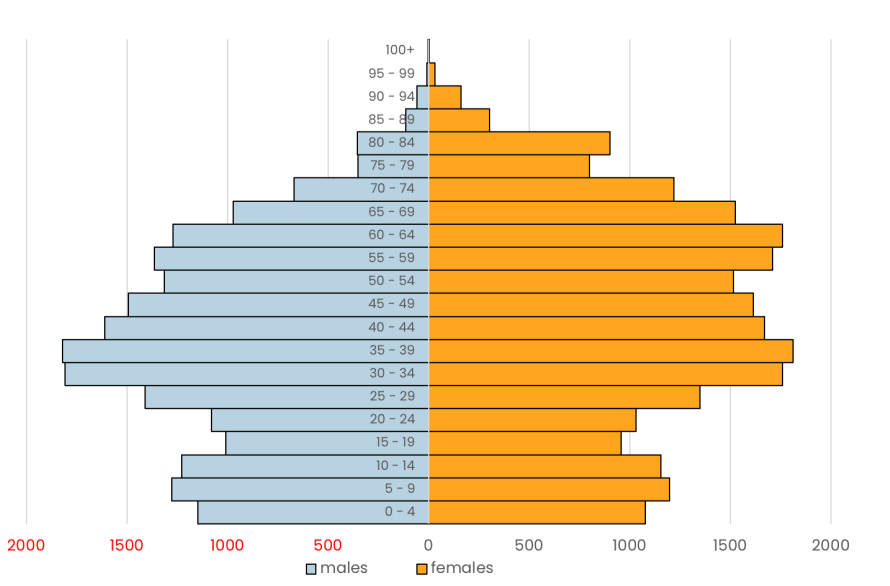
Figure 5. *Ukraine 1996–2020. Net migration and rate of natural change per thousand population*



Source: Eurostat

The result has been an unfavourable age-structure (Figure 6) promising serious economic challenges to pensions, elderly care and workforce, and entrenched population decline. Now, of course, emigration is at a level not seen since the Second World War.

Figure 6. *Ukraine 2020. Population by age and sex*

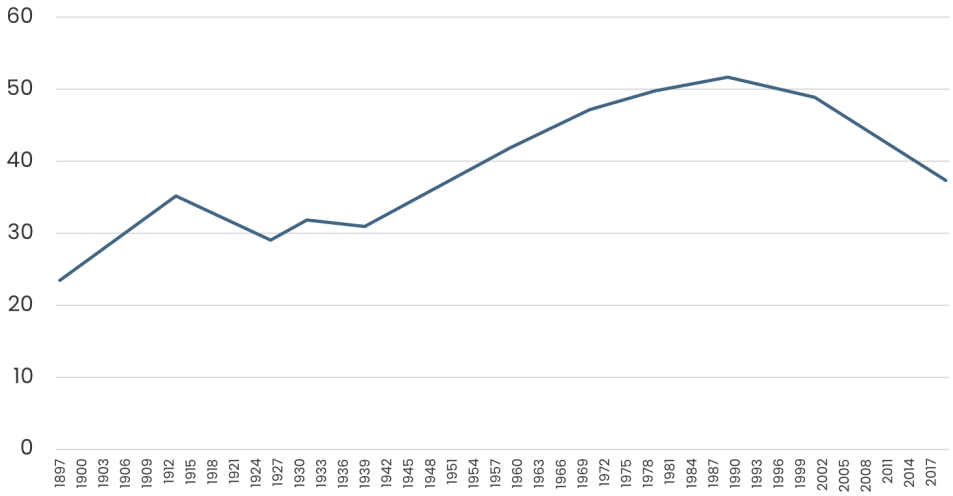


Source: US Bureau of the Census International Database.
Note: these data do not take into account territory occupied by separatists and Russian forces.

The last population census was held in 2001, another was planned for 2023. A form of electronic census was held in 2020 using diverse sources (https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-population-shrinks-23-percent-2001/30393838.html). Of necessity it excludes the Crimea and areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts occupied by separatists and Russian armed forces. Not only are population totals since 2001 correspondingly uncertain but so also are vital rates which use population as denominator.

Population, having peaked at 51.5 million in 1991, has been in decline ever since and had fallen to 45.3 million by 2011 (Figure 7). Decline has been relentless but variable; a loss of 450,000 people in the year 2000, 185,000 in 2010, 310,000 in 2020. The amputation of the breakaway regions and continued natural decline deprived Ukraine of a further four million people by 2018, the population estimate for that year being 41.6 million. Since then internal refugee movements have concentrated population in the safer Western parts of the country while a further four million have fled abroad. The population in early 2022 cannot be higher than 37 million (RFE, 2020).

Figure 7. *Ukraine, population 1897–2018*



Sources of data: variously Naselenye SSSR 1988, State Statistics Service of the Ukraine. Estimate 1931, Census data 1897 via Demographics of Ukraine, 1926, 1939 via Demoscop Weekly.

Note. There is considerable uncertainty about some of these statistics. The 1897 figure refers to the total of the nine gubernia (governorships) with majority Ukrainian population. It includes1.45 million for the Crimea. For 1913, State Statistics of Ukraine gives 35.2million, but an estimate cited in Demographics of Ukraine gives 31.14 million. The 1939 census total of 30.9 million was massaged by the Soviet authorities to hide the effects of the 1930s famine and purges. Annual estimates from 1950 are available from the UN Population Division, and from 1983–93 from and from 2010 from Eurostat. After 2012 they depart from each other and from reality.

At the time of writing the existence of Ukraine, the geographical boundaries of the State, the size and composition of its population, the nature of its governance all hang in the balance. The depopulation it has suffered from the flight of refugees since the Russian invasion already matches, if it does not exceed, the population losses of all previous calamities since the Mongols. The savage physical destruction of much of the Donbas rivals that of the Second World War. And the outcome of this conflict will determine not only the fate of Ukraine but also the shape and security of the whole of Europe

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