

World
Watch
Research

Ukraine: Full Country Dossier

March 2024



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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research@od.org

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Introduction

World Watch List 2024

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	12.8	96	98	96	94	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	10.6	93	92	91	92	92
3	Libya	15.9	16.0	15.9	16.1	16.4	10.2	91	88	91	92	90
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.8	89	89	88	88	87
5	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	89	88	87	85
6	Nigeria	13.5	13.9	14.5	14.9	14.4	16.7	88	88	87	85	80
7	Pakistan	13.2	13.9	15.0	15.1	13.1	16.7	87	86	87	88	88
8	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	13.3	87	83	79	79	85
9	Iran	15.0	14.6	13.5	15.8	16.5	10.9	86	86	85	86	85
10	Afghanistan	15.7	15.9	15.2	16.3	16.6	4.6	84	84	98	94	93
11	India	12.2	12.6	13.3	14.8	13.2	16.5	83	82	82	83	83
12	Syria	13.4	14.3	13.9	14.3	14.2	11.1	81	80	78	81	82
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.8	15.7	16.6	3.3	81	80	81	78	79
14	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	12.8	15.1	15.6	79	76	70	67	66
15	Algeria	14.4	14.1	11.5	14.0	15.6	9.8	79	73	71	70	73
16	Iraq	14.2	14.4	14.0	14.8	13.9	7.8	79	76	78	82	76
17	Myanmar	12.2	10.6	13.4	13.7	13.0	16.1	79	80	79	74	73
18	Maldives	15.6	15.5	13.6	16.0	16.4	0.9	78	77	77	77	78
19	China	13.0	10.0	12.8	14.6	16.0	11.1	78	77	76	74	70
20	Burkina Faso	11.7	9.7	13.2	11.5	13.8	15.6	75	71	68	67	66
21	Laos	11.6	10.6	13.2	14.3	14.0	11.3	75	68	69	71	72
22	Cuba	13.2	8.7	13.8	13.3	15.1	8.7	73	70	66	62	52
23	Mauritania	14.6	14.2	13.8	14.2	14.2	1.3	72	72	70	71	68
24	Morocco	13.2	13.8	11.7	12.8	14.4	5.4	71	69	69	67	66
25	Uzbekistan	14.6	12.7	13.9	12.6	15.5	1.7	71	71	71	71	73
26	Bangladesh	12.4	10.6	12.5	10.8	10.4	14.1	71	69	68	67	63
27	Niger	9.4	9.6	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.9	70	70	68	62	60
28	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	70	68	66	68
29	Turkmenistan	14.2	12.3	13.6	13.9	15.5	0.6	70	70	69	70	70
30	Nicaragua	12.1	7.6	13.2	13.2	14.1	9.6	70	65	56	51	41
31	Oman	14.3	14.0	10.6	13.3	14.0	3.1	69	65	66	63	62
32	Ethiopia	9.9	9.7	12.6	10.4	12.1	14.4	69	66	66	65	63
33	Tunisia	12.3	13.2	10.2	12.4	13.8	6.9	69	67	66	67	64
34	Colombia	11.1	8.6	12.9	11.3	10.4	14.1	68	71	68	67	62
35	Vietnam	11.3	9.4	12.4	13.8	14.2	7.2	68	70	71	72	72
36	Bhutan	13.1	12.1	12.4	14.1	14.3	2.2	68	66	67	64	61
37	Mexico	11.5	8.5	12.5	11.1	10.6	14.1	68	67	65	64	60
38	Egypt	12.5	13.7	11.4	11.9	10.9	7.8	68	68	71	75	76
39	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.0	68	68	65	63	43
40	Qatar	14.2	14.2	10.5	13.2	14.4	0.6	67	68	74	67	66
41	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.9	67	67	66	64	56
42	Indonesia	10.9	12.3	11.5	10.2	9.7	11.5	66	68	68	63	60
43	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	8.0	13.1	15.9	66	65	65	64	60
44	Brunei	15.0	14.7	10.0	10.8	14.1	1.3	66	65	64	64	63
45	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.1	66	66	63	62	57
46	Tajikistan	13.8	12.6	12.3	12.9	13.4	0.6	66	66	65	66	65
47	Kazakhstan	13.3	11.8	12.1	12.8	14.3	1.1	65	65	64	64	64
48	Jordan	12.9	14.2	10.5	12.4	12.8	2.2	65	65	66	64	64
49	Malaysia	13.0	14.1	11.5	12.2	11.1	2.4	64	66	63	63	62
50	Turkey	13.0	11.5	11.6	13.2	11.4	3.1	64	66	65	69	63

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	12.4	63	64	63	62	61
52	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	14.4	62	63	61	58	55
53	Nepal	12.1	10.4	9.5	13.2	12.3	4.4	62	61	64	66	64
54	Kuwait	13.1	13.6	9.4	12.0	12.2	0.9	61	64	64	63	62
55	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	1.1	61	60	59	56	56
56	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	10.6	61	58	55	53	56
57	UAE	13.3	13.4	9.5	11.3	12.8	0.7	61	62	62	62	60
58	Sri Lanka	12.9	9.2	10.8	11.5	9.7	5.9	60	57	63	62	65
59	Azerbaijan	13.2	9.9	9.6	11.9	13.6	1.7	60	59	60	56	57
60	Palestinian Territories	13.1	13.3	9.7	10.7	12.1	0.9	60	60	59	58	60
61	Kyrgyzstan	13.2	10.3	11.3	10.5	12.2	1.3	59	59	58	58	57
62	Russian Federation	12.7	7.7	10.6	12.8	12.9	1.7	58	57	56	57	60
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	9.4	58	57	50	42	42
64	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	12.8	57	55	52	48	48
65	Bahrain	12.0	13.2	8.6	11.3	8.5	1.1	55	55	57	56	55
66	Honduras	7.9	4.7	12.2	7.3	9.9	12.6	55	53	48	46	39
67	Venezuela	6.0	4.4	11.1	10.0	10.8	10.7	53	56	51	39	42
68	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	8.9	52	49	44	43	41
69	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	7.2	52	48	43	47	45
70	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	8.8	15.9	52	51	48	47	48
71	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	52	51	46	43
72	Lebanon	11.0	10.2	7.0	6.1	6.6	7.2	48	40	35	34	35
73	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	3.7	47	44	44	43	43
74	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.6	46	46	43	43	44
75	Belarus	9.6	3.8	5.8	9.7	13.3	3.3	46	43	33	30	28
76	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	44	42	42	42
77	Ukraine	5.5	4.8	8.0	11.6	11.6	2.8	44	37	37	34	33
78	Israel	9.8	8.6	5.8	6.3	6.9	6.7	44	38	41	40	38

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Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2024 reporting period was 1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023.
- The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- The latest update of WWL Methodology can be found on the research pages of the Open Doors website: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/> and on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom): <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>.

WWL 2024 Situation in brief / Ukraine

Brief country details

Ukraine: Population (UN estimate for 2023)	Christians	Chr%
42,911,000	36,942,000	86.1

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

Map of country



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

Ukraine: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	44	77
WWL 2023	37	-
WWL 2022	37	-
WWL 2021	34	-
WWL 2020	33	-

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Ukraine:	
Main persecution engines	Main drivers
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials, Religious leaders of other churches, Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups
Christian denominational protectionism	Government officials, Religious leaders of other churches

Engines and Drivers are listed in order of strength. Only Very strong / Strong / Medium are shown here.

Brief description of the persecution situation

In the Russian-controlled areas of Ukraine, the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) has a preferred position and all other denominations are under restrictions. In mainland Ukraine, the dispute between the two rival Orthodox churches has led to tensions: The Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) cut ties with Moscow in May 2022 in protest over Russia's invasion on 24 February 2022.

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

November 2022: Security agents in Ukraine conducted a "counterintelligence" operation at Kyiv's historic Pechersk Lavra and other facilities of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) as part of a probe into suspected pro-Russia activity. The 11th-century monastery and UNESCO World Heritage site -- which is also known as the Monastery of the Caves -- is the seat of the UOC, a branch of Ukraine's Orthodox Church that was formerly under the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Patriarch in Moscow. (Source: [RFE/RL](#), 22 November 2022)

November/December 2022: On 12 December 2022, armed Russian soldiers broke into the home of Serhiy Karpenko, pastor of the Vefil (Bethel) Protestant Church in the Black Sea coastal town of Berdyansk (Zaporizhzhia Region). They took him away in an unknown destination. No news has been heard of him since. Troops of Russia's National Guard (Rosgvardiya) seized two Ukrainian Greek Catholic priests in the same town on 16 November 2022 and there has been no news of them since. (Source: [Forum 18](#), 21 December 2022).

January 2023: Russian occupation authorities continue to violate freedom of religion and belief rights in the Ukrainian territory they currently control. Raids on and seizures of places of worship continued in January 2023, and a purge of "extremist" books from educational libraries was ordered in Luhansk. (Source: [Forum 18](#), 3 February 2023)

June 2023: Russian occupation forces in the village of Basan in Zaporizhzhia Region "discovered and halted the activity of an unregistered religious association" of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. (Source: [Forum 18](#), 13 October 2023)

July 2023: The main cathedral in the Ukrainian port city of Odesa suffered severe damage in a Sunday bombardment. At least one person was killed and dozens injured in the missile strike that damaged 25 historic buildings, according to Oleh Kiper, regional governor. (Sources: [Christian Today](#), 24 July 2023, [Human Rights Without Frontiers](#), 15 September 2023)

August 2023: Russian occupiers launched an attack on 22 August on the St. Teresa of the Child of Jesus Roman Catholic Church in the town of Skadovsk, located in the Kherson region in eastern Ukraine. Bishop Stanislav Szyrokoradiuk of Odessa-Simferopol stated on Facebook: "A group of armed special forces, cloaked in masks and wielding weapons, encircled the Roman Catholic chapel , ... broke down the door and broke into the chapel and began a search". (Source: [UCAN](#), 25 August 2023)

September 2023: Russian occupation forces seized another church of the Baptist Union in September 2023, this time in Zaporizhzia Region. This brings to seven the number of Baptist churches confiscated in territory Russian forces have captured since the beginning of the invasion in February 2022. The other six Baptist Union churches previously seized are located in parts of Donetsk Region. (Source: [Forum 18](#), 13 October 2023)

Destruction of buildings used for religious activities: On 25 May 2023 [Human Rights Without Frontiers](#) (HRWF) quoted a report from the Ukrainian Institute for Religious Freedom which stated that as a result of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, at least 494 religious buildings, theological institutions, and sacred places were wholly destroyed, damaged, or looted by Russian forces. HRWF also quoted a UNESCO report which stated that as of 17 May 2023, UNESCO verified damage to 256 sites since 24 February 2022 - 110 religious sites, 22 museums, 92 buildings of historical and/or artistic interest, 19 monuments, 12 libraries, 1 archive.

Specific examples of positive developments

None.

External Links - Situation in brief

- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: RFE/RL - <https://www.rferl.org/a/32142581.html>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Forum 18 - https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2799
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Forum 18 - https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2808
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Forum 18 - https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2866
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Christian Today - <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/historic.odesa.cathedral.badly.damaged.in.russian.missile.strike/140531.htm>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Human Rights Without Frontiers - <https://hrwf.eu/ukraine-russias-criminal-bombing-of-the-odesa-cathedral-assessing-the-damages/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: UCAN - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/russian-occupiers-seize-catholic-church-in-eastern-ukraine/102390>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Forum 18 - https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2866
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Human Rights Without Frontiers - <https://hrwf.eu/ukraine-110-damaged-religious-sites-inspected-and-documented-by-unesco/>

WWL 2024: Keys to understanding / Ukraine

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2022/23 Ukraine country report	AI Ukraine 2022	https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/europe-and-central-asia/ukraine/report-ukraine/	12 October 2023
BBC News country profile - updated 21 June 2023	BBC Ukraine profile	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-18018002	12 October 2023
Bertelsmann Transformation Index Ukraine country report 2022	BTI Ukraine Report 2022	https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/UKR	12 October 2023
Economist Intelligence Unit Ukraine country summary 2023	EIU Ukraine summary 2023	https://country.eiu.com/ukraine	12 October 2023
FFP's Fragile States Index 2023 - Ukraine	FSI 2023 Ukraine	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	12 October 2023
Freedom House's 2023 Democracy index - Ukraine	Democracy Index 2023 Ukraine	https://freedomhouse.org/country/ukraine/nations-transit/2023	12 October 2023
Freedom House's 2023 Global Freedom index - Ukraine	Global Freedom Index 2023 Ukraine	https://freedomhouse.org/country/ukraine/freedom-world/2023	12 October 2023
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2023 - Ukraine	Freedom on the Net 2023 Ukraine	https://freedomhouse.org/country/ukraine/freedom-net/2023	12 October 2023
Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index 2023 - Ukraine	WPS 2023 Index Ukraine	https://giwps.georgetown.edu/the-index/	12 October 2023
Girls Not Brides Ukraine	Girls Not Brides Ukraine - accessed October 2023	https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/ukraine/	12 October 2023
Human Rights Watch World Report 2023 - Ukraine country chapter	HRW Ukraine - Events of 2022	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/ukraine	12 October 2023
Internet World Stats available in 2023 - Ukraine	IWS 2023 Ukraine	https://www.internetworldstats.com/europa2.htm#ua	12 October 2023
RSF's 2023 World Press Freedom Index - Ukraine	World Press Freedom 2023 Ukraine	https://rsf.org/en/country/ukraine	12 October 2023
Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index - Ukraine	CPI 2022 Ukraine	https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/ukr	12 October 2023
UNDP: Human Development Report Ukraine - data updates as of * September 2022	UNDP HDR Ukraine	https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data/#/countries/UKR	12 October 2023
US State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom Report Ukraine	IRFR 2022 Ukraine	https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/ukraine/	12 October 2023
USCIRF Annual Report 2023 - Ukraine not included	USCIRF 2023	https://www.uscifr.gov/countries	
World Bank Ukraine country data profile-- 2021	World Bank Ukraine data profile	https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidge?t.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=UKR	12 October 2023
World Bank Ukraine country overview - updated 10 October 2023	World Bank Ukraine overview	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ukraine/overview	12 October 2023
World Bank's Macro Poverty Outlook Ukraine - October 2023	Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 Ukraine	https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/d5f32ef28464d01f195827b7e020a3e8-0500022021/related/mpo-ukr.pdf	12 October 2023

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 succeeded by Volodymyr Zelenskyy in May 2019.

Shortly after Yanukovich's departure in late February 2014, Russian President Putin ordered the invasion of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula falsely 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 were killed or wounded as a result of the Russian intervention in eastern Ukraine.

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.

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, Yanukovich, 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 2022 Ukraine):

- "On December 1 [2022], President Volodymyr Zelenskyy issued a decree for the Cabinet of Ministers to introduce legislation to prohibit religious organizations that are 'affiliated with centers of influence in the Russian Federation' to operate in Ukraine. The decree requires this law to be 'in accordance with the norms of international law in the field of freedom of conscience and Ukraine's obligations in connection with joining the Council of Europe'. The

President also announced sanctions against senior clergy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) for collaboration with Russia, stating they engaged in wartime collaboration with the invader. Although it continued to be unofficially referred to as the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate (or UOC-MP) through year's end, in May, Church leaders stated it had broken with the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC); a government-commissioned panel of experts, however, concluded the UOC remained connected and subordinate to the ROC. The Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) searched numerous UOC religious sites based on stated probable cause of collaboration, yielding what the SBU and civil society observers said was significant evidence of collaboration and other illegal acts.”

- “In February [2022], the government declared martial law and began general mobilization of reservists. The law does not provide for alternative service during mobilization and martial law. There were some arrests for draft refusal and one case of imprisonment, according to reports, although most conscientious objectors were able to perform alternative service.”

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)

Religious landscape

Ukraine: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	36,942,000	86.1
Muslim	645,000	1.5
Hindu	4,500	0.0
Buddhist	17,900	0.0
Ethno-religionist	9,200	0.0
Jewish	38,800	0.1
Bahai	210	0.0
Atheist	926,000	2.2
Agnostic	4,319,000	10.1
Other	8,850	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

86.1% of the Ukrainian population are Christian according to the World Christian Database (accessed March 2023), the majority being Orthodox believers (83.5%). The minority is made up mainly of Roman Catholic, Baptist, Pentecostal and Seventh-Day Adventist churches. 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 church leaders "... are often interrogated, jailed, expelled, and fined in occupied territories". In Luhansk, which is outside the control of the Ukrainian government, all Protestant church leaders and their family members are targeted for harassment, and in Donetsk all activities of Protestant churches (including the training of leaders) are closely monitored and hindered.

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Ukraine):

- "Since its invasion of Crimea and portions of Donbas in 2014, according to widespread reports, the Russian Federation and its proxies have committed widespread, ongoing, and egregious violations of the right to freedom of religion and conscience as well as physical and psychological abuse of religious minorities. Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Russia's forces intensified these practices and carried them into other occupied areas. There were reports of widespread regional bans of minority religious groups, including evangelical Christians, Roman and 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 stated it was difficult to gain a full accounting of Russia's extensive religious rights violations given heavy censorship of media, abuses against human rights activists, and denial of access to international observers."
- "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, including physically abusing an Orthodox priest seized from a ship in the Black Sea."

- “Church ownership disputes between UOC and OCU members in Zadubrivka village, Chernivtsi Oblast, and some other villages and cities continued. In May [2022], following a UOC Council meeting, the Church announced it disagreed with the position of Patriarch Kirill of the ROC supporting Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and that it took measures making the UOC 'fully independent' from the Moscow Patriarchate, measures that the OCU spokesman, the government, and civil society groups said were insufficient and left the UOC still subordinate to the ROC.”
- "The ROC and the UOC continued to label the OCU a 'schismatic' group and continued to urge other Orthodox churches not to recognize it. UOC and OCU representatives continued to contest some parish registrations as not reflecting the true will of their congregations. The UOC reported violent threats against some of its congregations. UOC leaders continued to accuse the OCU of seizing churches belonging to the UOC; the OCU responded that parishioners, rather than the OCU, had initiated the transfers of affiliation within the provisions of the law. Church ownership disputes between UOC and OCU members ... [have] continued."

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:

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

According to the World Factbook Ukraine:

- “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 Donets 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 Zaporizhya nuclear power station.

Social and cultural landscape

According to the World Factbook Ukraine:

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

According to the UNDP Human Development Report Ukraine:

- **HDI score and ranking:** 0.773 (0.775 for females, 0.766 for males), ranking 77 (2021)
- **Total population:** 43.5 million (2021)
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 72.4 years (76.7 for females, 66.5 for males) (2021)
- **Expected years of schooling:** 15.2 years (14.99 for females, 14.93 for males) (2021)

- **Gender Inequality index:** 0.2 (2021)
- **Labor Force Participation Rate (% ages 15 years and older):** Female: 48.1, Male: 63.6 (2021)

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 is 6.5%, one of the world's lowest such figures.

According to the latest World Bank 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 of Ukraine in February 2022 has created Europe's largest refugee crisis since World War II. **As of February 2024:** An estimated 3.7 million people have been driven from their homes and are internally displaced as a result of heavy shelling and fighting, and nearly 6.5 million people have crossed into neighboring countries ([UNHCR Ukraine Emergency](#), accessed 20 March 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. 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 Internet World Stats (IWS 2023 Ukraine):

- **Internet usage:** 94.9% penetration - survey date: January 2022
- **Facebook usage:** 61.2% penetration - survey date: January 2022

According to the World Bank Ukraine data:

- **Mobile cellular subscriptions:** 135.0 per 100 people (2021)

According to the World Factbook Ukraine:

- “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 Kolomoysky; 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 and destruction to the communications infrastructure in more than 10 out of 24 regions of Ukraine since the war started (2023)”

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:

- National media have adopted a united patriotic agenda following the Russian annexation of Crimea and the armed conflict in the east.
- 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.
- Ukrainians have changed their media consumption since the start of the full-scale war, with social media replacing TV as a top news source for Ukrainians, new TV channels continuing to launch despite the conflict, and the complete loss of popularity of Russian outlets.

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 invasion on 24 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 of 11 September 2023: At least 9,614 civilians had been killed and more than 17,535 injured since Russia’s invasion began in February 2022 ([UNHCR, 11 September 2023](#)).

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.

Trends analysis

1) The war in Ukraine looks set to continue

Since Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February 2022 the war has been going on unabated. Neither of the two sides is willing to compromise. No changes are to be expected in the governments of Ukraine and the Russian-controlled areas. This also means the position of the Orthodox community will remain divided.

2) Christians will continue to experience restrictions in the Russian-controlled areas

After annexing the Crimea in 2014, Russia imposed the same restrictions on religious freedom there as it did in Russia itself. In the Donbas region in eastern Ukraine similar restrictions have been imposed, and it can be expected that the same will happen in other areas occupied by Russian forces. It would appear that Russia is intent on annexing more and more areas of Ukraine.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Political and legal landscape: Forum 18 - https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2866
- 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
- 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: Ukraine Country Report 2022 - <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/UKR>
- Social and cultural landscape: (UNHCR Ukraine Emergency - <https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/ukraine/#>
- Security situation: (UNHCR, 11 September 2023) - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2023/09/ukraine-civilian-casualty-update-11-september-2023>

WWL 2024: Church information / Ukraine

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 1946 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	30,792,000	83.4
Catholic	4,965,000	13.4
Protestant	843,000	2.3
Independent	813,000	2.2
Unaffiliated	10,000	0.0
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-481,000	-1.3
Total	36,942,000	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	538,000	1.5
Renewalist movement	1,459,000	3.9

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

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. **Renewalist movement:** Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal.

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 data (accessed March 2023), 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
- Old Ritualist Church Belokrinitza Concord
- Other Independents
- Christians of the Evangelical Faith (Pentecostal)
- Union of Evangelical Christian-Baptists
- Church of God of Prophecy
- Bulgarian Orthodox Church
- Reformed Church in Carpatho-Ukraine

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

There are no restrictions on church life in mainland Ukraine. The only problem there is the growing division of the Orthodox community in a section that remains loyal to the Moscow Patriarchate and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church that was recognized by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople in 2018. From time to time this leads to conflict as the situation is constantly polarizing.

The situation is much more problematic in the Russian occupied areas of Ukraine. Here all denominations except the ROC Moscow Patriarchate are under close surveillance.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians: There are no communities of expatriate Christians in Ukraine to be considered for WWL analysis.

Historical Christian communities: This category consists mainly of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), which is linked to the Moscow Patriarchate, the autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), and the Roman Catholic Church. There are also several denominations of Old Believers churches, and Catholics in Ukraine belonging to two main denominations: Ukrainian Greek Catholic church and Roman Catholic Church. In Russian-controlled areas only the UOC MP is recognized and the rest are restricted. In mainland Ukraine the growing polarization inside the Orthodox community has resulted in several incidents where churches and monasteries have

been damaged and believers beaten.

Converts: This category consists of 'denominational converts' from Orthodoxy to Protestantism. They experience pressure from society and the UOC. These Christians are also actively persecuted in Russian-controlled areas.

Non-traditional Christian communities: There are many non-traditional denominations in Ukraine: Baptists, Pentecostals, Charismatics and Adventists. In Mainland Ukraine these denominations can mostly function without any problems. But in the Donbas and other Russian-controlled areas these church communities are strongly persecuted. In Luhansk province all unregistered religious organizations are banned from holding worship. Since 2019, all Baptist publications have been banned in this province as well. Since the start of the war in February 2022, Pentecostals, Baptists, Adventists and Charismatics, etc. have all been particularly affected. Russian soldiers are known to regard non-traditional church groups as 'American spies', 'sectarians' and 'enemies of the Russian Orthodox people'.

External Links - Church information

- Christian origins: EWTN News - <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/overview-of-christian-history-in-ukraine-1751>

WWL 2024: Persecution Dynamics / Ukraine

Reporting period

1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023

Position on the World Watch List

Ukraine: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	44	77
WWL 2023	37	-
WWL 2022	37	-
WWL 2021	34	-
WWL 2020	33	-

Ukraine scored 44 points in WWL 2024, seven points higher than in WWL 2023. In mainland Ukraine the main religious issue has been the growing division inside the Orthodox community which led to several incidents. However, the focus for all major religious persecution in Ukraine is to be found in the Russian-controlled areas where local authorities are increasingly restricting non-Russian Orthodox Christian church activities.

Persecution engines

Ukraine: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Not at all
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Not at all
Clan oppression	CO	Not at all
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Strong
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Strong
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Not at all

The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. For more information see WWL Methodology.

Dictatorial paranoia (Strong)

In the Russian-controlled areas of eastern Ukraine the local regimes are increasingly restricting non-Russian Orthodox churches. In contrast, the central Ukrainian government has been elected and is not authoritarian.

Christian denominational protectionism (Strong)

Since the 2018 recognition of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) by the Constantinople Patriarch Bartholomew, the Orthodox community in Ukraine has been deeply divided. In mainland Ukraine, most Orthodox Christians are part of the OCU and consider Orthodox believers who side with the Moscow Patriarchate as traitors. Exactly the opposite is occurring in Russian-controlled Ukraine where the influence of the ROC is growing and repression of other denominations (not only the OCU) is increasing also with the support of ROC-leaders.

Drivers of persecution

Ukraine: Drivers of persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	-	-	-	-	STRONG	-	-	STRONG	-
Government officials	-	-	-	-	Strong	-	-	Strong	-
Ethnic group leaders	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Non-Christian religious leaders	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	-	Strong	-	-	Strong	-
Violent religious groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ideological pressure groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	-	-	-	-	Weak	-	-	-	-
One's own (extended) family	-	-	-	-	Weak	-	-	-	-
Political parties	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Medium	-
Organized crime cartels or networks	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.) and embassies	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

The scale for the level of influence of Drivers of persecution in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. Please note that "-" denotes "not at all". For more information see WWL Methodology.

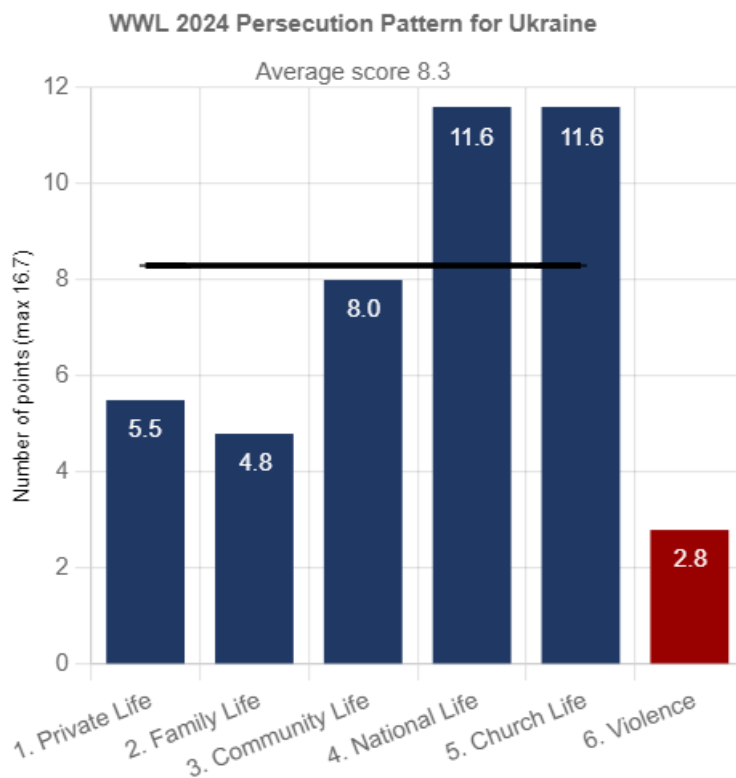
Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (Strong):** The authorities in the Russian-controlled areas of Ukraine have imposed many restrictions (comparable to the restrictions employed in Russia).
- **Christian religious leaders (Strong):** In the Russian-controlled areas, ROC leaders will tend to support Russia.
- **Revolutionaries (Medium):** Rebels cooperate with the Russian forces. Non-ROC Christians are targeted.

Drivers of Christian denominational protectionism

- **Government officials (Strong):** Government officials in the Russian-controlled areas will always side with the ROC.
- **Christian religious leaders (Strong):** ROC leaders will be strongly supportive of Russia, while the Ukrainian Orthodox will be loyal to Ukraine. Both groups do not tolerate each other.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2024 Persecution pattern for Ukraine shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a high level (8.3 points). Oppression of non-Russian Orthodox Christians in Russian-controlled areas of Ukraine is present at all levels of society, ranging from the personal level all the way up to the national and church levels.
- While all other *spheres of life* show low or fairly high levels of pressure, pressure is very high in the *National* and *Church spheres of life*. Non-Russian Orthodox churches in the Russian-controlled areas are experiencing increasing restrictions and local governments there are becoming increasingly intolerant towards them.
- The score for faith-related violence reached 2.8 points in WWL 2024. This figure does not include destruction caused by the ongoing war.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2024 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (3.00 points)

In the Russian-controlled areas speaking about non-ROC MP faith is interpreted as extremist activity.

Block 1.9: It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians. (2.75 points)

In the Russian-controlled areas meeting with other non-ROC MP or Christians belonging to unregistered churches could have serious consequences.

Block 1.3: It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials. (2.50 points)

It can be dangerous in the Russian-controlled areas on Ukraine as the authorities approve and support only the Moscow Patriarchate Orthodox Church. All other Christians run the risk of their houses being searched and books confiscated. In the rest of Ukraine this is no problem.

Block 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable. (2.00 points)

This affects Christians who leave Orthodoxy. It is much more problematic in Russian-controlled areas than in mainland Ukraine.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (3.00 points)

In the Russian-controlled areas raising children as non-ROC MP can be fraught with difficulties.

Block 2.4: Christian baptisms have been hindered. (3.75 points)

In the Russian-controlled areas, non-ROC MP baptism ceremonies are prohibited.

Block 2.3: Christians have been hindered in celebrating a Christian wedding for faith-related reasons. (2.50 points)

There are major obstacles to celebrating Protestant weddings in the Russian-controlled areas.

Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (2.50 points)

In the Russian-controlled areas children from Protestant and Catholic families are pressured into attending lessons in 'Orthodox Ethics' and the 'Basics of Orthodox Culture'.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

Block 3.1: Christians have been harassed, threatened or obstructed in their daily lives for faith-related reasons. (3.00 points)

Christians from non-traditional church groups can occasionally experience pressure and hostility from Orthodox believers. This is less the case in mainland Ukraine, but is definitely occurring in the Russian-controlled areas.

Block 3.2: Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.). (3.00 points)

In the Russian-controlled areas non-ROC MP Christians - especially Protestants - are frequently considered undesirable elements in society.

Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (3.00 points)

There is pressure in the Russian-controlled areas on non-ROC MP Christians, and on Ukrainian Orthodox Christians to join the Moscow Patriarchate Orthodox Church again.

Block 3.10: Christians have been discriminated against in public or private employment for faith-related reasons. (3.00 points)

This is not the case in mainland Ukraine; however, in the Russian-controlled areas, non-ROC MP Christians - especially Protestants - are not employed by separatists. Separatists are also known to compel the local population (as well as captured Ukrainian military personnel) to carry out forced labor.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (3.25 points)

There are no restrictions in mainland Ukraine, but there are in the Russian-controlled areas.

Block 4.4: Christians have been hindered in travelling for faith-related reasons. (3.25 points)

There are no travel restrictions in mainland Ukraine, but there are restrictions for non-ROC MP Christians in the Russian-controlled areas.

Block 4.9: Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions. (3.00 points)

In the Russian-controlled areas all Christian civil society organizations other than those linked to Russian Orthodoxy (MP) are prohibited.

Block 4.10: Media reporting has been incorrect or biased against Christians. (3.00 points)

In the Russian-controlled areas, the media permanently label all Christian denominations except Russian Orthodoxy (MP) as ideological and extremist sects.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

Block 5.1: Church activities have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed. (3.00 points)

The activities of all non-ROC MP church groups are monitored and disrupted in the Russian-controlled areas. On the mainland territory of Ukraine, religious freedom is strictly observed.

Block 5.2: It has been difficult to get registration or legal status for churches at any level of government. (3.00 points)

In the Russian-controlled areas it is not possible to register any religious organization other than the Moscow Patriarchate Russian Orthodox Church. There is no such problem in mainland Ukraine.

Block 5.5: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings. (3.00 points)

In mainland Ukraine restrictions might apply as in cases with secular activities. Here, no difference will be made due to the religious character of the meeting. In fact, it would be easier to organize a religious outdoor activity than, for example, a political demonstration. In the Russian-controlled areas, Protestant, Catholics and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine are prohibited from organizing outside events. It could involve direct physical threats if they went ahead.

Block 5.8: Christian preaching, teaching and/or published materials have been monitored. (3.00 points)

In mainland Ukraine this is no problem. In Luhansk, Protestant preaching and teaching materials are prohibited. A list of prohibited publications was issued in which 18 Protestant publications were banned, including certain translations of the Gospel of John. In Donetsk, they are allowed for registered churches but are closely monitored.

Violence

Violence is defined in WWL Methodology as the deprivation of physical freedom or as bodily harm to Christians or damage to their property. It includes severe threats (mental abuse). The table is based on reported cases as much as possible, but since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as being minimum figures. The following points should be considered when using the data provided in the Block 6 table:

1. Some incidents go unreported because the Christians involved choose not to speak about the hostility being faced

Possible reasons for this may be:

- Doing so would expose them to more attacks. For example, if a family member is killed because of his/her faith, the survivors might decide to keep silent about the circumstances of the killing to avoid provoking any further attacks.
- In some circumstances, the reticence to pass on information may be due to the danger of exposure caused by converts returning to their previous faith.
- If persecution is related to sexual violence - due to stigma, survivors often do not tell even their closest relatives.
- In some cultural settings, if your loved one is killed, you might be under the obligation to take revenge. Christians not wishing to do that, may decide to keep quiet about it.

2. Other incidents go unreported for the following possible reasons

- Some incidents never reach the public consciousness, because no one really knows about it; or the incident is simply not considered worth reporting; or media coverage is deliberately blocked or distorted; or media coverage is not deliberately blocked, but the information somehow gets lost; or the incidents are deliberately not reported widely for security reasons (e.g. for the protection of local church leaders).
- In situations where Christians have been discriminated against for many years, armed conflict can make them additionally vulnerable. Christians killed in areas where fighting regularly takes place are unlikely to be reported separately. Examples in recent years have been Sudan, Syria and Myanmar.
- Christians who die through the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care (due to long-term discrimination) are unlikely to be reported separately. Christians are not always killed directly; they can be so squeezed by regulations and other oppressive factors that they die – not at once, but in the course of years. This often includes the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care, or exclusion from government assisted socio-economic development projects. These numbers could be immense.

Ukraine: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2024	WWL 2023
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	0	0
6.2 How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	3	3
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	3	1
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	1	0
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	5	0

Ukraine: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2024	WWL 2023
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	0	0
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	0	0
6.9 How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	0	1
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	1	0

For the WWL 2024 reporting period:

- **Churches and religious properties attacked:** There were 5 cases where Christian churches/properties were damaged/confiscated/destroyed.
- **Christians detained:** Open Doors sources reported that at least 3 Christians were detained for faith-related reasons.
- **Christians sentenced:** Open Doors sources reported 1 case of criminal punishment.
- **Christians kidnapped:** At least 2 Christians were kidnapped.
- **Christians forced to leave the country:** 1 case was reported in which Russian occupation forces expelled a Ukrainian Greek Catholic priest from Melitopol to Ukrainian government-held territory.

5 Year trends

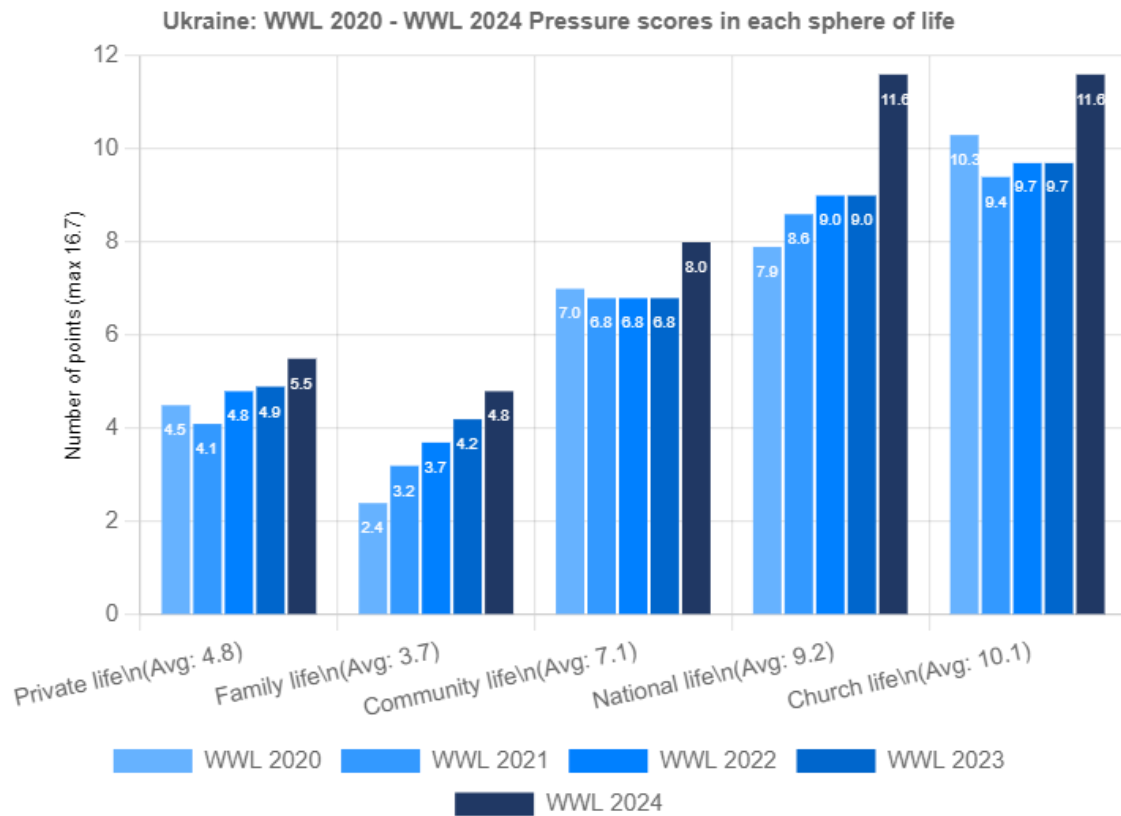
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

As can be seen in the table below, the level of average pressure was stable at 6.4 points until the Russian invasion began in February 2022. Since then, it increased and in WWL 2024 it jumped from 6.9 points to 8.3. This is a clear indication that the war in Ukraine has a very negative effect on Christians – especially in the Russian-controlled areas.

Ukraine: WWL 2020 - WWL 2024	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2024	8.3
2023	6.9
2022	6.8
2021	6.4
2020	6.4

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



Over the past five WWL reporting periods there has been a trend of rising pressure in virtually all *spheres of life*. The situation for Christians is most precarious in the *National* and *Church spheres of life*. The restrictions for Christians in the Russian-controlled areas have increased – and the expectations for the future are not bright.

- Pressure in *Private sphere of life* over the past five years has always been low - it has never been higher than 5.5 points (but there was a significant increase from 4.9 points to 5.5 between WWL 2023 and WWL 2024).
- Pressure in *Family sphere of life* has always been the lowest of the five *spheres of life*, but even here the score has been going up.

- Pressure in *Community sphere of life* was stable in the period WWL 2020-2023, but there was a major increase in WWL 2024. This was caused by two main factors: First of all, the tensions between the two Orthodox communities in mainland Ukraine and the Russian-controlled areas are having an increasingly negative effect; and secondly, the hostility of local government officials in the Russian-controlled areas towards non-ROC MP churches has intensified.
- Pressure in *National sphere of life* has increased to a very high level (11.6 points in WWL 2024) having been much lower in all preceding years. The very high score mainly reflects the growing pressure exerted by local authorities in the Russian-controlled areas of Ukraine.
- Pressure in *Church sphere of life* had always been the highest of all 5 spheres of life until WWL 2024 when it was caught up by the level of pressure in the *National sphere of life*. The very high score is an indication of the growing pressure exerted by local authorities in the Russian-controlled areas of Ukraine, as well as of the increasing influence of the ROC.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



The growing division between the two Orthodox communities in Ukraine and the Russian-controlled areas has resulted in a rise in the number of violent incidents. The authorities in the Russian-controlled areas are also responsible for more and more restrictions being imposed on non-ROC church groups. These scores do not include war-related damage. The Russian-Ukraine war is not primarily religious (Russia's aim is basically to restore its former empire), but religion does play a role in the background. Russia claims it is trying to restore Christian values, but most Christians would agree that war is not the right method to achieve this.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	-
Security	-
Social and Cultural	-
Technological	-

While no gender-specific forms of religious persecution were found for Christian women in Ukraine in the WWL 2024 reporting period, there are broader gender dynamics at play for women in the country.

Throughout 2023, it was reported that Russian and Russian-affiliated forces committed numerous grave abuses against civilians in occupied parts of Zaporizka, Khersonska, Donetsk, and Luhanska regions. They carried out enforced disappearances, summary executions of civilians, and unlawful detention and torture, especially targeting those presumed to oppose the occupation. There have also been widespread reports of sexual violence throughout that period. In an [OHCHR Press Release](#) published on 25 September 2023, the UN reported that Russian soldiers had been violently raping Ukrainian women. At this time, Ukrainian authorities documented 231 cases of conflict-related sexual violence perpetrated by Russian forces in occupied areas of Ukraine and in Russian detention facilities ([HRW 2024, Ukraine country chapter](#)). The true figures are likely much higher, as stigma, shame and fear of reprisals prevent survivors from seeking help. In addition, survivors have faced significant challenges in accessing medical, psychosocial and legal assistance.

Furthermore, in August 2023, data from the Ukrainian National Police revealed that during the first five months of 2023, registered cases of domestic violence increased by 51% compared to the same period the previous year ([Gwara Media, 5 August 2023](#)). Experts say that the increase in domestic violence is a byproduct of war, and they fear that numbers will continue to climb as the war continues. Stress, economic hardship, unemployment, and conflict-related trauma are fueling this increase, and the vast majority of victims of GBV are women ([Divoche Media, 4 August 2023](#)).

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via fines
Political and Legal	False charges; Imprisonment by government
Security	Abduction; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Men and boys are particularly subject to torture, beatings, imprisonment and killings in Russian-controlled areas. Church leaders are mainly men and face higher risks. As mentioned above in *Religious landscape*, a country expert states that church leaders, who are mostly male, "... are often interrogated, jailed, expelled, and fined in occupied territories". In Luhansk and Donetsk, Protestant church leaders and their family members are monitored and threatened. The psychological and verbal violence that Christian men are facing is a direct result of Russian occupation.

Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Ukraine):

- "The independent National Minorities Rights Monitoring Group (NMRMG) reported one documented violent act of antisemitism [in 2022], compared with three in 2021. There were again reports of vandalism of Christian monuments, Holocaust memorials, synagogues, Jewish cemeteries, and Jehovah's Witnesses' kingdom halls. The All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (AUCCRO) continued to promote interfaith dialogue and respect for religious diversity."
- "Local authorities in Lviv allowed a local developer to complete the construction of a private medical clinic on the grounds of a historic Jewish cemetery despite an August 2020 stop-work order from the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy. According to observers, government investigations and prosecutions of vandalism of religious sites continued to be generally inconclusive, although the government condemned attacks and police arrested perpetrators. Representatives of religious groups continued to report problems with local authorities in allocating land to build religious structures and with national authorities regarding restitution claims. President Zelenskyy made several public statements against antisemitism, participated in Jewish cultural events, and condemned Russian attacks on Jewish sites, including its shelling of a location near the site of the 1941 Babyn Yar massacre."

There have been no further incidents reported about other religious minorities in either Ukraine or the Russian-controlled areas of Ukraine. However, it is good to remember that, like all citizens, those belonging to any religious minority will be suffering from the war that has been raging since February 2022.

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Dictatorial paranoia

The negative influence of local authorities in Russian-controlled areas is only likely to improve if Russia decides to leave Ukraine and restore all occupied areas to Ukrainian authority. However, there are no signs at all that this will happen.

Christian denominational protectionism

The conflict between the two Orthodox communities is growing. The Moscow Patriarchate is still angered about the 2018 decision by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to grant independence to the Orthodox Ukrainian Church (OCU). Like the Russian government, the leadership of the Moscow Patriarchate has no inclination to recognize the OUC. This means that in both Ukraine and the Russian-controlled areas of Ukraine tensions will continue.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: OHCHR Press Release - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/09/un-commission-inquiry-ukraine-finds-continued-systematic-and-widespread-use>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: (HRW 2024, Ukraine country chapter) - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/ukraine#>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: (Gwara Media, 5 August 2023) - <https://gwaramedia.com/czogorich-zrosla-kilkist-vipadkiv-domashnogo-nasilstva-v-ukraini/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: (Divoche Media, 4 August 2023). - <https://divoche.media/2023/08/04/v-ukraini-cherez-viynu-rizko-zbilshyvsia-riven-domashnoho-nasylstva-eksperty-poboivutsia-shcho-kilkist-vypadkiv-lyshe-zrostatyme/>

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/>.

As in earlier years, these are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom):

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