

UKRAINE

Ukraine is known for its Orthodox churches, Black Sea coastline, and forested mountains. Europe's second largest country, it is a land of wide, fertile, agricultural plains, with large pockets of heavy industry in the east. Its capital, Kyiv, features the gold-domed St. Sophia's Cathedral, with 11th-century mosaics and frescoes. Ukraine is bordered by Russia, Belarus, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, Moldova, the Black Sea, and the Sea of Azov. Ukraine gained independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and has since veered between seeking closer integration with Western Europe and being drawn into the orbit of Russia, which sees its interests as threatened by a Western-leaning Ukraine. While Ukraine and Russia share common historical origins, the west of the country has closer ties with its European neighbors, particularly Poland, and nationalist sentiment is strongest there. Ukrainian is the official language but a significant minority of the population uses Russian as its first language, particularly in the cities and the industrialized east. The currency is the hryvnya.



Population
43,952,299



233,032 MI²

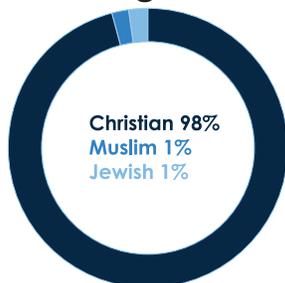
Slightly smaller than Texas



Ethnicities



Religions



FAMILY LIFE

It is common for multiple generations to live in the same household. Extended relatives do not usually live together, but often live in the same area. Families tend to be small with an average of two children. Typically, fathers are responsible for the financial state of the family and work outside the home, and mothers take care of the household. This is changing in larger cities where women often work.

Typically both sons and daughters help out with chores, which are usually divided according to traditional gender roles. Women are normally responsible for cooking and providing the meals for the family, and daughters may be expected to help out. It is not typical for parents to give allowances to their children and teenagers do not usually work. Parents usually keep track of financing their children's social and extracurricular activities, and teenagers may not be used to managing and budgeting money.

Parents are actively involved in arranging extracurricular activities for their young children and are less involved when students reach middle and high school. Fathers are seen as the authority and disciplinary figures and will usually decide on any punishment, with the support of the mother.

Many Ukrainian households own cats or dogs and they may be treated as members of the family, but would commonly not be allowed inside the house.

FRIENDSHIP

Teenagers usually socialize in groups or one-on-one with closer friendships. The term "friend" is used sparingly and only when referring to very close relationships. Spending time with friends of the opposite gender is considered more appropriate in groups. It is common for teenagers to make friends in elementary school and still remain close with them.

Eye contact is very important in Ukrainian culture and is considered a sign of respect. Showing respect to those who are older is expected, and it is uncommon for a teenager to call an adult by their first name. Borrowing money between close friends is common with the expectation that it will be paid back. Personal space is smaller in Ukraine, and sitting or standing close to someone is considered normal. Teenagers feel quite comfortable showing negative emotions amongst their peers and family, but may complain or express disappointment in an indirect way.

SCHOOL LIFE

Students generally have 6-7 classes per day and have little flexibility in choosing their academic classes. They may have an opportunity to choose a specialization after 9th grade. Students are divided into sections in elementary school and remain with the same group of students until graduation. They change classrooms for different subjects which are studied at the same level of difficulty for every student. Most students dress formally to school, and some schools require uniforms.

Bullying and fighting are taken seriously and may lead to being expelled from schools. Cheating among peers is common in high schools, and carries less serious consequences since it is viewed as helping a friend succeed.

The relationship between teachers and students is very formal. Students are expected to stand up when a teacher enters the classroom, to show respect. Many parents stay in frequent and direct contact with the teachers of their children, specifically the class teacher who mentors each class section. Parents are kept up to date weekly on the progress on their children through an academic book that shows their current marks.

Extracurricular activities are not usually offered in high schools. Teenagers typically take part in sports, music and other activities outside of school which usually require a fee to participate.

FOOD

Teenagers do not usually bring their lunch with them to school, and will instead buy something at the school cafeteria. Sometimes they bring snacks to eat between classes. Vegetarianism and food allergies are uncommon. Usually Ukrainians have a large lunch which includes a hot soup, and they tend to eat vegetables and fruits that are in season. Children are used to their parents preparing everything for them, and may not be comfortable making food for themselves. It is typical for mothers to constantly offer food to their children. Restaurant portion sizes are medium, and it is uncommon to take uneaten food home.

RELIGION

Religious institutions are generally only for worship and are not considered as community centers for non-religious activities. Families usually go to church together on Christmas and Easter and spend time with relatives. Most families consider themselves Orthodox Christians, but many do not attend church regularly. In religious families, Christmas Eve is celebrated with a Holy Dinner with 12 dishes and by singing carols. The New Year's holiday is usually celebrated by spending time with one's family, sharing large meals and giving presents. Small gifts are commonly given on Christmas and Easter, but it is even more common to give a present on New Year's Day.

PERSONAL CARE

It is common for people to shower daily. Sometimes people wear clothes more than once before washing. Teenagers do not usually wash their own clothes since mothers usually do this for them, and they may not be familiar with washers and dryers.



The Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) program is sponsored by the U.S. Department of State. FLEX provides competitively selected secondary school students from 21 countries in Europe and Eurasia with the opportunity to spend the academic year in the U.S. living with a volunteer host family and attending a host high school. Begun in 1993, FLEX now has over 27,000 alumni.