



**The Jewish Federations®**  
OF NORTH AMERICA  
Israel Office

## **THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF UKRAINE**

*Updated February 13, 2022*

**By February 2022, more than 100,000 Russian troops had massed along the border with Ukraine as the world watched and prepared for a possible Russian invasion of the country. On February 12, 2022, the State of Israel advised all Israeli citizens to leave the country immediately, just a day after US President Joe Biden said “American citizens should leave now,” and on February 13, The Jewish Agency began to evacuate many of its shlichim. While world leaders attempted to defuse the crisis, some in the Jewish world were preparing for a range of scenarios that could mitigate the impact on 200,000+<sup>1</sup> members of Ukraine’s Jewish community.**

### **THE THREAT OF OPEN CONFLICT**

Ever since Ukraine gained independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, it has 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.

Following the “Maidan” uprising in February 2014 that led to the ousting of Ukraine’s pro-Russian president, several momentous events have occurred in the country, including the unilateral (and internationally unrecognized) annexation of Crimea by Russia as well as the outbreak of sporadic military conflict in eastern Ukraine, where Russian-backed rebels (and possibly Russian troops as well) have been trying to break the region away from Ukraine. The conflict in Ukraine’s east has already claimed more than 14,000 lives.

From the end of 2021 the crisis with Russia has deepened significantly. As more and more Russian troops moved closer to the Ukrainian border, Western governments claimed that Russia was planning an invasion of its neighbor. According to many commentators, Russian President Vladimir Putin entertains dreams of a significant revival of Russian power, including expanding Moscow’s sphere of influence in eastern Europe, principally embracing former Soviet republics such as now independent Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus, Georgia and Ukraine. Putin has frequently spoken out about the “loss” of these areas after the Soviet Union collapsed. He may also hope to demonstrate to the west (and Russians) that the country is still a superpower despite significant economic challenges and the spread of democracy across much of the region.<sup>2</sup>

Russia, on the other hand, claims that NATO is attempting to expand its influence eastward (including possibly bringing Ukraine into the western military alliance), which it sees as a direct threat. President Putin has threatened “appropriate retaliatory military-technical measures” if what he calls the “West’s aggressive approach” continues.<sup>3</sup> Russia claims that in the negotiations over the reunification of Germany in 1990, then US Secretary of State James Baker said that NATO would not expand “even one inch” towards Russia. That “promise” was

<sup>1</sup> Estimates of the size of the community vary from 200,000 – 300,000 individuals.

<sup>2</sup> See for example, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/12/russia-ukraine-what-does-putin-want>

<sup>3</sup> “Is Russia preparing to invade Ukraine and what does Putin want?” BBC News, February 3, 2022

never included in final agreements, but Russia is now demanding an end to NATO military activity in Eastern Europe. That would mean combat units being pulled out of Poland and the Baltic republics, and no missiles deployed in countries such as Poland and Romania.<sup>4</sup> Others argue that President Putin is most threatened by the strengthening of democracy on Russia's border, as is happening in Ukraine.<sup>5</sup>

Some commentators have also linked the current crisis to other global challenges facing the United States. (See for example these pieces in the [Wall Street Journal](#), the [Financial Times](#) and on [National Public Radio](#). The argument here is that both Russia and China share an interest in a global order that is less America-centric, just as both see the United States is less willing and able to project power abroad. In addition, they point to divisions within the United States and between the US and its allies, especially in Europe. Finally, they argue that Europe's energy dependence on Russia, especially at this time of year, creates leverage for Russia and limits Europe's options.

By early February 2022, US officials were saying that Russia had assembled some 100,000 troops equipped with advanced weaponry along Ukraine's eastern border with Russia and northern border with Belarus, a Russian ally. The officials said that this was more than 70% of the military capability needed for a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and that the capital Kiev could fall in as little as two days.<sup>6</sup> The Pentagon also ordered all U.S. troops in Ukraine to leave the country and reposition elsewhere in Europe, and the U.S. State Department reduced its diplomatic staff at the U.S. Embassy in Kiev to the "bare minimum." US officials also warned that a Russian invasion of Ukraine could cause as many as 50,000 civilian deaths.<sup>7</sup>

Additional US troops have been arriving in Poland as part of a new American deployment to bolster NATO's forces in the region. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff U.S. Army General Mark Milley said that Russia's posture along Ukraine's border was unlike anything he has seen during his four-decade military career.<sup>8</sup>

Following issuance of an advisory to leave the country, a State Department spokesperson reiterated, "American citizens should not expect that the U.S. military is going to rescue them in Ukraine at the last minute. That's not going to be happening in this scenario. And that's why it is past time for them to leave Ukraine."<sup>9</sup>

On February 11, referring to the Russian troop build-up, US President Joe Biden said, "We're dealing with one of the largest armies in the world... and things could go crazy quickly."<sup>10</sup> The next day, Biden held an urgent call with President Putin. According to the White House, Biden made it clear that if Russia undertakes a further invasion of Ukraine, the US and its allies and partners will impose "swift and severe costs on Russia." Biden said that while the US remains prepared to engage in diplomacy, "we are equally prepared for other scenarios."<sup>11</sup>

As a result of the major political and military upheavals taking place, and the threat of a high level of casualties, the Jewish community itself may be vulnerable.

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<sup>4</sup> "Is Russia preparing to invade Ukraine and what does Putin want?" BBC News, February 3, 2022

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/01/russia-ukraine-putin-nato/621370/>

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/02/12/pentagon-orders-departure-of-us-troops-in-ukraine.html>

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2022/02/11/1080060546/biden-us-citizens-leave-ukraine>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/02/12/pentagon-orders-departure-of-us-troops-in-ukraine.html>

## UKRAINE'S JEWISH COMMUNITY

Europe's second largest country, Ukraine,<sup>12</sup> is a land of wide, fertile agricultural plains, and significant heavy industry. With a population of some 44 million, located between Europe and Russia (both physically and metaphorically), Ukraine continues to occupy a critical position in international affairs; and as evidenced by the current crisis, it is a major sticking point in escalating tensions between Russia and the West.

Ukraine is also a land with a long and important Jewish story that continues until this day. It is the only country outside of Israel led today by both a Jewish head of state, President Vladimir Zelensky, head of government (Ukraine's Prime Minister Volodymyr Groysman is also Jewish).

The history of the Jews of Ukraine includes some of the Jewish People's greatest highs and most difficult lows. On the one hand, Ukraine was the site of enormous tragedies such as the Chelminitzky massacres, and also Babi Yar and the Einsatzgruppen executions. At the same time, however, it also has a full and rich Jewish history. This includes the formation of several famous yeshivot, the development of much Ashkenazi culture, and the birthplace of people such as founder of Hassidism the Ba'al Shem Tov, former Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, national Jewish poet Haim Nachman Bialik, Zionist visionary Ze'ev Jabotinsky, authors Shalom Aleichem and Shay Agnon, tens of famous rabbinical figures, and many more.

Today, the country is home to the fifth largest Jewish community in the world, with an estimated 200,000 Jews.<sup>13</sup> Current political instability, which threatens to deteriorate into a full-scale Russian invasion, has left the entire country – including the Jewish community – not only facing a situation of dramatic economic decline, but of real physical danger.

## HISTORY

Jewish settlements in Ukraine can be traced back to the 8th century, when Jewish refugees from the Byzantine Empire, Persia and Mesopotamia settled in the Khazar Khaganate, mainly fleeing persecution.<sup>14</sup>

During the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth period (1569-1795), Jews in Ukraine were one of the country's largest and most important ethnic minority groups. But as they prospered, anti-Semitism flourished. The Cossack Uprising, led by Hetman Chelminitzky, which began in 1648, took place under the premise that "the Poles had sold the Cossacks as slaves into the hands of the accursed Jews." The resulting infamous Chelminitzky Massacres killed some 30,000 Jews, and destroyed around 300 Jewish communities.<sup>15</sup>

As is so common in Jewish history, significant tragedy and destruction gave way to a new era of renewal. Indeed, a short time after the Cossack Uprising and massacres, Ukraine was to become the birthplace of Hassidism, a new expression of Judaism. The teachings of Israel Ben Eliezer, known as the "Ba'al Shem Tov," (1698-1760) profoundly influenced the Jews of Eastern Europe – and indeed global Jewry; and the movement continues to play an important role in the Jewish world, even today. The rise of the Ba'al Shem Tov's movement, which was heavily influenced by Jewish mysticism – *kabbalah* - became known as "Hassidic Judaism," and it greatly enhanced the development and reputation of Jewish life in Ukraine.<sup>16</sup> In 1791, Catherine the Great established a

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<sup>12</sup> In this document, "Ukraine" generally refers to a vast area in Eastern Europe that today comprises the country of Ukraine, including those areas under dispute or in conflict. Historically, these areas have formed parts of many political entities, including the countries of Ukraine, Poland, Russia and the Soviet Union.

<sup>13</sup> "Ukraine Country Report," NCSEJ, 2021

<sup>14</sup> "The Jewish Community of Ukraine," European Jewish Congress

<sup>15</sup> Magocsi, P, "A History of Ukraine," 1996, p350.

<sup>16</sup> "The Jewish Community of Ukraine," European Jewish Congress

vast area in the west of her Russian Empire that became known as “The Pale of Settlement.” The region, which included all of Ukraine, was the only area of the Empire where Jews were permitted to live.<sup>17</sup>

As a result of the creation of the Pale of Settlement, during the 19th century, Ukraine was densely populated by Jews. Despite restrictions, Jews played a prominent role in the development of commerce and industry in the region, and especially in the growth of its major cities, including Kiev,<sup>18</sup> Odessa, and Kharkov.<sup>19</sup> A large number of the most important Jewish thinkers and personalities of the modern age were born there.

Although anti-Semitic attacks had made frequent appearances throughout the history of Ukrainian Jewry, matters became significantly worse from 1881. In that year, Tsar Alexander II was assassinated and Jews were falsely blamed for the killing. The resulting attacks on Jews throughout the Pale became known as the first “pogrom.”<sup>20</sup> These pogroms intensified and continued through the following three decades.

The anti-Semitic policies of the new Russian emperor, Alexander III, (particularly his infamous May Laws that remained in effect until the 1917 Russian Revolution) further tightened restrictions on where Jews could live in the Pale of Settlement and restricted the occupations that Jews could attain. Jews were subjected to frequent internal expulsions – including an edict that expelled all Jews from Kiev in 1886.

The ongoing persecution and policies under both Alexander III and his successor, Nicholas II (who was to be the last Tsar), resulted in hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian Jews opting to emigrate to the United States and other countries at the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century.<sup>21</sup>

While millions of Jews fled the region, others began looking for alternative answers and ideologies. As a result, Jews were at the forefront of the emerging communist movement, with Tsar Nicholas II even falsely declaring that “90% of revolutionaries are Jews.”<sup>22</sup> At the same time, other Jews promoted different ideologies, including liberalism, enlightenment, traditionalism and more. Perhaps most significantly, many Ukrainian Jews began to see Jewish nationalism as an answer to their problems, and this resulted in widespread adoption of the teachings of Zionism during this period. Indeed many of Zionism’s founders and leaders emerged from the region.

Following the Russian Revolution, a short-lived independent Ukrainian People’s Republic was established. This new country became the first modern state to establish a Ministry of Jewish Affairs, and Yiddish was declared an official language.<sup>23</sup>

Nonetheless, pogroms continued, and according to recently released state archives, at least 100,000 Jews were killed in attacks in Ukraine between 1918-21.<sup>24</sup>

Ukraine soon became a republic of the newly formed Soviet Union, and its Jewish population was subjected to communist attempts to stifle religion and religious practice. Despite this, the Jewish community continued to grow, and reached 2.7 million by the outbreak of World War II and the subsequent German occupation.

During World War II more than half of Ukraine’s Jews were murdered by the Nazis and their local Ukrainian accomplices. Over one million Jews were shot, usually in open fields, by the Einsatzgruppen. Perhaps the most infamous incident of the War in Ukraine occurred at Babi Yar, a ravine in the Ukrainian capital Kiev. A series of

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<sup>17</sup> “History of the Jews in Ukraine,” Wikipedia.org

<sup>18</sup> Often spelt Kyiev

<sup>19</sup> “Jewish Ukraine,” World Jewish Congress

<sup>20</sup> “History of the Jews in Ukraine,” Wikipedia.org

<sup>21</sup> “The Jewish Community of Ukraine,” European Jewish Congress

<sup>22</sup> “History of the Jews in Ukraine,” Wikipedia.org

<sup>23</sup> Magocsi, P, “A History of Ukraine,” 1996

<sup>24</sup> Kiev District Commission of the Jewish Public Committee for Relief to Victim of Pogroms.

massacres of Jews took place there, carried out by German forces and local collaborators, killing some 100,000 Jews in total. The most notorious and the best documented of these massacres took place 29–30 September 1941, when 33,771 Jews were murdered over a two-day period, following a decision to kill all the Jews in Kiev that was made by the military governor. The massacre was the largest mass killing for which the Nazi regime and its collaborators were responsible during its campaign against the Soviet Union.<sup>25</sup> Over the course of the War, many Ukrainians played an active role in the murder and despoliation of their Jewish neighbors, and even after the war, returning Jews were often met with hostility.<sup>26</sup>

Some 840,000 Jews remained in Soviet Ukraine following the War but the repression of Jewish cultural and spiritual life was especially severe in the country. The years of Communist oppression and restrictions led to further immigration and assimilation, and by the beginning of 1989, there were only around 500,000 Jews left in the region.<sup>27</sup>

The 1989 collapse of the Soviet Union and the establishment of an independent Ukrainian state in 1991 set the stage for two dramatic events in the history of Ukrainian Jewry: Further mass immigration, alongside a renaissance of Jewish life.

The precarious economic situation, coupled with an uncertain political future and ongoing anti-Semitism encouraged almost 80% of Ukrainian Jews to leave the country in the decade following the fall of the Soviet Union. The majority who left (some 266,000)<sup>28</sup> moved to Israel, while others immigrated to the United States, Germany and other countries.<sup>29</sup>

## THE UKRAINIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY TODAY

Today, some 200,000 Jews remain in Ukraine, although some estimate the number to be as high as 300,000. The country also boasts close to 300 Jewish organizations in some 100 towns and cities. The Jewish population is mainly concentrated in Kiev (110,000), Odessa and Dnepro (60,000 each) and Kharkov (50,000). Smaller numbers of Jews also live in many other towns. Western Ukraine, once a global center of Jewish life, has only a remnant of its former Jewish population, with Lvov and Chernovtsy each with around 6,000 Jews. The majority of Jews in modern Ukraine are native Russian and Ukrainian speakers, and only some of the elderly citizens speak Yiddish as their mother tongue. (In 1926, 76.1% considered Yiddish to be their native language).<sup>30</sup>

Since the fall of Communism, a renaissance of Jewish life has taken place for those Jews who remained in Ukraine, and Jewish communities in many cities and towns have been reconstituted. The main Kiev synagogue located in Podol was returned to the Jewish community in 1945, and for 50 years it was the only operational synagogue in Ukraine. Today, synagogues and other religious and cultural institutions function in every place with a significant Jewish population. Kiev's Beith Yaakov Shul (also known as the Galitskaya Synagogue) is a typical example of Ukrainian Jewish revival. Built in 1909 and used for more than 50 years as a factory cafeteria, the synagogue was returned to the community by the government in 2001 and renovated in 2004. Today it is a fully functional, thriving house of Jewish prayer.<sup>31</sup>

Across the country, religious leadership is provided by a number of mainly foreign-born rabbis, many from the Chabad movement, whose roots also lie in Ukraine.<sup>32</sup> Chabad Rabbis Yaakov Dov Bleich of Kiev and Shmuel

<sup>25</sup> Wendy Lower, "From Berlin to Babi Yar. The Nazi War Against the Jews, 1941–1944." May 24, 2013.

<sup>26</sup> "Jewish Ukraine," World Jewish Congress

<sup>27</sup> [www.berdichev.org/images/Jews\\_Table1.jpg](http://www.berdichev.org/images/Jews_Table1.jpg)

<sup>28</sup> "History of the Jews in Ukraine," Wikipedia.org

<sup>29</sup> "History of the Jews in Ukraine," Wikipedia.org

<sup>30</sup> *ibid*

<sup>31</sup> "The Jewish Community of Ukraine," European Jewish Congress

<sup>32</sup> "Jewish Ukraine," World Jewish Congress

Kaminezki of Dnepro<sup>33</sup> are today considered to be among the most influential foreigners in the country.<sup>34</sup> Reform Rabbi Duchovny has also become very prominent in Kiev. The Reform movement's World Union of Progressive Judaism operates in over 20 Ukrainian cities. The Masorti (Conservative) movement runs a Sunday school and youth group in Kiev as well as operations in other cities.<sup>35</sup>

Ukraine today has about 75 Jewish schools in some 45 cities, among them 15 day schools and 80 Sunday schools, 11 kindergartens, 8 yeshivas, and some 70 Hebrew-language *ulpanim*.<sup>36</sup> The Kiev Jewish Gymnasium Orach Chaim opened in 1990. Licensed by the State Educational Authorities, it was the first Jewish secondary school in Ukraine since World War II.<sup>37</sup> Summer camps are also very popular in Ukraine, and form an important part of informal Jewish education.

Numerous Jewish newspapers and journals are published in the country, including the prominent Kiev-based "Hadashot." Ten Jewish newspapers are published in Kiev alone, four of which have circulations of 10-15,000.<sup>38</sup> There is also a weekly TV program called "Yahad" on state television.<sup>39</sup>

Ukraine's capital, Kiev, boasts four synagogues, ranging from Reform to Chabad; a Jewish library; and the International Solomon University, a private university with a strong Jewish component. The multifunctional Menorah Center in Dnepro, which was opened in October 2012, is one of the largest Jewish community centers in the world.<sup>40</sup>

In November 2007, an estimated 700 Torah scrolls previously confiscated from Jewish communities during the Soviet Union's Communist rule were returned to Jewish communities in Ukraine by the state authorities.<sup>41</sup>

Jewish heritage tours now regularly visit many Ukrainian sites. The most popular place for visits is Uman, where the burial place of famed Hassidic leader Rebbe Nachman of Breslov is located. Some 70,000 (mainly Israeli) "pilgrims" visit there each year during Rosh Hashana, with many more throughout the year.<sup>42</sup>

Nonetheless and despite the multiple signs of a revival, even before the current crisis, the Jewish population in Ukraine was in decline, due to emigration and the aging process. The community, together with international Jewish welfare groups, is striving to alleviate the poverty of the many destitute Jews in the country, a large portion of whom are elderly.

In 2022, as diplomatic, military, social and economic conditions in the country continue to deteriorate, every aspect of daily life is affected. The Jews of Ukraine are not immune, and today face a troubled economy, open military conflict, political instability, ethnic tensions and a rapidly deteriorating standard of living.

### **Ukraine and Israel**

Ukraine and Israel have enjoyed full diplomatic relations since 1991, and Ukraine has supported the Jewish state in numerous important international votes.<sup>43</sup> In January 2019 the two countries signed a free trade agreement,

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<sup>33</sup> Formerly known as Dnepropetrovsk

<sup>34</sup> Ukrainian rabbis seen as 'powerful foreigners', Jewish & Israel News, Chabad.org

<sup>35</sup> Ukraine Country Report," NCSEJ, 2021

<sup>36</sup> *ibid*

<sup>37</sup> "The Jewish Community of Ukraine," European Jewish Congress

<sup>38</sup> Ukraine Country Report," NCSEJ, 2021

<sup>39</sup> "Jewish Ukraine," World Jewish Congress

<sup>40</sup> Chesler, Chaim, "The Menorah Center: Largest Jewish complex in world," Jerusalem Post, 22 October 2012.

<sup>41</sup> "Ukraine President Orders Return of 700 Torah Scrolls Confiscated by Communist Government", Religious Information Service of Ukraine News, November 2007.

<sup>42</sup> "The Jewish Community of Ukraine," European Jewish Congress

<sup>43</sup> Including the 2009 UN Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict (The "Goldstone Report.")

and trade is expected to soon approach \$5 billion.<sup>44</sup> When Israel's Prime Minister Naftali Bennett took office in 2021, one of the first calls he received was from Ukrainian President Zelensky.

In 2021, Israel's President Isaac Herzog visited Ukraine to mark the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Babi Yar massacres, and to open a new National Historical Memorial Reserve and Museum at the site.

### **Antisemitism**

Although official discrimination by the state all but halted very soon after Ukrainian independence in 1991, Jews still faced discrimination during the 1990s; an example being that Jews were not allowed to attend some of the country's educational institutions.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, some 40 synagogue buildings have been returned to the community by the state, of the nearly 2000 communal properties confiscated by the Nazis, and then the Soviet powers, during the previous century.

In the 2012 Ukrainian parliamentary elections, the far-right All-Ukrainian Union (Svoboda Party) won its first seats in the Ukrainian Parliament, garnering 10.44% of the popular vote and the fourth most seats among national political parties. The rise of Svoboda concerns Jewish organizations, many of whom accuse the party of having strong antisemitic tendencies, despite Svoboda's insistence that this is not the case. In May 2013, the World Jewish Congress listed the party as "neo-Nazi."<sup>46</sup>

A steady stream of antisemitic acts continue to cause concern for the community. In June 2021 bullet holes were found in a synagogue, and two months later, the grave of the daughter of Rabbi Nachman (the founder of the Breslav Hassidut movement) was razed and desecrated with pig heads, the fifth time the grave has been attacked since 2013.

In September 2021, the Ukrainian Parliament adopted a new law on antisemitism. The law defines antisemitism and provides compensation for victims.

According to the ADL, 38% of the Ukrainian population, harbor "significant antisemitic attitudes," compared to 9% in the USA, 20% in Italy, 27% in Germany, 37% in France and 30% in Russia.<sup>47</sup>

### **FEDERATION PARTNERS IN UKRAINE**

With the fall of the Soviet Union, Jews and Jewish organizations from outside Ukraine were able once again to reestablish formal connections and presence in the country and Jewish Federation partners the Jewish Agency, JDC, ORT and others today have significant local operations supporting a range of communal needs and programming.

### **The Jewish Agency for Israel<sup>48</sup>**

Even before the current security escalation, the activities of many organizations were severely hampered by the COVID crisis. From March 2020 until May 2021, almost all activities of The Jewish Agency in Ukraine went virtual.

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<sup>44</sup> Ukraine Country Report NCSEJ, 2021

<sup>45</sup> "History of the Jews in Ukraine," Wikipedia.org

<sup>46</sup> "World Jewish Congress calls Svoboda a neo-Nazi party," Ukrinform, 14 May 2013

<sup>47</sup> ADL - Global100.adl.org

<sup>48</sup> All information in this section is courtesy of The Jewish Agency for Israel

Despite the challenges, Agency madrichim (counsellors) and coordinators adapted and developed formats for various online platforms.

Most of the Covid-19 restrictions in Ukraine were lifted in early June 2021, before being re-instated in October 2021. In summer 2021, the Agency succeeded in running summer camps for teenagers, alongside several Aliyah seminars and holiday celebrations in peripheral Jewish communities. Following renewed restrictions on public events and meetings and a low vaccination rate, most Agency activities are once again online though a small number of in-person events, such as a recent weekend seminar for families in Kharkov and an overnight winter camp near Kiev, have also taken place.

The Jewish Agency currently has three shlichim (emissaries) in Ukraine, alongside 90 locally employed staff, and three “mobile Aliyah shlichim” who commute regularly between Israel and Ukraine.

Other current Agency activities in Ukraine include:

- Security:
  - Jewish communal institutions and schools are often targets of attacks. The Jewish Agency has invested more than \$1.1 million in equipment such as surveillance cameras, bulletproof glass and reinforced doors, which has significantly enhanced security on the ground over the past few years.
- Jewish Continuity:
  - The Agency currently operates eight Sundays Schools in Ukraine (in Kiev, Cherkassy Belaya Tserkov, Kmelnitzkiy, Dnipro, Kharkov, Odessa and Nikolaev), serving approximately 150 children and 85 parents and is currently in discussions to open two more locations if the security situation permits.
  - The Agency also conducts summer and seasonal camps in Ukraine. In 2020-21, Agency youth camps were held for 1,270 participants as well as 172 local counselors and 83 Israeli counselors with day camps running in eight locations.
  - The Jewish Agency offers educational leadership programs for youth and students that are designed to foster connections to Jewish roots and history for thousands of Ukrainian Jews.
- Connection to Israel:
  - Every year, several hundred participants from Ukraine take part in Taglit-Birthright Israel trips. Due to travel restrictions in 2021, only 35 participants took part, but these numbers are expected to rebound rapidly now that group travel is returning.
  - In 2020-21, 290 Ukrainian Jews participated in various Masa (long-term Israel experience) programs. So far, in the 2021-22 program year, there are just over 200 participants from Ukraine, with more expected to arrive in the coming weeks for the second half of the year. In the years prior to the pandemic, an average of 550 participants Ukrainian Jews took part in Masa programs each year. Approximately 80% of Masa alumni from the FSU make Aliyah.
  - The Jewish Agency also operates 108 ulpan (Hebrew language) classes in Ukraine. In 2021, 1,532 Ukrainian Jews regularly attended Hebrew-language classes at these ulpanim.
  - In addition, The Jewish Agency operates camps and educational programs in Israel that aim to enhance the bonds between the Jewish communities of Ukraine and Israel.

Since 2014, more than 45,000 immigrants made Aliyah from Ukraine, reaching a peak in 2017.



Year by year Aliyah from Ukraine has been as follows:

2021: 3,111	2018: 6,583	2015: 7,390
2020: 2,993	2017: 7,217	2014: 5,924
2019: 6,320	2016: 5,561	

Once new immigrants arrive in Israel, the Jewish Agency provides them with a range of absorption services, including employment training and relicensing programs to help ease the transition into Israeli society, and specifically into the Israeli workforce. For immigrants from Ukraine, there is a high level of interest in absorption programs such as the Nurses Training and Relicensing Program, Tel Ran Training in Software Engineering, CNC Program and the Rimonim Chef's Course.

For youth, The Jewish Agency offers tailored absorption programs to help integrate them into Israeli society, especially in preparing for their national service and enrolling in university. Such programs include Kibbutz Ulpan, Selah and Na'ale.

Jewish Agency activities in Ukraine have intensified, as the conflict with Russia has grown more serious. Agency offices in Eastern Ukraine remained open and active, even as bombings and fighting took place there beginning in 2017. The shelling of Donetsk in 2017 occurred just five kilometers from the Jewish Agency's offices in the region. From 2014-2017, the Agency also operated the Mayak Center for Displaced Persons near Dnipro, which helped more than 2,000 Jews from Eastern Ukraine escape the region where fighting was taking place, and make Aliyah.

### **The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee<sup>49</sup>**

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) reentered Ukraine some 30 years ago, and now has four field offices, located in Kiev, Dnepro, Kharkov and Odessa. Today, JDC provides the following services:

#### *Human Services*

JDC supports a network of 18 *Hesed* social welfare centers aiding Jews in need in 1,000 locations across Ukraine, as well as through related institutions like Jewish Family Services and JDC's Jewish community volunteers corps.

JDC also provides critically needed food, medicine, homecare, and other services to the approximately 37,000 poor Ukrainian Jewish elderly (including 9,900 Holocaust Survivors) and approximately 2,500 children at-risk and their families.

In 2020, JDC launched JOINTECH in the wake of COVID. The initiative leverages technology to conduct remote care and help combat loneliness among homebound Jewish seniors, who were already struggling with poverty and little access to the outside world. One JOINTECH pilot provides specially-designed smartphones that enable isolated elderly to connect with family, friends, and their larger Jewish community when in-person gatherings are not possible. To date, 750 people have benefited from the program in Ukraine.

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<sup>49</sup> All information in this section is courtesy of JDC

Additional JOINTECH initiatives include a remote training program and online reporting platform for homecare workers, as well as food security

### *Jewish Life & Leadership*

JDC supports 6 major JCCs (located in Kharkov, Odessa, Dnepro, Kiev, Zaporozhe and Lvov); Jewish cultural and holiday programming; Jewish family retreats and informal Jewish educational opportunities; and operates METSUDA, a young adult leadership training program which has more than 380 graduates who have become active in their Jewish communities.

Launched in 2014, JDC's FSU volunteer center has grown from a handful of local leaders to a network of more than 6,900 volunteers working in fifty-three cities in seven countries to improve the lives of more than 46,000 people. In Ukraine, more than 3,400 volunteers reach over 12,700 beneficiaries annually. The volunteer network was also critical for JDC's response during COVID, and during the early days of the political crisis in Ukraine, when thousands of volunteers were mobilized.

Active Jewish Teens (AJT) the largest Jewish teen group in the former Soviet Union, is JDC's growing peer youth network made up of more than 3,200 young Jews in 63 locations in 7 countries. In Ukraine, there are more than 1,100 active teens. AJT grew out of a confluence of various grassroots efforts to build connections between young Jews in the region and has grown from a handful of Jewish youth to thousands in just seven years. Through activities both on a local and regional level, AJT aims to nurture Jewish identity, community engagement, and leadership among Jewish youth, and to strengthen them as they try to lead the next generation in their local communities.

### **World ORT<sup>50</sup>**

Since ORT returned to the former Soviet Union in the early 1990s, it has played an important role in the renewal of Jewish life in the region, creating an educational network that serves approximately 22,000 people today. ORT's Jewish day schools, as well as training centers, offer formal and informal Jewish education and programming, that aim to rebuild and strengthen Jewish communities across the region.

The first ORT school in Ukraine was opened in Odessa in 1997 and today, there are five ORT schools in Ukraine, (two in Kiev, and one each in Odessa, Zapharozye, and Chernivtsi) and one affiliated school (Dnepro) educating over 3,400 students. ORT schools aim to provide students with high-quality STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) education and innovative educational programs. ORT Ukraine schools are widely recognized in the country as leaders in STEM education, and the Ukrainian government has frequently selected its schools to test new technology and pilot programs.

The schools also offer informal Jewish educational activities for students and their families such as school-wide Jewish holiday celebrations and marking Shabbat.

ORT's vocational training centers are an important resource for the wider Jewish community. Launched in 2002, ORT KeshetNet is a joint program with Project Keshet created in response to the need for enabling unemployed and underemployed Jewish women in the Former Soviet Union to become more economically secure. There are five ORT KeshetNet centers in Ukraine: Cherkasy, Khmelnytskyi, Krivoy Rog, Lutsk, and Vinnitsa.

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<sup>50</sup> All information in this section is courtesy of World ORT

## OTHER COMMUNAL INSTITUTIONS AND FEDERATION PARTNERS

The Jewish community encompasses various other Jewish organizations and communities located all over Ukraine, comprising many different Jewish religious and cultural groups, including numerous Zionist organizations. Since 1999 many of these groups have become members of the Jewish Confederation of Ukraine, which represents Ukrainian Jewry in many Jewish international organizations and at various international events.

**The Jewish Confederation of Ukraine** (the Confederation) is the major umbrella organization of the Jewish community today. It represents Ukrainian Jewry and “protects the interests of the community in state and non-governmental structures both in Ukraine and abroad.” The Confederation also “provides assistance to vulnerable Jews including orphans and Holocaust survivors,” and “supports Jewish educational projects and religious programs.” The Confederation also prioritizes securing the return of nationalized Jewish property.<sup>51</sup>

The Confederation was founded by the Union of the Jewish Religious Organizations of Ukraine, the Jewish Council of Ukraine, the Association of the Jewish Organizations and Communities (VAAD) of Ukraine and the Kiev City Jewish Community.

**Chabad** has a large and long-established presence in Ukraine, as detailed above. The movement has activities in 24 out of 25 of Ukraine’s oblasts (administrative divisions). According to the Ukrainian Jewish Encounter, “Going to a synagogue in (Ukraine) today and speaking with the rabbi means, in ninety percent of cases, visiting a Chabad synagogue and communicating with the Chabad rabbi. All the rabbis from abroad have learned Russian, while some have become fluent in Ukrainian. They take an active part in Ukraine’s civic life. They appear on television and help the entire population, Jewish and non-Jewish, within the framework of charitable projects. The authorities in all the regions of Ukraine view the rabbis as partners and help their social initiatives.”<sup>52</sup>

**The Israeli Embassy** in Kiev also has a strong presence in Ukraine and is itself an integral part of the Jewish community.

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<sup>51</sup> The Jewish Confederation of Ukraine

<sup>52</sup> <https://ukrainianjewishencounter.org/en/the-spiritual-leaders-of-ukraines-jewish-community/>