

Perspectives on depopulation and low fertility in eastern Ukraine: examining uncertainties during civil unrest

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Abstract

Ukraine is experiencing one of the most severe population declines of any country in the world. Although mortality and emigration have fuelled population decline, the main driver has been low fertility, around 1.2 in 2019. Over the past decades, economic and political unrest has wracked the country. Civil war erupted in 2014, resulting in 1.5 million internally displaced persons (IDPs). The following years continued to be unstable, particularly in eastern regions. This study analyses focus groups conducted online in July 2021 to understand Ukrainians' perceptions of depopulation and fertility. The research explores differences between IDPs and locals in two large cities, rural areas near the "Contact Line," and in Separatist regions. The discussions reveal how political instability intensified uncertainties, discouraging couples from having more than one child. Perceptions of depopulation depended on region: those in cities noticed population increase, those in rural regions detected little change, while those in Separatist areas noticed rapid deterioration.