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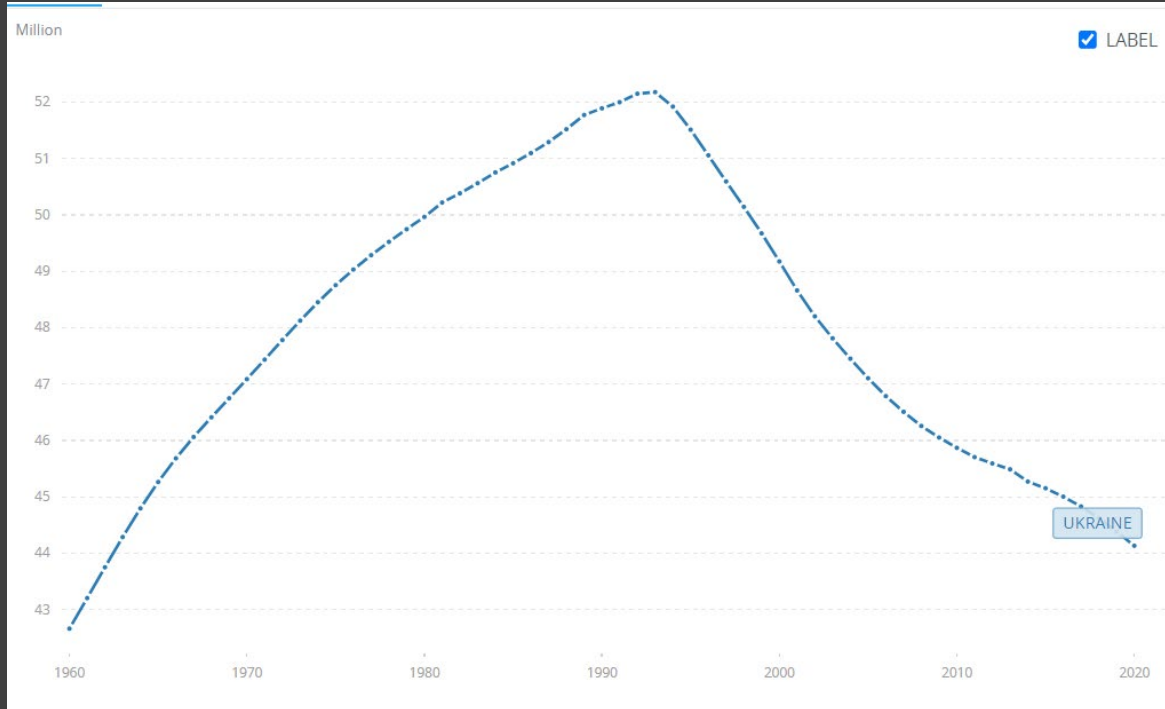
Perspectives on Depopulation and Low Fertility in Eastern Ukraine:

Examining uncertainties during civil unrest

The Triple Burden of Depopulation

- Academic discourse on low fertility have been dominated by Southern Europe and East Asia
 - Less attention to Eastern Europe
- Triple burden: Low fertility, high emigration, and relatively high mortality
- Many of those facing triple burden are also most deprived, facing accelerated ageing and a shrinking labor force.

Population decline in Ukraine



- Last census 2001

Population estimates in 2020

- World Bank: 44.4 mil
- State Statistics of Ukraine: 41 mil
- Cabinet Ministry: 37.3 mil
(based on 2019 “digital census”,
not including NGCA)

(1) United Nations Population Division. World Population Prospects: 2019 Revision. (2) Census reports and other statistical publications from national statistical offices, (3) Eurostat: Demographic Statistics, (4) United Nations Statistical Division. Population and Vital Statistics Reprot (various years), (5) U.S. Census Bureau: International Database, and (6) Secretariat of the Pacific Community: Statistics and Demography Programme.

Triple burden of High Emigration, High Mortality, and Low Fertility

Number of Emigrants and Immigrants



Джерело: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Population Division (2019). International Migrant Stock 2019 (United Nations database, POP/DB/MIG/Stock/Rev.2019)

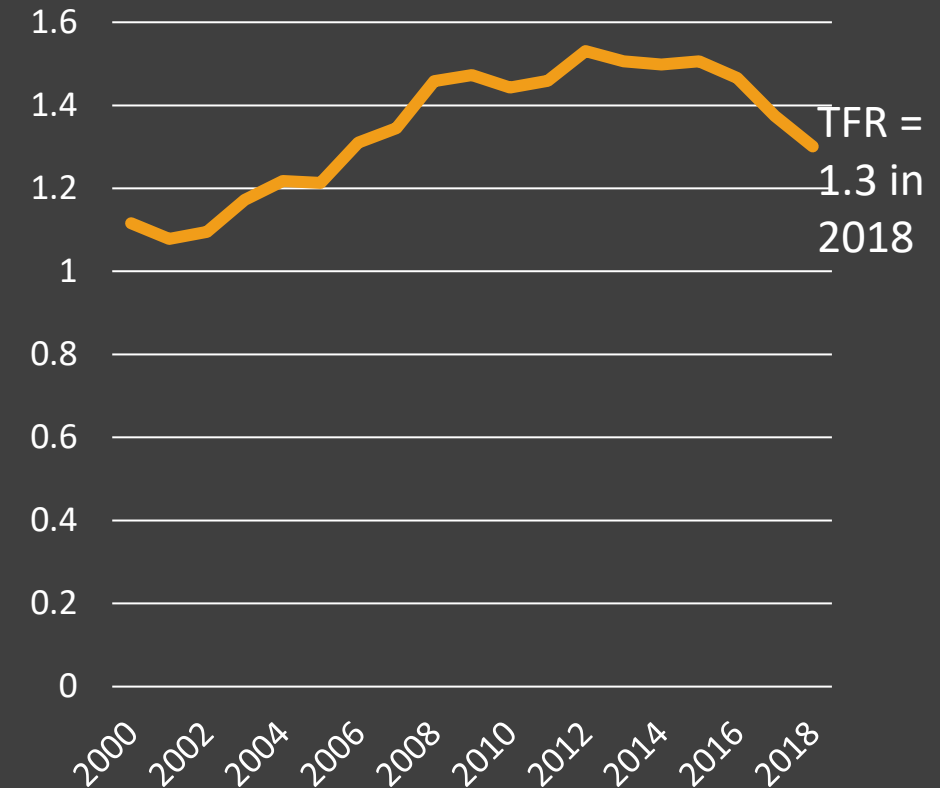
https://iom.org.ua/sites/default/files/iom-ukraine_facts-ukr_2019.pdf p. 10

Life Expectancy in 2019

Females: 77

Males: 67

Total Fertility Rate



Source: State Statistics Service of Ukraine, Ukrstat.org

Armed conflict

Ukraine is the only low fertility country to have experienced armed conflict on this scale

- In 2013 Euromaidan protests led to ouster of president

- Putin annexed Crimea

- Russian-backed separatists took control of Donbass in April 2014

- 13,000 died during fighting



Ukraine's Humanitarian Crisis

- 1.7 million Internally Displaced Persons in Ukraine (0.8 million in separatist regions and Russia)
- Largest group of IDPs in Europe
- Lost homes, jobs, income, and support networks (friends and family)



Non-Governmental Controlled Area

- **Non-governmental Controlled Areas** are an unknown entity
 - Controlled by Russian-backed separatists
 - Difficulties with public services, health systems, transport, documents
 - Covid restrictions have completely sealed off the area
- Low-level conflict continues on the border; Russia sometimes a threat



Online focus groups

- Aim to elicit social norms
- Conducted in June-July 2021
- Moderated by Ukrainian survey agency
- Questionnaire guideline developed for different groups:
 - Ukrainian Residents
 - IDPs
 - NGCA residents
 - Men
 - Women
- Discussions lasted nearly 2 hours



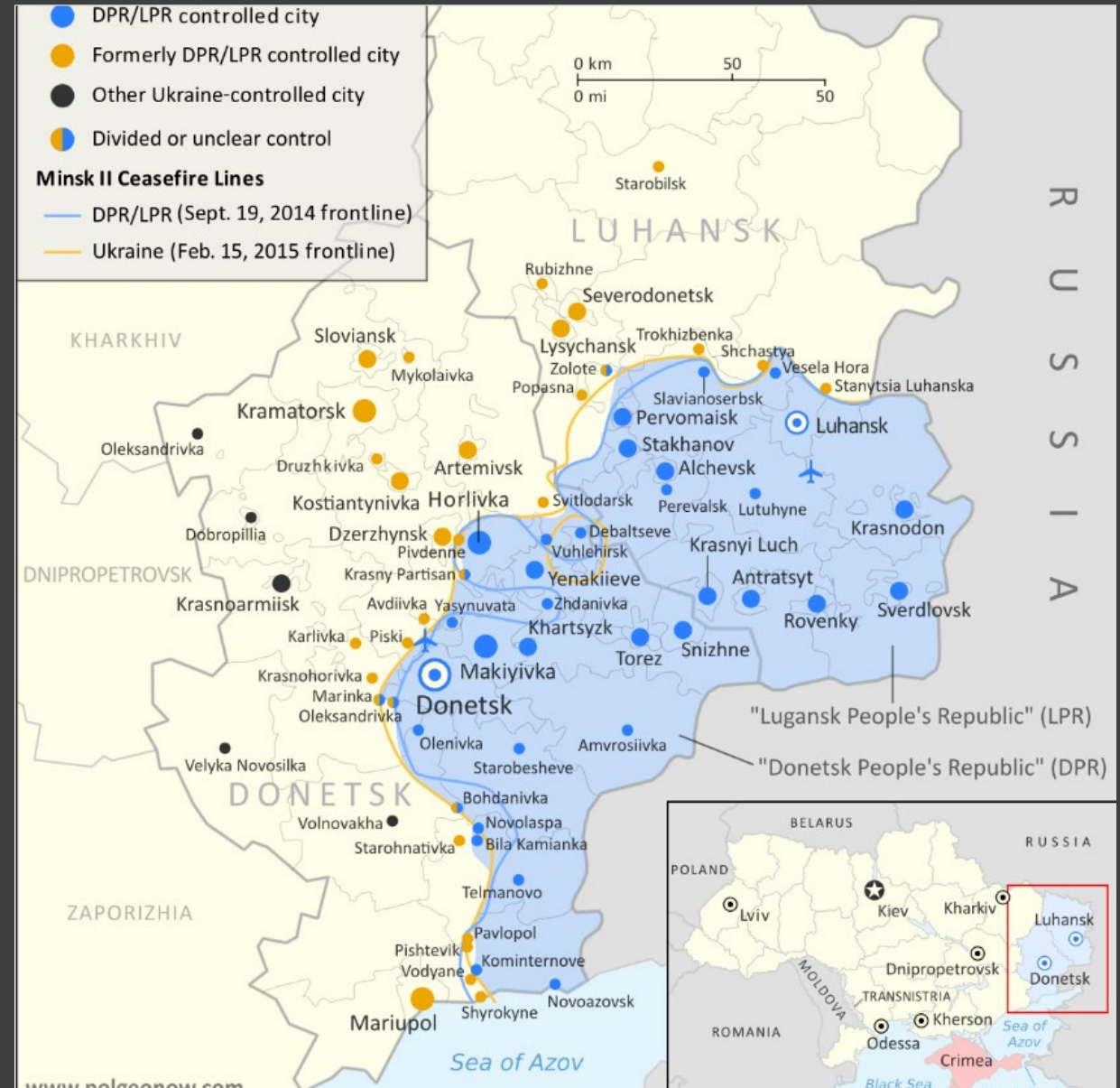
Focus group locations:

4 in Kharkiv (2nd largest city in Ukraine, 1.5 mil)

4 in Rural Areas near contact line

4 in Mariupol, on border of conflict

4 in Donetsk, NGCA (3 million people?)



Perceptions of Depopulation and Low Fertility

- How do focus group participants perceive population change occurring around them? How does this differ by region?
- How do participants talk about depopulation in Ukraine as a whole? Do they know that the country is shrinking or deem it to be a problem ?
- What are the main reasons for low fertility?

Perceptions of Population Change

- *How has the population of your area been changing in recent years?*
- Note:
 - Difficulties answering; Refused to answer or give opinion
 - Talked about characteristics of their local area (people became “angry”, “closed,” more alcoholics, IDPs, military presence);
 - Could be shaped by Covid lockdowns

Perceptions of Local Population Change

Government Controlled Areas in Ukraine

- Reflected urban/rural migrant flows, whether receiving area for IDPs
- Mariupol: influx of IDPs, especially professionals, students, and specialists; recent activity, increase in mothers and children on the street,
- Kharkiv: growing city, immigration of students/foreigners, some IDPs
- Rural areas near contact line: some saw decline and mentioned how childcare centers had closed; others noticed influx of IDPs, or thought nothing had changed

Perceptions of Local Population Change

Non-Government Controlled Areas

- Noticeable population decline
- Many people had left and conditions had deteriorated
- Although some people had returned (e.g. from Russia and Ukraine)
- Some noticed more people on the streets, but only in comparison with Covid restrictions and earlier years
- Others discussed increase in babies

Perceptions of Local Population Change

Кто-то живёт в центре, кто-то видит много людей. Кто-то живёт на окраине, где слышны выстрелы и, не дай бог, прям видны эти выстрелы, там, естественно, детей не будет. (FGD-14 NGCA_men)

Those who live in the **centre** [of Donetsk], they see **many people** [around them]. Those who live on the **outskirts**, where **shooting** is still heard, and god forbid, the shooting is still seen, there, naturally, **will be no children**.

FGD-14 NGCA_men



Perceptions of National Population Decline

What do you think about Ukraine's shrinking population – Is it a problem or not?

- Again, some could not answer the question or had no opinion.
- Most that answered saw national population decline as a problem, especially emigration that could result in labor market shortages.
- They also discussed how people were having fewer children due to financial hardships and little state support
 - Produces Social, Political, and Economic Uncertainty

Perceptions of National Population Change

Сокращение населения это проблема?

Это огромная проблема. Потому что молодежь выехала, огромное количество. Многие просто умерли до ковида еще из-за конфликта на Донбассе. Там же вот эти котлы Дебальцевские и прочие, столкновения самые большие унесли огромное количество жизней. Это второй фактор. А третий это что коронавирус. Сейчас я не знаю вообще, там же яма огромная демографическая, рождаемость плюс падает, потому что ни на что не хватает денег. Естественно, двое детей и ты уже третьего себе не позволишь.

FGD-12, Kharkiv-local_women

Is it a problem that population declines?

It is a huge problem. Because **young people have left, in huge amounts**. A lot of **[people]** died even before COVID due to the **Donbas conflict**. [...] This is the second factor. And the third factor is Covid. Nowadays, I do not know how it in overall, but there is this **demographic pit**, plus **fertility is declining because there is not enough money for anything**. Surely, if you have two children, you cannot afford a third one. (FGD-12, Kharkiv-local_women)

Reasons for Low Fertility

- The events of the past years were described as a whole leading to instability

Будет пандемия, будет война, будет опять какой-то конфликт – нет стабильности, у людей нет уверенности в завтрашнем дне, поэтому не заводят детей...

There will be a **pandemic**, there will be **war**, there will be some sort of **conflict** – [there is] **no stability**, **people do not have confidence** in [what will happen] tomorrow. **Therefore, they don't have children...** FGD-[add number], NGCA_men

ну слишком нестабильная ситуация, во всей стране, то молодежь как бы массово не хочет рожать детей, вот, отказывается.

The situation is very **unstable**, in the entire country. So, young people overall are kind of not wanting to give birth, **they refuse**. FGD-9 Kharkiv_IDPs_men

IDPs and Fertility Uncertainty

- IDPs also discussed how their experiences shape their childbearing plans.

А у меня допустим ситуация в стране вызывает опасения. Не знаю вообще, что можно ожидать в ближайшие годы. И не придется ли еще куда-то уезжать. А если опять же уезжать с детьми сложнее, где-то в другой стране устраиваться на новом месте, это все не так просто. FGD-10 Kharkiv_locals_men

For me, the situation in the country still raises **fears**. I don't know in general, what to expect in the next few years. And **whether I do not need to have to flee somewhere again**. But then again, **if I have to flee with children**, it would be **more difficult** to go somewhere in another country and settle in a new place, everything is not so simple. FGD-10 Kharkiv_locals_men



Conspiracy theories

- In a discussion among IDPs in a rural area close to the “Conflict Line,” participants debated who was behind the most recent events...

Так оно всё и идет, так всё и сделали. Умирают, война. Потом вирус, а потом...и еще плюс куча всяких моментов, которые наталкивают на то, чтобы ты еще и не рожал. Потому что тяжело поставить ребенка. Тут одного попробуй поставь, а двоих-троих я вообще молчу. К этому вся и идет. А для чего это все делается? Кому хуже от этого? А от этого как бы...мы вообще тут тараканы, как по мне. Те, кто это все делает, это делается специально. У нас давно наукой доказано, что перенаселение на земле происходит, планета земля. И каким-то образом...у нас никто не спрашивает, к сожалению, хотим мы жить, или не хотим, всех под ряд косят.

P4: That is **how everything goes**, and **how everything has always been**. ‘[People] **die**, [there is] **war**. Then, there is the **virus**, then there are **many other factors that provoke one not to give birth**. Because it is hard to sustain a child. It is hard to sustain one child, but two-three, no comments. Everything is moving in that direction. **Why is this all taking place?** Who is negatively affected by this? And then...we all are, in my view, like **cockroaches**. Those [people] who are behind all of this ...**those who are doing this, they are doing this on purpose**. Science has proved long ago that overpopulation is happening on planet earth. And then, in some way, the question is... we are not being asked, unfortunately, whether we want to live or not, [they] mow down everyone in a row.

-FGD-7 Don rural women.

Moderator: And who does it all?

P4: **I don't know who does it**

P3: Americans (smiling)

Conclusions

- Perceptions of population change are very local and depend on surroundings
 - Those in IDP receiving areas saw their population increasing, while most of those in the NGCA felt their region was dying out
 - Some noticed local population booms
- Most thought population decline in Ukraine was a problem, especially emigration, which was a threat to the labor market (despite high unemployment)
- Macro-level events such as the war and pandemic have led young people to stop having children
- However, growth in cities – even when leads to decline of villages – was seen in a positive light
- Perceptions of that Ukrainians needed to have more children to save the nation was not often mentioned
- Discussions about Ukrainian/Russian identity were rare