

Frozen Conflicts and Depopulation in Eurasia: Population Processes in De Facto States

- Across Eurasia outmigration and declining fertility are driving population decline in many countries, spurring economic and social concerns and raising questions concerning state capacity. In some regions, population declines are exacerbated by the mortality and population displacement associated with armed conflicts, many of which go unresolved for many years. Armed conflicts reaching relative low levels of aggression (often through treaties or ceasefires) yet lacking resolution have been referred to as “frozen conflicts”, a term which obscures the dynamic changes in population size and composition found within these regions. This paper examines depopulation in the Eurasian countries of Armenia/Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, focusing on population declines within contested territories to highlight the way in which de facto states provide a pathway for the inclusion of low state capacity and conflict into approaches to depopulation. Findings emphasize the macro level opportunities for outside actors to either assist or provoke depopulation processes, draw attention to depopulation as both a cause of and reaction to low state capacity, and link depopulation to shifting ethnic balances. I find that so-called, “frozen conflicts” generate dynamic population changes overtime, providing unique insights into small area depopulation