

## Ukrainians

### Profile

Large numbers of Ukrainians speak Russian as their first language (49 per cent) and many, especially in urban areas, have been assimilated by the Russian community. Rural Ukrainians retain their language and a separate identity. The 1999 census recorded 237,000 Ukrainians.

### Historical context

In 2002 Minsk and Kyiv exchanged ratification instruments for a 1999 agreement easing the procedure for Belarusians in Ukraine and Ukrainians in Belarus to change their citizenship.

### Current issues

A number of Ukrainian organizations have been created but cultural and linguistic revival is modest mainly because of the shortage of resources and economic constraints.

The context of Belarusian-Ukrainian relations changed significantly as a result of the 'Orange Revolution' in Ukraine in 2004, and Ukraine's subsequent embrace of a pro-Western orientation. Portrayals of Ukraine in the Belarusian media reportedly depict Ukraine as diverging from the path of Slavic unity putatively followed by Presidents Lukashenka and Putin. In April 2005 five Ukrainian citizens were detained in Minsk on charges of attending an unauthorized meeting in the city; they subsequently went on hunger strike before being later released. In March 2006 another six Ukrainian citizens were arrested and Ukrainian journalists prevented from reporting on the elections in Belarus. While straining relations between the two governments, the impact on ethnic Ukrainians in Belarus was minimal.