**Ukraine** is a country in [Eastern Europe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Europe). Ukraine [borders](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_Border_of_Ukraine) the [Russian Federation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russia) to the east and northeast, [Belarus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belarus) to the northwest, [Poland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poland), [Slovakia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slovakia) and [Hungary](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hungary) to the west, [Romania](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romania) and [Moldova](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moldova) to the southwest, and the [Black Sea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Sea) and [Sea of Azov](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sea_of_Azov) to the south and southeast, respectively. It has an area of 603,628 km2, making it the largest country entirely within Europe.

The Ukrainian landscape consists mostly of fertile plains (or [steppes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steppes)) and plateaus, crossed by rivers such as the Dnipro, [Seversky Donets](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seversky_Donets), [Dniester](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dniester) and the [Southern Buh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southern_Bug) as they flow south into the [Black Sea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Sea) and the smaller [Sea of Azov](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sea_of_Azov).

Its various regions have diverse geographic features ranging from the highlands to the lowlands. The country's only mountains are the [Carpathian Mountains](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carpathian_Mountains) in the west, of which the highest is Mountain Hoverla at 2,061 metres, and the [Crimean Mountains](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crimean_Mountains) on Crimea, in the extreme south along the coast. Significant natural resources in Ukraine include iron, ore, coal, manganese, natural gas, oil, salt, sulfur, graphite, titanium, magnesium and an abundance of arable land. Despite this, the country faces a number of major environmental issues such as inadequate supplies of potable water; air and water pollution and deforestation, as well as radiation contamination in the north-east from the [1986 accident at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chernobyl_disaster).

Ukraine is home to a very wide range of animals, micro-organisms and plants. Ukraine has long been a world [breadbasket](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Breadbasket) due to its fertile conditions. The country, as of 2011, was the world's third-largest grain exporter. Ukraine is one of ten most attractive agricultural land acquisition regions.

The territory of Ukraine was first inhabited at least forty-four thousand years ago.In the [Middle Ages](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle_Ages), the area was a key center of [East Slavic culture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Early_East_Slavs), before being divided between a variety of powers. A [Cossack republic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cossack_Hetmanate) flowered for a century in the [early modern period](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Early_modern_period), but Ukraine remained otherwise divided until its consolidation into a Soviet republic in the twentieth century, becoming independent in 1991.

Ukraine is a [unitary state](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unitary_state) composed of 24 [oblasts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oblast) (provinces), one [autonomous republic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autonomous_republic) ([Crimea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crimea)), and two cities with special status: [Kiev](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kiev), its capital and largest city, and [Sevastopol](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sevastopol), which houses the Russian [Black Sea Fleet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Sea_Fleet) under a [leasing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leasing) agreement. Ukraine is a republic under a [semi-presidential system](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semi-presidential_system) with separate [legislative](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legislative), [executive](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Executive_branch), and [judicial](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judicial) branches. The country is home to 46 million people, 77.8 percent of whom are ethnic [Ukrainians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ukrainians), with sizable minorities of [Russians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russians) (17%), [Belarusians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belarusians) and [Romanians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romanians). [Ukrainian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ukrainian_language) is the [official language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Official_language) of Ukraine. Russian is also widely spoken. The dominant religion in the country is [Eastern Orthodox Christianity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Orthodox_Christian), which has strongly influenced [Ukrainian architecture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ukrainian_architecture), [literature](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ukrainian_literature) and [music](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Music_of_Ukraine).