



Press Release

April 11, 2003

Ukrainian Canadians in the 2001 Census: A Brief Overview

Canadian census figures released recently show that Ukrainians remain a major ethnic group in this country, although native language knowledge continues to drop. The total Ukrainian numbers are up slightly from the 1991 and 1996 censuses, albeit with fewer respondents claiming single origin (ie, an exclusively Ukrainian background). Renewed immigration from Ukraine, which developed over the course of the 1990s, had only a slight impact on Ukrainian-Canadian demographic trends as the numbers involved were relatively small.

The statistics presented here focus on ethnic origin, language, and immigration. Data regarding religion has yet to be released. The census figures should be approached with some caution. Changes over the last 20 years in how information regarding ethnicity has been posed in the census questionnaire and the establishment of "Canadian" as an origin category have made direct comparisons with earlier statistics no longer possible: the data base is not consistent. As a result, the origin statistics provide a general indication of trends, but not a solid base for precise analysis.

Ethnic Origins

In 2001, there were 1,071,060 Ukrainians in Canada out of a total population of 29,639,035. Of this number 326,200 were single origin, while 744,860 were multiple origin (ie, individuals claiming more than one ethnic background). The origin category "Canadian" obtained the greatest number of responses on the census (a total of 11,682,680). Nationally, Ukrainians were the 9th most populous group in Canada, (now) slightly behind the Chinese. They ranked quite highly in western Canada—British Columbia (10th place), Alberta (7th), Saskatchewan (6th), and Manitoba (5th)—but less so in central Canada (12th in Ontario and 22nd in Quebec). They did not figure significantly in Atlantic Canada or the territories.

In absolute terms the national figure represents an increase of 1.6 per cent in the total Ukrainian-Canadian population since 1991 (when it stood at 1,054,300). It is a well below the 9.8 per cent increase in Canada's population overall during the decade, but something of a 'recovery' from the 1996 census results which saw the Ukrainian-Canadian population fall to 1,026,470. In proportional terms, this means that the percentage of Ukrainians in the Canadian population overall fell from 3.91 in 1991 to 3.61 in 2001. There was a substantial decrease in the number of single-origin Ukrainian Canadians—from 410,410 (406,645 using another method of calculation) in 1991 to 326,200 in 2001. The majority of this drop occurred between 1991 and 1996, when the single-response figure stood at 331,680. This can partially be understood as one aspect of an inevitable demographic trend with the passing away of individuals from older (interwar and post-World War

Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies
Канадський Інститут Українських Студій
Institut Canadien d'Etudes Ukrainiennes

Two) generations in which single origin was commonplace. The addition of “Canadian” as a suggested origin category since the 1996 census most likely influenced the figures as well.

The proportion of the Ukrainian-Canadian population found in specific provinces or regions remained much the same as it was in 1991. This provides at least a pause to certain historic trends in the internal migration of Ukrainians in Canada, namely the steady increase in the proportion of Ukrainian Canadians in British Columbia (starting with a figure of 1.1 per cent in 1931, rising incrementally to 16.9 per cent in 1991, and dropping slightly to 16.7 per cent in 2001) and the dramatic decrease in the proportion of the Prairie province’s Ukrainian-Canadian population (from 85.7 per cent in 1931 to 53.4 per cent in 1991, with only a minor change to 52.8 per cent in 2001). Ontario’s share of the Ukrainian-Canadian population increased just slightly from 26.1 per cent in 1991 to 27.2 per cent in 2001.

Edmonton, Winnipeg, and Toronto—each with a population of over 100,000 Ukrainian Canadians—remained the major urban centres for Ukrainians in Canada, while Vancouver (76,525) and Calgary (65,040) also registered substantial numbers.

Language

A total of 148,090 Canadians claimed Ukrainian as their mother tongue in 2001, down from the 187,015 in 1991 (and much reduced from the 285,115 in 1981). The drop is much in keeping with a national trend which saw a decline in the numbers of individuals from ‘established’ ethnic groups—Italians, Germans, Poles, and Dutch—claiming native language knowledge. This reflects increasing death rates related to the aging of individuals from these groups with a native language fluency and a decline in the number of immigrants from European countries. A much greater proportion of Canada’s allophone population (those with a mother tongue other than one of Canada’s official languages) now consists of recent immigrants from non-traditional source regions (eg, east and southeast Asia, the sub-continent, and so forth). In fact, Tagalog (aka Pilipino) has superseded Ukrainian as the second leading non-official mother tongue in Winnipeg (German remains in first place).

A breakdown of Ukrainian language knowledge in Canada by age groups indicates that just less than half of those individuals claiming a Ukrainian mother tongue (73,930) are 65 years of age or older. This suggests that the loss in linguistic fluency is almost certain to continue. There seems to have been a minor increase in language skills in the lower- and middle-age cohorts, presumably as a result of the renewed immigration from Ukraine.

The use of Ukrainian as a home language increased nation-wide from 31,990 in 1991 to 49,985 in 1996, and finally to 67,665 in 2001. To a degree this is due to renewed immigration from Ukraine. The more pertinent factor, however, is likely to be a looser interpretation of what constitutes ‘home language.’ For the 1996 census the definition read “the language spoken most often at home by the individual at the time of the census.” In 2001, it became “the language spoken most often or on a regular basis at home by the individual at the time of the census.” Ontario had the greatest number (29,300) of individuals with a Ukrainian home language; of these, 19,855 lived in Toronto. In relative terms, Ontario and Quebec were the only provinces in which the number of people claiming Ukrainian home language use was greater than 10 per cent of the Ukrainian-Canadian population. Among those claiming Ukrainian home language use across the country, 14,325 used Ukrainian exclusively, 14,515 mostly, 5,385 in equal measure, and 33,440 regularly.

Immigration

A total of 23,435 individuals emigrated from Ukraine to Canada in 1991-2001. The majority of these (15,875) settled in Ontario, particularly in Toronto (13,835). This represents a significant increase in the number of immigrants from Ukraine over the decade, although their numbers remain relatively modest. The figures

cited do not take into account the ethnic origin of the Ukrainian immigrants; nor do they factor in possible ethnic Ukrainian immigration from a third country.

An additional 1,380 individuals from Ukraine were registered in the census as non-permanent residents of Canada.

The significance of the recent arrivals is underscored by comparing their numbers against those of earlier immigrants born in Ukraine. Those who came here in 1991-2001 constitute 45.4 per cent of the total immigrant population (51,610) from Ukraine. Those who arrived before 1961 represent a further 41.1 per cent, while the remaining 13.5 per cent came in the intervening period of restricted emigration from Ukraine.

The impact of recent immigration from Ukraine is not readily obvious. In overall demographic terms the new arrivals do not seem to make a major difference. However, in respect to Ukrainian language use they seem to have increased numbers in lower- to middle-aged cohorts.

- 30 -

Andrij Makuch
Research Co-ordinator,
CIUS Ukrainian Canadian Programme