Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union

Ukraine's Jewish Community: Current Dynamics and Needs Assessment

Author: Vyacheslav Likhachev

UCSJ | 1015 15th ST NW, SUITE 600, WASHINGTON, DC 20005| www.ucsj.org | ucsj@ucsj.org

Contents

Executive summary

In the context of a full-scale Russian invasion, Ukrainian Jewry is experiencing a severe crisis. This crisis has many aspects, including human and material losses directly resulting from the hostilities, a sharp decline in the community due to emigration, reduced mobility of those Jews who have remained in the country, the severing of previously important ties, the reorientation of community organizations from their usual activities to addressing urgent humanitarian needs, and a reduction in financial resources.

In these extraordinary circumstances, the Jewish community of Ukraine has demonstrated considerable resilience and the ability to respond to challenges. The Jews of Ukraine and their institutions are enduring all the trials that have befallen their country, together with the entire population, helping others to the best of their ability. In these circumstances, it is natural that many activities previously important to the community, such as education, museum projects, and other cultural initiatives, as well as newspaper publishing, have declined or been curtailed altogether. On the contrary, a stubborn attempt to maintain the same level of pre-war activities in a new context would have been a sign of inadequacy.

Active humanitarian work helped the Jewish community reach beyond its usual circle of "clients." This not only introduced broad segments of the population to the activities of Jewish organizations but also helped shape a positive image of the Jewish community in the eyes of society as a whole. This changed the very nature of Ukrainian Jewry: from a "community for itself," it became a "community for others," in practice approaching the religious ideal theoretically formulated by the ideologues of American reformism.

At the same time, it is clear that after the hypothetical end of the war, systematic and large-scale efforts will be necessary even to return to a normal existence, and it is unlikely that this will be possible to the full extent. Institutional structures will need to be creative and find innovative ways to nurture and sustain Jewish identity among potential community members.
The success of this work will largely depend on external support. The activities of Ukrainian Jewish community institutions are almost entirely dependent on funding from abroad. After three and a half years of full-scale war, their own internal resources have been completely exhausted. In addition, there is a clear need for professional and methodological assistance, at least in training a new generation of community activists, professionals, and future leaders.

Introduction: characteristics of the Ukrainian Jewish community and challenges of wartime

Like Ukrainian society as a whole, Ukrainian Jews are going through difficult times. Russian aggression not only physically threatens people's lives and safety, but also hinders the normal functioning of many social institutions, including national and religious communities. It seems that the preservation and successful development of Jewish identity in Ukraine requires conscious and systematic efforts by both community institutions within the country and partners and donors abroad, primarily in the US, but also in Israel.
The post-Soviet Jewish community has its own specific characteristics. Due to the high level of intermarriage over several generations, the lack of a compact territory, and almost complete linguistic assimilation, identification with Judaism is not automatically "inherited" but is, in essence, a conscious choice. The mere presence of Jewish roots, usually distant, does not in itself ensure self-identification with the Jewish community. In modern conditions, a person may be aware of and accept their ethnic origin, but not attach any particular significance to it. Family upbringing, by and large, does not guarantee the reproduction of a stable identity; rather, it is a vague sentiment that still needs to be actualized.

In this context, community institutions that can help interested people with Jewish roots to "discover" their identity take on particular significance. In practice, it is the organized structures of the community that ensure the preservation and strengthening of a sense of belonging to Judaism. They support an informational and social environment in which self-identity is filled with meaning for the individual. In this way, community institutions are responsible for the very survival of the Jewish people. This is no easy task for Jewish organizations.

It should also be borne in mind that after decades of forced secularization and persecution of Judaism, post-Soviet Jewry is either not very religious or not religious at all. In most countries of the diaspora and in Israel, every Jew, even non-believers, attends synagogue at least once during significant stages of their life cycle, such as their bar mitzvah (and in some communities, their bat mitzvah), wedding, and funeral. Many non-religious Jews visit the synagogue at least once a year, on Yom Kippur. This natural order of things does not work in our region. The average post-Soviet Jew has no connection to community institutions that create an appropriate social space or to kashrut, as the vast majority ignore traditional dietary rules and restrictions. In our region, religious infrastructure is necessary for preserving the essential essence of Judaism and is extremely important for the small "core" of the community, but it is completely insufficient for maintaining the identity of the majority of those who associate themselves with Judaism to one degree or another. In some cases, the strict requirements for community members in ultra-Orthodox circles can even push modern secular people, especially those of mixed heritage, away from Judaism.

For post-Soviet Jews, their connection to Judaism is formed either intellectually, through knowledge, or emotionally, through culture, which in modern conditions means the consumption of audiovisual content. Accordingly, educational institutions at all levels, both formal and informal, book publishers, the media, multimedia online platforms, music and theater festivals, etc., are of particular importance for the "actualization" of Jewish identity, its strengthening and development. Organizational structures and donors clearly underestimate the importance of this cultural and intellectual component of activity for the development or even survival of the Jewish community. Maintaining Jewish identity in an environment of free choice requires the community to be competitive. Comparing this to a supermarket, where customers choose the cultural model they like from those available, may be an exaggeration, but it is clear that never before in history has national identity been so flexible and changeable. The Jewish community must be able to offer an attractive informational and cultural product designed to support identity.

The war has become a significant challenge, seriously complicating the task of the organized Jewish community to reproduce and develop Jewish identity.

In a situation of external existential challenge threatening the existence of the Ukrainian people, the importance of belonging to the Ukrainian civic nation, with the acceptance of its symbols and ethno-cultural elements, naturally increases for the country's inhabitants. This means that community institutions must make even greater efforts than in a "normal" situation to ensure that Ukrainian Jews/Ukrainians of Jewish origin feel not only Ukrainian but also Jewish. Meanwhile, it is the educational, informational, and cultural activities of the Jewish community that have suffered the most from the reduction in financial and human resources due to the war.

One of the obvious consequences of Russian aggression, which is destroying the community, is the mass exodus of Jews abroad. Based on some indirect considerations, it can be assumed that the percentage of Jews among refugees and emigrants is higher than in Ukrainian society as a whole. And it is certainly true that fewer Jews have returned – and fewer will return after the hypothetical end of hostilities (at least from Israel). Depopulation will be a serious problem for Ukrainian society as a whole after the war, but it will hit the Jewish community in Ukraine particularly hard.

The demographic aspect will be discussed in more detail below; for now, it is important to identify the "risk factors" that threaten the continued well-being of the Ukrainian Jewish community.

There are other, less obvious negative aspects of the war that are quietly but steadily eroding Jewish identity. These include, for example, restrictions on mobility and the severing of familiar personal and organizational ties. Jews have always been characterized by high mobility. Visits to Israel, both organized, such as Taglit, and individual, have contributed to strengthening the identity of post-Soviet Jews for decades. Often just as important in this sense were trips to the US and Europe, which included meetings with relatives and friends who had emigrated and visits to Jewish "landmarks" that do not exist in Ukraine. There are no Jewish museums in Ukraine similar to those that can be visited in Berlin or Warsaw (or even Moscow), and there are no Holocaust memorials like those in Washington or Auschwitz. Restrictions on travel for men of conscription age have greatly reduced the importance of these channels for maintaining Jewish identity. Of course, due to the security situation, the high cost of insurance, and logistical difficulties (it is impossible to fly to Kyiv or Odesa), fewer Jewish tourists have been coming to Ukraine on "journeys to their roots," fewer community professionals have been coming to exchange experiences, fewer teachers have been coming to give lectures, and so on. Only pilgrims continue to come to Uman (although, of course, in significantly smaller numbers), but they have long since created their own autonomous infrastructure and have minimal contact with the Ukrainian Jewish community.

The severing of ties with Russian Jews is also painful. Being wealthier and more developed in terms of infrastructure, the Russian Jewish community supported the Ukrainian community in some respects. Some community projects were literally financed by Russian (at least in terms of the origin of their capital) Jewish oligarchs. **Lev Leviev's** *Or* Avner Foundation sponsored educational projects of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement, while the Genesis Foundation, created with philanthropic contributions from Mikhail **Fridman's** Alfa business group, supported summer camps and many other initiatives.

Perhaps even more important was the cultural connection. High-quality Russian translations of Israeli literature and classic religious texts, published by such publishing houses as Knizhniki, fully satisfied the demand for Jewish books in Ukraine. Ukrainian researchers of Jewish studies published in Russian journals and gathered annually in Moscow for academic conferences at *the* Sefer Center, while their Russian colleagues organized visits by lecturers to Ukraine and field schools in Podolia and Crimea. The breakdown of organizational ties began in 2014; since 2022, they have become simply impossible, as have trips or the delivery of literature (which, incidentally, hardly anyone in Ukraine would read in Russian). Personal ties were mostly preserved and even experienced a revival during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in 2020–2021, as online communication became the main form of communication regardless of the location of interlocutors or participants in internet conferences. However, after the start of the full-scale invasion, it became difficult to maintain ties even between relatives.

The list of unfavorable factors complicating Jewish life and the work of community organizations to maintain identity could go on. To some extent, the entire report is devoted to analyzing these factors (as well as attempting to formulate possible responses to current challenges). However, it should be emphasized that excessive pessimism about the fate of the Ukrainian Jewish community is also unwarranted. It will undoubtedly survive these difficult times. The trials of recent years have demonstrated its enormous potential. The report also analyzes the factors contributing to the success of Ukrainian Jewish organizations.

This introduction is intended primarily to record the specific situation in which the Ukrainian community finds itself today and to emphasize the need for conscious, systematic, and consistent efforts to help it cope with all its difficulties in a dignified manner.

1. General information

The Ukrainian Jewish community is not only one of the oldest, but also one of the most significant in Europe. Despite a dramatic decline in numbers over the past 150 years, it is at least among the five largest in Europe (after France and Great Britain; probably roughly on a par with Germany and Hungary).

Ukraine has a huge Jewish heritage, both material and immaterial, which, sadly, hasn't been studied enough or brought into the wider academic and cultural scene. State institutions that are supposed to keep history alive, and society as a whole, don't really get the importance and scale of Jewish heritage (although slow progress is being made in this direction). The community itself, even in the best of times, was unable to study and preserve it at the proper level. In a sense, the historical heritage of the Ukrainian Jewish community is greater than the community itself.

Of course, it is impossible not to mention the fact that the country's president is an ethnic Jew, Volodymyr **Zelensky**. However, he has never had strong ties to organized Jewish community structures and has not demonstrated any outward signs of his identity. At the same time, his origins were well known at the time of the 2019 elections. The head of the Ukrainian state is aware of his ethnic identity but does not emphasize it. He is also not prone to public religious behavior. Having mentioned several times that he is a believer, the president nevertheless insists that his relationship with God is a purely private matter.

1.1. Brief historical background

Jews have lived in Ukraine for at least two thousand years. The first Jewish communities appeared in the territory of modern Ukraine in the first centuries AD in the Hellenistic states of Crimea and the Northern Black Sea region. Archaeological data suggests, for example, that the famous Chersonese Basilica (known in scientific literature as the "Basilica of 1935"), which is even depicted on the hryvnia banknote (and, after Russia's occupation of Crimea, on the 200-ruble note), was originally a synagogue, later converted into a Christian church. With the onset of the "barbarian" era, traces of Jews in the region are lost—neither written sources nor archaeological material provide grounds for asserting that there was a continuous succession between the Jewish communities of Taurida in the Hellenistic era and later periods.

The next reliably known stage in the history of Jews in Ukraine was connected with the Khazar Khaganate, a state whose rulers at a certain point adopted Judaism. Khazaria controlled a significant part of the territory of modern Ukraine. The connection between Jewish-Khazar and Slavic history can be illustrated by one fact that is quite well known among historians: the earliest authentic document mentioning Kiev that has survived to this day is a letter in Hebrew, presumably dating from the 10th century and apparently written by representatives of the local Jewish community (the so-called "Kiev Letter," published in 1982 by American Hebrew scholar Norman Golb and Ukrainian orientalist Omelian Pritsak). The Jewish community of ancient Kiev is mentioned repeatedly in the "Tale of Bygone Years" and other sources. Historians conditionally distinguish the Jews who lived in the Slavic lands at that time as a special group – the "Canaanites." Apparently, they spoke Slavic languages in everyday life. However, there is no direct continuity between the Canaanites and the Jewish population of Ukraine in subsequent eras. References to early medieval Jewish communities in the region disappear in the 13th century after the so-called "Tatar-Mongol" invasion.

The history of modern Ukrainian Jewry begins with the migration of the ancestors of the group we now call Ashkenazim from the territory of present-day Czech Republic and Poland to the east. In fact, the Ashkenazim as a specific Jewish group were largely formed in Ukraine. What is

stereotypically referred to in popular history books (and, to some extent, in Jewish collective memory) as "Polish Jewry," "Lithuanian Jewry," or "Russian Jewry" (and later as Soviet Jewry) can, to a large extent and with no less justification, be called Ukrainian Jewry. Hasidism, a unique doctrine that in a sense revolutionized Judaism, emerged in Ukraine. The graves of the founder of Hasidism, Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov (in Medzhybizh, Khmelnytskyi Oblast), Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav (in Uman, Cherkasy Oblast), and other Hasidic tzadikim (righteous sages and teachers) attract tens of thousands of pilgrims from all over the world to the Ukrainian countryside every year. A rich literature in Yiddish (a Germanic language spoken by Eastern European Jews) was created in Ukraine, and great Jewish poets and writers such as Paul Celan and Sholem Aleichem worked here. A significant portion of Israeli and American Jews trace their ancestry back to this region.

In 1793–1795, as a result of the so-called "partitions" of Poland, most of the territory of modern Ukraine was annexed to the Russian Empire, and a smaller part to Austria-Hungary. In Russia, a "Jewish Pale of Settlement" was established, beyond which Jews were not allowed to travel without special permission. At the beginning of the 20th century, about 2 million Jews lived in what is now Ukraine. In 1881 and 1905–1906, a wave of pogroms swept across the Russian part of Ukraine. At the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, due to the difficult economic situation and pogroms, large numbers of Jews emigrated from the "Pale of Settlement" (mainly to North America, but also to South America, Australia, South Africa, and Palestine). After the official abolition of the "Pale of Settlement" in 1917, a significant number of Ukrainian Jews migrated deeper into the country (primarily to large cities in the RSFSR).

In the 1920s and 1930s, numerous cultural, educational, religious, and cooperative organizations, as well as Jewish village councils, operated in Soviet Ukraine. In some places, official documents, such as birth certificates, were duplicated in Yiddish. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Jewish national districts were established in the steppes of Crimea and the Northern Black Sea region. At the same time, there was a struggle against religious communities and Zionist organizations, which were quite strong in Ukraine in the 1920s, as well as the eradication of Hebrew culture. In the late 1930s, the national districts were abolished, most Jewish organizations were closed, and their functionaries were repressed.

During the Nazi occupation, about one and a half million Jews were exterminated by the Nazis. Babi Yar in Kiev became a symbol of the Holocaust in Ukraine, where about 33,000 Jews were shot in just three days in September 1941.
In the late 1940s, the last Jewish cultural institutions in the Ukrainian SSR were closed. From that moment until the end of the 1980s, the only legal Jewish institutions were synagogues, which were becoming increasingly fewer in number. The number of religious communities declined sharply during the anti-religious campaign of 1958–1964. In the 1960s–1980s, Ukraine became one of the centers of the Jewish independence movement, which served as the basis for the formation of future full-fledged community institutions during the Perestroika period.

1.2. Antisemitism

The purpose of this study is not to review signs of anti-Semitism in Ukraine; rather, it is appropriate to briefly describe the situation to help the reader form a comprehensive understanding of the current situation of the Jewish community. In early 2025, UCSJ published an overview of the main trends in this area in Russia and Ukraine in the context of the war. In addition, at the end of 2025, UCSJ plans to prepare an analytical report on recent manifestations of anti-Semitism throughout the region, including Ukraine.

Traditionally, for many Western and Israeli observers who are superficially interested in the issue, “anti-Semitism” is the first association with the combination of the words ‘Jews’ and “Ukraine”

side by side. The reasons for the formation of this persistent stereotype are themselves of interest and deserve separate consideration.
In recent years, Kremlin propaganda has been cited as the main reason, especially in public debate. Indeed, it is difficult not to pay attention to it. Russian officials, the media, influential commentators, pseudo-non-governmental organizations (so-called GONGOs), and Moscow's agents of influence around the world obsessively use the "Jewish theme" to defame Ukraine. In recent years, the intensity of this propaganda has decreased. But it continues today, only its target group has become more specific.

Although the exposure of Kremlin propaganda has already received a lot of attention, its systematic nature has partly done its job. Many have heard "something" about the anti-Semitism of "Ukrainian nationalists" who allegedly came to power after the overthrow of the Yanukovych regime. This is how defamation works. The propaganda of recent years has been built on a strong foundation. A similar campaign after Viktor Yushchenko came to power [https://www.sova-center.ru/ racism-xenophobia/publications/2005/01/d1122/] after the Orange Revolution of 2004 [http://jewseurasia.org/page18/news17077.html]. Moreover, the roots of this campaign go back to the Soviet era. The KGB organized special operations to influence the West [https://tsn.ua/analitika/ kuhnya-antisemitizmu-vid-kgb-2.html], aimed at discrediting the Ukrainian anti-Soviet diaspora and preventing its alliance with Jewish organizations, which were then waging a broad campaign for human rights in the USSR. Both Soviet propagandists and their modern-day successors do not shy away from lies, falsification of sources, and provocations. It would be very tempting to blame Ukraine's "bad image" in the Jewish diaspora on Russian propaganda. However, that would be an oversimplification.

There are other historical and psychological factors that have contributed to the formation of a painful attitude toward anti-Semitism in Ukraine over a long period of time. From the 17th to the 20th century, waves of brutal violence against Jews swept across Ukraine. This was partly due to the sheer size of the Jewish population—where there were more Jews, there were more recorded instances of anti-Semitism. But it would be dishonest not to note that outbreaks of violence often accompanied the rise of the Ukrainian national movement. In multinational Eastern European states such as Turkey, Poland, Austria-Hungary, and even Russia, despite the anti-Semitic policies of the authorities, loyalty to the imperial center gave Jews a false hope of protection. Their association with the oppressors cost Jews dearly in times of unrest and uprisings. National liberation movements in the Eastern European context often took on an acute ethno-confessional character. Jews knew that in any situation of instability, they could easily become victims. Russian propaganda in 2014, among others, skillfully played on this stereotype. Those who emigrated (first to North America, then to Palestine) over the past 150 years took with them memories of their own fear and vulnerability, which became firmly embedded in their cultural memory.

Not only the imagined "Ukraine" as a country of exodus, but also 'Poland' and "Russia" in the mass historical consciousness of the Jewish diaspora are also significantly associated with memories of persecution and violence. But, unlike these countries, Ukraine historically did not have its own subjectivity, with positive elements with which those who left could associate themselves. Most often, the historical and cultural self-identification of people who left our country does not contain any connection to it. Historical memory has retained images of "Polish" Jewry, "Lithuanian" and "Russian" Jewry, even 'Hungarian' and "Romanian" Jewry, but not Ukrainian Jewry. Such self-identification allows, to some extent, to balance memories of anti-Semitism. Poland, for example, is associated in Jewish historical memory with the image of the "golden age" of Eastern European Jewry. The Russian Empire did not leave such a positive mark on collective perceptions, but among the numerous descendants of educated, loosely religious, and largely assimilated Jewish emigrants, a positive image has taken root, for example, that of great

Russian literature. The memories of those who left our country may retain warm nostalgic notes associated with nature, “simple” people, and folk art, but not with “high” culture and prosperity.
The last mass wave of Jewish emigration, made possible first by relative liberalization and then by the collapse of the Soviet Union, took place in an atmosphere of radical changes in the social landscape. The collapse of the economic system and the political instability of those years were frightening. Jews had the opportunity to leave behind real problems and imagined threats—and they left, as in previous periods, taking their fears with them.

Psychological adaptation to the inevitable difficulties of the first period after moving is greatly facilitated by the confidence that the decision to emigrate was the right one. An important component of this conviction is the idea of the dangers that could threaten them and their children in the country of departure. In such a situation, it is natural for people to believe in the fears they themselves have invented. Rumors about anti-Semitism in the Ukrainian independence movement and impending pogroms, artificially fueled by the KGB during the perestroika period, proved to be extremely persistent. As we know very well, there was no surge in anti-Semitism with the attainment of Ukrainian independence (quite the contrary, in fact, but I will return to the question of the real level of anti-Semitism in Ukraine separately). However, despite its absurdity, many people remained convinced that pogroms were entirely possible.

In 1989-1992, when emigration was truly massive, Jews left Ukraine as Soviet citizens. Another aspect should also be taken into account. During World War II, the entire territory of our country was occupied by the Germans. The vast majority of historical Ukrainian Jewry perished in the nightmare of the Holocaust. Jews returning from evacuation and the army, coming from other regions to work in the industrial and scientific centers of Ukraine, already had little connection to the local social landscape. Educated, secularized, and Russified, most of them were not eager to integrate into the Ukrainian cultural environment.
A significant number of emigrants tend to “freeze” in their cultural state as it was at the time of their departure. Over the past thirty years, Ukrainian Jewry has come a long way together with the rest of society. Those who left did not have this opportunity. With the advent of global Russian satellite television fifteen to twenty years ago, it became the main source of information about what was happening in the post-Soviet space for Russian-speaking emigrants. Thus, the circle was closed, and modern propaganda overlapped with historical stereotypes, reinforcing and developing them.

In these circumstances, it is simply amazing how strong the opposite trend has been in the Jewish diaspora—toward supporting Ukraine. Despite all the problems of the past and conscious efforts to poison our relations in the present, centuries of Ukrainian-Jewish coexistence have done much to break the stereotypical image of Ukraine as a land of pogroms and suffering.
Of course, isolated manifestations of anti-Semitism are recorded in Ukraine. But monitoring results show that the number of anti-Semitic incidents in the country has been gradually but steadily declining over the past 10 to 15 years. Public opinion polls conducted annually by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology show a similar steady trend toward improved attitudes toward Jews.

If we put aside propaganda and stereotypes, it is easy to see that in reality, the situation with anti-Semitism in Ukraine is much better than in most European countries. This has been particularly noticeable since October 7, 2023, when an unprecedented wave of anti-Israel propaganda and anti-Semitic incidents literally swept across Western European countries. The challenges facing the Ukrainian Jewish community are of a completely different nature and are primarily related to Russian aggression.

1.3. Autochthonous Jewish groups: Krymchaks and Karaites

The uniqueness of the Ukrainian Jewish community on the global map of the Jewish diaspora is highlighted by the existence of two "autochthonous" Jewish groups: the Karaites and the Krymchaks.

Both groups formed on the Crimean Peninsula in the Middle Ages and early modern period, i.e., during Muslim rule. Accordingly, unlike the Jews of Christian Europe, the Crimean Jewish communities were subject to fewer legal restrictions and discrimination. Linguistically and culturally, both groups were significantly influenced by the surrounding Turkic-speaking population. After the conquest of Crimea by the Russian Empire, in order to avoid the restrictions imposed on Jews, the Karaite community began to form its own version of its origins and identity, emphasizing its differences from the Ashkenazim. There were some grounds for this. The Karaites are a religious offshoot of Judaism whose followers do not recognize the authority of the Talmud to the same extent as it is followed in "mainstream" Judaism. The Karaites did not deny *the Halakha* as such, but they disputed the divine origin of the Oral Torah and differed from mainstream Judaism in some details of ritual, customs, and the calendar.

During the secularization process in the 20th century, Crimean Karaite intellectuals formed a completely ahistorical but nevertheless deeply rooted opinion about the Turkic origin of the group, which took root not only in the self-awareness of many members of the community but also in uncritical popular and even scientific literature. Within this discourse, there are more and less radical versions: from the idea that the ancestors of the Crimean Karaites were Khazars who converted to Judaism, to claims that the Karaites are descended from a separate ancient Turkic people who formed in the Altai region and professed a unique monotheistic tradition known as Tengriism.

Unlike the Karaites, the Krymchaks professed "normative" or rabbinical Judaism. However, under the influence of the Karaite tendency toward "Turkification" of self-identity and perceptions of historical roots, throughout the 20th century, many members of the community also tried not to emphasize or even dispute their affiliation with the Jewish people.

Since the Crimean Peninsula was completely occupied by Nazi Germany during World War II, both communities suffered dramatically during the Holocaust. The Krymchaks were almost completely exterminated. The Karaite community suffered only partially, because at one point, under the influence of widespread beliefs at the time and as a result of conscious efforts by both Karaite and Jewish intellectuals, the Nazis began to doubt their belonging to the "Semitic race."

According to the 2001 census, there were only 1,196 Karaites and 406 Krymchaks in Ukraine. Most of the members of these communities (715 and 280 people, respectively) lived in Crimea, which was occupied by Russia in 2014. According to Russian "census" data (the results of which may have been distorted in terms of the ethnic composition of the peninsula's population), in 2014 there were 232 Karaites and 344 Krymchaks living in Crimea, and in 2021 there were 295 and 277 people, respectively.

Melitopol in the south of the Zaporizhzhia region, which was occupied in 2022, was also an important cultural and community center for the Karaites. In 2021, the Karaites and Krymchaks were recognized by law as indigenous peoples of Ukraine (along with the Crimean Tatars). This gives them several additional rights compared to other national minorities (including "ordinary" Jews), including a state-guaranteed full cycle of education, including higher education, in their native language, and the formation of an officially recognized representative body, whose position the government is obliged to take into account in all matters relevant to the community. However,

as of summer 2025, not a single representative body of the indigenous peoples of Ukraine had been formed.

Ukraine's recognition of "autochthonous" Jewish groups as indigenous peoples is unprecedented in world practice and underestimated by the international community.

The Russian occupation administration does not recognize the Karaites and Krymchaks as indigenous peoples.

1.4. Community size. Demographic situation

At the beginning of the 20th century, approximately 2 million Jews lived in the territory of present-day Ukraine, which was divided at that time between the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires. On the eve of World War II, when this land was under the control of Soviet Ukraine, Soviet Russia, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Romania, their number was close to three million. The Holocaust, emigration, and assimilation led to a dramatic decline in the community. The 1959 census recorded 840,300 Jews in Ukraine. According to the 1970 census, the Jewish population of the Ukrainian SSR decreased to 777,100, and according to 1979 data, to 634,200. According to the last Soviet census in 1989, there were 487,300 Jews living in Ukraine (it should be noted that the Soviet census questionnaire asked about ethnicity, not religious affiliation).

The fall of the Iron Curtain at the end of the Perestroika period and after the collapse of the Soviet Union allowed hundreds of thousands of them to leave for Israel, the US, and Germany over the next few years. This was a real exodus of Ukrainian Jewry.

During the first census in independent Ukraine (and the last one to date) in 2001, just over 105,000 people identified themselves as Jewish, including small groups of Karaites and Krymchaks, as well as Mountain Jews, Georgian Jews, and Central Asian (Bukharian) Jews, who were counted separately.

A quick look at the census data shows that the community has a high average age and low birth rate, which means it's shrinking naturally. In the 2000s, aliyah declined, but the Russian invasion of Crimea and Donbas in 2014, followed, of course, by full-scale war, gave new impetus to emigration from the country. The impact of emigration in the context of the war on Ukrainian Jewry will be discussed in more detail below.

Today, demographers estimate the remaining Jewish community in the country at 32,000 (although this estimate is debatable).

Of course, to be more precise, the answer to the question of the number of Jews in the country depends to a large extent on who is considered Jewish. The specific situation in Ukraine, as in the entire former Soviet Union, is determined by decades of Soviet experience of forced secularization and cultural mimicry in conditions of state anti-Semitism. As a result, a phenomenon of a secular Jewish community has developed in the region, which understands its identity as primarily ethnic.

Despite the fact that dozens of synagogues opened their doors across the country after the fall of Soviet power, there was no mass return to Judaism (perhaps because the religious revival was led and almost monopolized by Orthodox groups). Ukrainian Jews identify with Judaism more on a theoretical level, perceiving some of its elements as unique ethnocultural characteristics.

Among other things, this situation has led to the vast majority of Jews entering into mixed marriages over the course of two or three generations. Although members of such families would most likely answer "Ukrainian" when asked about their ethnicity in a census, they retain their Jewish identity to varying degrees. Demographers refer to this community as an "extended population." These people occasionally attend events at Jewish community centers, read books and media publications on Jewish topics with interest, and express solidarity with Israel. Although they are not Jewish according to halacha (and, therefore, according to Israeli classification), they have for many years constituted the majority of those who make aliyah under the Law of Return. It is estimated that this "extended" Jewish community may number up to 200,000 people.

Estimates of the demographic future of the Jewish community depend largely on one's point of view. The optimistic view interprets the non-religious, culturally assimilated descendants of mixed marriages who are aware of their origins and have a certain cultural sentiment as part of the Jewish people. Pessimists argue that the community will disappear within a single generation. The remnants of Jewish identity will cease to have any value for the "extended population," and the few Jews who remain will die out or leave.

As is often the case, the middle ground seems more realistic. If the catastrophic scenario of a front line sweeping across the country can be avoided in the coming years, the community will certainly not disappear. Based on demographic trends, twenty years ago, Nativ (the Israeli Prime Minister's Office Liaison Bureau) predicted that post-Soviet Jewry would disappear within 15-20 years. As we can see, this did not happen. However, we should not hope that the "extended population" will somehow naturally return to its Jewish roots on its own. In order to involve Ukrainians of Jewish origin in community life to at least some extent and reactivate their identity, organized institutions of the Jewish community will have to make significant efforts. At the same time, in order to survive, the community must change the very nature of its activities and external representation, becoming more open and inclusive.

After the war, Ukrainian Jewry will have to largely "rebuild" its community institutions. This seems possible, although it will require significant resources and long-term, systematic work. It seems justified to consciously begin preparing for this now.

2. Achievements and weaknesses of community institutions

The activities of the Jewish community are as diverse and multifaceted as the community itself: from organizing the redemption of firstborn sons in the synagogue to delivering hygiene kits to pensioners with limited mobility, from lighting Hanukkah candles in the president's office to training hospital clowns who visit children with terminal illnesses. Today's Ukrainian realities add challenges that must be addressed by expanding the scope of activities, now including sending kosher food packages to the front lines and collecting funds to repair an ambulance previously donated to the army.

Due to the impossibility of providing a comprehensive overview, it seems justified to focus on those aspects of the systematic work of community institutions that are fundamental and critical to the preservation of Jewish life.

2.1. General characteristics of community institutions. Main Jewish organizations

The Ukrainian Jewish community, like communities in other post-Soviet countries, is relatively young in its current form. The institutional development of community institutions began just over 35 years ago. Unlike countries where the normal functioning and development of community structures was not interrupted, the post-Soviet situation is characterized by high dynamism. The

creation of an organizational infrastructure from scratch was marked by explosive growth of communities in the first years after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Somewhat later, the arrival of major foreign "players," such as *the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (the Joint)* and the Hasidic religious movement *Chabad-Lubavitch*, continued to shape the community institutions. The emergence of large local businessmen of Jewish origin, who competed for the right to represent Ukrainian Jews before the authorities and within international Jewish structures, added dynamism to community life.

There is no point in recounting the history of the turbulent relations and rivalry between Ukrainian Jewish organizations (which in the press were sometimes even ironically referred to as "Jewish wars"). At present, a number of previously active (including active participants in the "Jewish wars") large associations have left the scene, ceasing or minimizing their activities. These include *the All-Ukrainian Jewish Congress, the Jewish Council of Ukraine, the Ukrainian Jewish Committee, the Jewish Forum of Ukraine*, and *the Jewish Fund of Ukraine.*

According to statistics from the State Service for Ethnic Policy and Freedom of Conscience, as of January 1, 2025, there were 155 public associations of the "Jewish national minority (community)," as it is officially called, in Ukraine. However, these data cannot be considered exhaustive. There is no formal status of "public association of a national minority." It is unclear what exactly gives the State Service the right to label certain public organizations from the register of legal entities as "Jewish." Perhaps it is the word "Jewish" in the name. In any case, the State Service's quantitative assessment should be considered minimal. State statistics separately account for religious communities; there are more than 300 Jewish religious organizations in Ukraine. In addition, charitable foundations also have a special legal status. According to rough estimates, there are about a hundred Jewish charitable foundations in Ukraine.

It is impossible to mention all the significant and active Jewish organizations in Ukraine within the scope of this review. Since the report is application-oriented, it seems justified to limit ourselves to a brief description of several associations whose activities deserve support and cooperation with which may be promising for foreign partners and donors.

In June 1988, the first independent legal Jewish community organization in the Ukrainian SSR was established in Chernivtsi, initially under the name Chernivtsi Jewish Cemetery Preservation Fund. Two months later, it was renamed *the Chernivtsi Jewish Social and Cultural Fund,* and it still exists under this name today. Its founder was **Joseph Zissels,** an anti-Soviet dissident and human rights activist who had recently been released from prison after serving his second term. Together with Russian and Belarusian comrades and colleagues, he created the Vaad (Federation of Jewish Organizations and Communities) of the USSR, whose first congress was held in December 1989 in Moscow (https://institute.eajc.org/eajpp-29/). The word "vaad" means "council" in Hebrew. Historically, the "Vaad of the Four Lands" was the highest body of Jewish communal self-government in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

During the collapse of the Soviet Union, Joseph Zissels created and headed (for the last ten years as co-president) *the Vaad of Ukraine,* or *the Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities of Ukraine* (vaadua.org). The Vaad was registered in January 1991 and became the first—but not the last—national association of Jewish organizations in Ukraine.

In the spring of 2025, after verifying the membership of the communities, it was established that the Vaad of Ukraine comprises 165 organizations. Most of them are local, but there are also national ones, such as the All-Ukrainian Association of Jews Former Prisoners of Ghettos and

Concentration Camps. The membership of 24 organizations located in Russian-occupied territory has been suspended for security reasons.

Previously, the Vaad was actively involved in international associations, for example, as one of the founders of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress in 2002 (all ties were severed in 2017 after the "raider" takeover of the Congress leadership by Georgian-Russian-Israeli businessman Mikhail Mirilashvili). Vaad is one of two organizations representing the Ukrainian community in the World Jewish Congress.
At the last Vaad conference in May 2025, Eduard Shifrin, a former big-time businessman who now lives in Europe, became the new co-president of the association. Joseph Zissels stayed on as the other co-president of Vaad.

Like many other Jewish organizations, the Vaad practically shut down numerous community projects during the COVID-19 pandemic, not only because of quarantine restrictions, but also due to the reduced financial capabilities of its main sponsors. With the start of full-scale aggression, Joseph Zissels was the only Jewish leader in Ukraine who did not leave the country, even temporarily. Over the past three years, the Vaad has almost completely refocused on humanitarian projects related to overcoming the consequences of the war and aimed at providing assistance to those affected (see below for more details). The Vaad's support for a university program in Jewish studies remained virtually the only ongoing Jewish project.

The second organization authorized to represent the Ukrainian Jewish community in the WJC is *the Jewish Confederation of Ukraine* (ECU; https://jcu.org.ua/). The Confederation was created in 1999 as an alternative to the Vaad and the All-Ukrainian Jewish Congress, which already existed at the time, but it did not really succeed as an association of "grassroots" communities. A distinctive feature of the ECU is its partnership with **Yakov Dov Bleich,** rabbi of the Kiev synagogue in Podil. Since 2018, the EJC has been headed by **Boris Lozhkin**. In 2014–2016, at the beginning of Petro Poroshenko's term, he was the head of the Presidential Administration. He gave the ECU a political dimension, in particular by initiating the annual "*Kyiv Jewish* Forum," which has become the main regular public event in Jewish community life. However, having never emerged from its online format after the pandemic, the Forum has become less substantive in recent years and attracts less and less attention. In addition, Boris Lozhkin himself has not lived in Ukraine in recent years. However, despite its decline in activity in recent years, the ECU retains some significance, primarily thanks to the leadership's strong ties with the Ukrainian political elite and its potential for revival after the war.

The United Jewish Community of Ukraine (UJCU, jew.org.ua) continues to carry out some minimal activities, primarily thanks to the efforts of its young executive director, Vitaly **Kamozin.** The UJCU was established in 1999 **by Vadim Rabinovich,** president of *the* then existing *All-Ukrainian Jewish Congress,* as a backup organization. Rabinovich is said to have transferred control of the UJCU to the wealthy businessman **Ihor Kolomoyskyi** for his own benefit**.** Rabinovich himself went on to become one of Ukraine's leading pro-Russian politicians and fled the country on the eve of the full-scale war.

Formally, the OEU, along with Vaad, is one of the largest national associations. The OEU website lists 143 communities that are members of the association. However, it is clear that the list has not been updated for a long time, and the last, sixth Congress of Jews of Ukraine, as the OEU called its conferences, took place 14 years ago. In recent years, the OEOU's main activity has been to restore old Jewish cemeteries throughout the country.

The OEOU office is located in Dnipro, and it is closely connected with the city's Jewish community, which developed primarily around Shmuel **Kaminsky**, a representative of the

Chabad-Lubavitch Hasidic movement. Dnipro was also a center of business activity for a number of prominent Jewish businesspeople, whose generous sponsorship made it possible to build the huge *Menorah* community center.

The picture of the complex system of Ukrainian Jewish organizations would be incomplete without mentioning the network of charitable and community institutions created and supported by *the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee* (*the Joint)*. Called upon to support financially weak post-Soviet Jewish organizations in the early 1990s, the Joint gradually built its own community and charitable infrastructure. The community centers supported by the Joint became the center of Jewish life in many cities. At its peak, the network of charitable institutions (Hesedim) it created supported around 120,000 clients in Ukraine, making it the community structure with the largest number of regular participants in the country.

The Joint played a huge role in building Jewish infrastructure, but it was often criticized for creating a consumerist attitude toward the community among Jews. The establishment of a patronage-client relationship with "ordinary" Jews and the recruitment of local leaders as obedient managers formed a specific community structure. The Joint was not alone in this "sin." Religious communities that gathered a minyan (the minimum number of people required for a prayer to be considered collective) in the synagogue by inviting people to a free lunch also contributed to this. Of course, it would be unfair to blame the community's lack of independence on those who came to the aid of post-Soviet Jews during a difficult period. Objective circumstances, primarily the poverty of the majority of the population, as well as the advanced age of Ukrainian Jews, made it unlikely that the community could get back on its feet without outside help. In general, domestic oligarchs, who lured the "masses" to their pompous "congresses of Ukrainian Jews" with free buses to Kiev and lunch, did not greatly contribute to fostering a tradition of independent participation by community members in the organization of Jewish life.

As a result, in Ukraine, as in the entire post-Soviet space, a model of community life has developed that is very different from that in the West. If, for example, in some American town, Jews who feel the need to satisfy their religious needs hire a rabbi of the denomination that appeals to them most (or of the degree of authority they can afford) at their own expense, then in Ukraine, on the contrary, the formation of the community itself depended on the ability of a rabbi who came to the city from abroad to find sponsors (preferably among local businessmen) to finance the renovation of the synagogue building, etc. This, in particular, explains the dominance of Chabad in the religious sphere. Rabbis of this movement arrived with discipline to carry out a conscious mission: to return the forcibly secularized Soviet Jews to religion. As a result, a paradoxical situation has developed that significantly distinguishes the Ukrainian Jewish community from the American one: the largely non-religious Jewish population has almost no accessible and understandable alternative to Orthodox Judaism. Post-Soviet Jews do not go to synagogue, but the synagogues they do not go to are Orthodox.

Few in Ukraine have attempted to build a community that exists at least in part through the financial participation of its members, and even fewer have succeeded to any degree. This feature, which is not well understood by the community itself, should be taken into account by foreign friends of the Ukrainian Jewish community. Under the current circumstances, without external support, it will be difficult, if not impossible, for the community to emerge from this serious crisis. But after the war and the initial period of recovery, it will inevitably have to learn to stand on its own two feet.

2.2. Religious infrastructure

Even in the secular post-Soviet context, the synagogue is the first thing associated with Jewish community infrastructure. The functioning of religious institutions ensures the preservation and development of the core of the Jewish community.

According to statistics from the State Service for Ethnic Policy and Freedom of Conscience, there are 315 Jewish communities registered in Ukraine (in addition, there are four Karaite religious communities operating in the territory controlled by the Ukrainian government). This number can be considered more or less accurate, since religious organizations have a special status and are classified not only by denomination but also by national associations when they are registered. However, it is entirely possible to engage in religious activities without registration, as this is not prohibited by law. It is likely that some Jewish religious groups (for example, in Uman) manage perfectly well without registration, but their numbers are unlikely to be large.

Most religious communities in Ukraine belong to the Lubavitch branch of Hasidism and are united in *the Federation of Jewish Communities of Ukraine* (FJCU; https://www.fjc.org.ua/; head – Rabbi Meir **Stambler)**. The FEOU office is also located in Dnipro. The chief rabbi of the FEOU is Rabbi Kaminsky. According to the FEOU administration, it includes 163 communities, which formally makes the Federation the largest Jewish association in Ukraine. However, according to DES statistics as of January 1, 2025, 113 communities belong to the Chabad Lubavitch Hasidic movement. This number still makes the FEOU the largest Jewish religious association in the country. In the capital, the FEOU is represented by Rabbi Yonatan **Markovich,** who claims the title of Chief Rabbi of Kiev.

With the start of Volodymyr Zelensky's presidency, the FEOU started to be seen by the state as the "default" Jewish religious organization. Rabbis from the Federation are invited to the President's Office to light Hanukkah candles, and the president is accompanied by them to Babi Yar to honor the memory of Holocaust victims and meet with representatives of American Jewry during his visit to the United States.

The FEOU objectively dominates Jewish religious life in the country, but it is not a monopoly. The Federation is not even the exclusive representative of Lubavitch Hasidism.

The alternative branch of Chabad is represented by Rabbi **Moshe Asman of** the Brodsky Synagogue in Kyiv**.** Although, according to the latest data, only five communities belong to *the All-Ukrainian Congress of Jewish Religious Communities*, at one point Asman began to call himself the "Chief Rabbi of Kiev and Ukraine" and often appears in the media in this capacity.
At one time, the building of the Brodsky synagogue, which housed a puppet theater during the Soviet era, was practically bought out for Asman by Vadim Rabinovich. For some time, Asman positioned himself as the "Chief Rabbi of the All-Ukrainian Jewish Congress." However, unlike his former main sponsor, Asman has taken a decidedly patriotic stance in recent years.

With the start of the full-scale Russian invasion, Asman has significantly stepped up his public and charitable activities. Thanks to his charisma and presence on social media, he has become perhaps the most prominent figure in the Ukrainian public sphere associated with the Jewish community. In addition, Rabbi Asman has historically had friendly relations with the Republican establishment in the US, which in the last six months has contributed to his advocacy efforts aimed at maintaining American support for Ukraine.

By inertia, Rabbi **Yakov Bleich,** who heads *the Association of Jewish Religious Organizations of Ukraine* and was mentioned above in the context of the partnership with the ECU**,** continues to call himself the Chief Rabbi of Ukraine. In 1990, Rabbi Bleich came to work at the Rosenberg Synagogue (in Podil) in Kyiv, the only synagogue still functioning since Soviet times. As the only

rabbi in the capital at the time of Ukraine's declaration of independence, Rabbi Bleich automatically became Chief Rabbi. Although he represents the Carlin-Stolin Hasidic community, which is exotic even for the United States, all Orthodox non-Chabad communities, including even the "Litvaks" (i.e., Orthodox Jews who are not Hasidim), began to consolidate in his Union. According to DES statistics, Rabbi Bleich's association currently includes 72 communities.

Reform Judaism is also represented in Ukraine by an extensive network of religious organizations. Forty-four communities are members of *the Religious Union of Progressive Judaism in Ukraine (*https://reformkiev.com/). The chief rabbi of the progressive Jewish communities in Ukraine is Alexander **Dukhovny.** Ukraine also has a female Reform rabbi**,** Julia **Gris**, who is the only spiritual leader of the community who did not leave Odessa even in the first months after the start of the full-scale aggression.

There are also a few conservative communities in Ukraine, although the only rabbi, Reuven Stamov, was recalled after ten years of working in the capital.

To complete the religious spectrum, it is probably worth mentioning the more than 70 Messianic Jewish communities. In the Jewish world, Messianic communities are viewed with suspicion due to fears of missionary activity. Formally, they are not considered Jewish, even according to the official classification of the State Service for Ethnic and Religious Affairs. However, many members of these communities insist on their Jewish identity. These communities celebrate Jewish holidays, use Jewish symbols, and often position themselves as Jewish in their external communications. In the Ukrainian context, Messianic Judeo-Christian communities should be seen not as dangerous competitors, but as natural partners contributing to the formation of a friendly environment for the Jewish community itself.

The diversity of Jewish movements present in Ukraine creates a space that is potentially attractive to any Jew, but systematic and conscious efforts must be made to realize this potential. First and foremost, it makes sense not to focus exclusively on the stereotypical image of ultra-Orthodox long-bearded rabbis in caftans and wide-brimmed hats when thinking about religious Jewry. It would be very good if, after the war, American and international reformist and conservative organizations made a conscious effort to expand the work of these communities in Ukraine. This does not necessarily require funds comparable to those needed by Chabad to build the Menorah community center in Dnipro. Relatively inexpensive educational, cultural, book publishing, and media programs could have a significant impact.

In the context of the inevitable further decline of the Orthodox religious core of the community, all branches of Judaism should also make efforts to communicate more actively with the outside world. This applies both to education aimed at preventing conflicts based on misunderstanding (as has often been the case in recent years with Hanukkah lamps in public places) and to participation, together with representatives of other faiths, in shaping a religious response to the challenges of modern life, from gender issues and bioethics to accountability for international crimes.

2.3. Media

The media are both an essential tool for reproducing and maintaining identity within the community itself and a channel for positioning and representing Judaism to the outside world. Before the widespread use of the internet, having a Jewish periodical in the home made it a Jewish home. In the post-Soviet space, there was even a joke that the Jews had turned from a people of the Book into a people of the newspaper. Now the era of print media is coming to an end, and the community needs to develop new forms of internal and external communication. In Ukraine, this is not going very well. The Jewish media here is in a serious crisis. Virtually nothing remains of

the once impressive diversity, at least in print. Some life still lingers in electronic format, but it clearly does not meet the needs.

The heyday of the Jewish media in Ukraine was about 10–15 years ago. At that time, readers had access to a wide range of newspapers: the weekly VEK (published by the All-Ukrainian Jewish Congress), which was at its best in its heyday, the monthly Khadashot (Vaad Ukraine), *Evreyskiy* Obozrevatel (Jewish Observer, published by the Jewish Confederation of Ukraine), *Evreyskie* Vesti (Jewish News, published by the Jewish Council of Ukraine), *Kiev* Evreyskiy (Kiev Jewish, published by the Ukrainian Jewish Forum), *and* Einikayt (published by the Kiev City Jewish Community). Practically every regional center had its own newspaper, usually monthly, and sometimes more than one.

Today, only *Yevreyskiy Oboz*revatel (*Jewish* Observer) continues to exist formally (online), although its editor-in-chief, Mikhail **Frenkel**, has been living in Germany for the past few years. At the beginning of the full-scale war, the website of the newspaper Khadashot (https://hadashot.kiev.ua/), which by that time was also only available online, stopped being updated. Its editor-in-chief, Mikhail **Gold,** also left Ukraine. The other publications listed above ceased publication even earlier for various reasons, mainly related to the crisis affecting the organizations that published them.

Regional publications have also declined. For example, in Odessa, with the start of full-scale war, the magazine *Migdal* Times (https://www.migdal.org.ua/times/) ceased publication. The last available issue, published in January 2022, is dedicated to the 30th anniversary of the community center of the same name. The Odessa weekly Chabad newspaper *Shomrei* Shabbos (https://www.chabad.odessa.ua/templates/articlecco_cdo/aid/944253/jewish/page.htm; https://www.facebook.com/ShomreiShabos).

In some regions, local publications continue to appear, remaining the last islands of the Jewish press. In Chernihiv, the newspaper Tkhia is published, in Lviv – Shofar (one page of which is traditionally published in Yiddish) and *the Bulletin of the All-Ukrainian Charitable Foundation* Hesed-Arie, and in Dnipro – *Shabbat* Shalom (https://shabat.com.ua/).

Among the existing online publications, the website "*Jewish* News" (https://jewishnews.com.ua/) is worth mentioning. It appeared sometime in 2014 as a reaction to the beginning of Russian aggression with the aim of forming a Ukrainian Jewish information space independent of the much more developed Russian one, which had previously largely satisfied the needs of the Russian-speaking Internet audience for Jewish topics. The publication is funded by the United Jewish Community of Ukraine. Today, however, little remains of the ambitious concept of ten years ago. In any case, Jewish News remains the only consistently updated daily Jewish news site in Ukraine. The OEOU Telegram channel also has some informational value.

Among regional websites, the website of the Jewish community of Dnipro, djc.com.ua, deserves special mention as perhaps the most dynamic of the community's online resources. Attempts to create multimedia content are interesting, such as the YouTube channels EVREI TV (*Jewish Modern Television)* by Elena **Bereza,** *Ukraine in Progress* by Oleg **Rostovtsev** (dedicated, however, not only to Jewish topics), and *the Jewish podcast* by Inna **Tsaruk.** These projects are currently being developed on the enthusiasm of their initiators and have not yet gained widespread recognition. The channels mentioned above have between one and five thousand subscribers. At the same time, despite its relatively low budget, this format appears to be very promising and has not yet fully realized its potential.

It is easy to see that Ukrainian Jewish media, at least the traditional ones, are going through a protracted crisis. It was not caused solely by the full-scale war, but the war seems to have made it irreversible. Most publications initially stopped printing during the COVID-19 pandemic, limiting themselves to online versions, and with the full-scale war, many electronic publications stopped updating.

All of the newspapers listed above were affiliated with organizations and were completely dependent on them financially (but were free to readers). There has never been an independent Jewish media in Ukraine. In a sense, the newspapers were "party newspapers"—their most important function was to provide publicity for the leaders and/or sponsors of the organization. Accordingly, as the capabilities of the main Jewish organizations declined, so did the media space, which was not supported by an audience and had no other sources of funding.

At the same time, the quality of Ukrainian Jewish newspapers has always been rather low. Much of the content was "timeless" in nature. The main topics were community events and PR activities of the organizations that published them, information about Jewish holidays, popular historical materials, reprints of news from Israel and the diaspora from news sites (which looked particularly strange in monthly newspapers), and in religious community publications, comments on the weekly Torah portion. Since print publications were available by free subscription or could be picked up at community centers, often charitable in nature, they were mainly read by older people, who were generally satisfied with them. The main function of Jewish newspapers was not to inform or create a space for discussion of current issues, but to maintain a symbolic link with the Jewish information space, which was important for the representation of identity. Such publications were unable to attract a new audience or interest the younger generation, who were accustomed to a completely different style of presenting information.

It cannot be said that Jewish issues were not of interest to a wider audience. A whole range of topics, from Ukrainian-Jewish relations in a historical perspective to contemporary Israel, attract not only regulars at community events. Individual articles on "Jewish" topics appearing in the mainstream media are widely read and discussed.

It would be interesting to study the experience of community publications in countries with a comparable Jewish population. Of course, the peculiarities of media culture and the obvious difference in the purchasing power of the population must also be taken into account. But even a cursory glance shows that, for example, the German weekly *Jüdische* Allgemeine is two orders of magnitude more professional than the best Ukrainian Jewish newspapers in their heyday. Admittedly, as the organ of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, this publication has a solid financial base and can afford a full editorial staff. A more relevant comparison might be with the German monthly *Jewish* Panorama, which is independent of any organization. Its audience is also mostly older people. Like Ukrainian Jewish publications, the newspaper is produced by its editor-in-chief, Mikhail **Greenberg,** virtually single-handedly, but it is read with interest and consists entirely of original and topical material.

Print publications with developed online versions are surviving in the post-Soviet space. An obvious relevant example for Ukraine in a different format is the Russian monthly magazine *Lechaim*. Its editor-in-chief, former Odessa resident Boruch **Gorin,** has managed to create a high-quality intellectual product. This fact is all the more remarkable given that the magazine is published by the Russian Chabad movement, yet it is read with interest even by completely non-religious Jews. This is somewhat reminiscent of the situation with Soviet intellectual popular science magazines, in which readers would flip through the first few pages containing ideological party material (in the case of Lechaim , these were editorials by the Chief Rabbi of Russia, Berl Lazar, and memories of the last Lubavitcher Rebbe), and read with great interest articles on history,

book reviews, interviews, and chapters from books also prepared for publication by the Chabad publishing house Knizhniki.

In many ways, the quality of the publication is maintained by translations and articles by Russian-speaking Israeli authors, which helps broaden the audience's horizons. In Ukraine, attempts were made to publish Jewish magazines (*Orach Chaim*, *Ot Serda K* Serda), but they were in a completely different category, differing little in content from community newspapers (the quarterly magazine *Evreyi* Evrazii, launched 20 years ago, showed promise, but the project was limited to a few issues).

These and other examples show the potential for development even of the traditional Jewish press, not to mention new media.

With sufficient resources, the Jewish media system will have to be rebuilt from scratch after the war. Ideally, Jewish periodicals should not depend on any one particular organization and should be "pan-Jewish" or, rather, "pan-Ukrainian-Jewish" in character. It is also extremely important to develop new media.

2.4. Education. Jewish studies

Education has always been a top priority in the Jewish community. According to traditional beliefs, studying the Torah your whole life is both the best thing a Jew can do and their highest duty. From a more rational point of view, education, both formal and informal, as well as the study of Jewish civilization, are critical to the continued existence of the Jewish community. If the media creates a common information space that supports Jewish identity, then education is largely responsible for shaping it.

Unfortunately, the situation in Ukraine is far from ideal in this area. Today, Jewish education hardly fulfills its function. There are some successful projects, but overall the situation is quite depressing. Religious schools, mainly operating under the auspices of Chabad, dominate school education. Their primary task is to create an educational space for children from religious families where they can receive a secondary education while observing the commandments. In addition to the religious component, parents value the atmosphere in these schools. Kindness, a humane attitude towards children, and safety were by no means part of the educational process in any average school in the post-Soviet space in the 1990s, when Jewish schools were first established. Since then, the situation has changed significantly, especially in Ukraine following the education reform and the introduction of the New Ukrainian School standard in 2017. In this sense, Jewish schools are no longer exceptional.

In terms of the level of education in general, as well as in the subjects of the "Jewish cycle" (i.e., Hebrew, traditions, and sometimes Jewish history), Chabad schools have never been particularly distinguished. This was not their goal. First and foremost, they provided a basic religious education. But in the absence of a more advanced system of religious education in Ukraine, their graduates did not have significant prospects in their homeland. Those who continued to observe tradition sought to obtain a secular profession that would allow them to earn a living as freelancers (for example, as programmers, if their general level of education allowed). Previously, there were several educational institutions (*Orach* Chaim in Kyiv, *Or* Sameach in Odesa) that claimed the status of yeshivas (higher religious educational institutions), but these initiatives did not develop fully.

Young people who left to continue their education in Israeli (less often American, and previously also Russian) yeshivas do not usually return to Ukraine. Among other things, this is hindered by

the extremely limited job market for junior specialists in the Jewish tradition (e.g., *mashgiachs*, specialists in kashrut observance).

The situation is much better in the *ORT* school system. These are technology-oriented lyceums that provide students with a good education in general subjects combined with basic knowledge of Hebrew and Jewish tradition. These are secular schools, attended not only by Jews attracted by the high level of education. Unfortunately, there are only a few such schools in Ukraine (in Kyiv, Dnipro, Zaporizhzhia, Chernivtsi, and one is due to open this year in Bila Tserkva, which will be a major achievement).
In the field of higher education in Jewish studies (as the academic discipline is often called in the post-Soviet space), a somewhat paradoxical situation has developed in Ukraine. On the one hand, Jewish studies are present in leading humanities universities. On the other hand, there is no place in Ukraine where one can obtain a full higher education in Jewish studies, requiring specialization from the first year (as is the case, for example, at *the Institute of Asian and African Studies at Moscow State University)*. There is not a single independent department of Jewish studies. Once relatively successful programs at *the* private *Solomon University* (and its *Eastern Ukrainian branch* in Kharkiv) were shut down more than ten years ago.

Master's programs in Jewish studies exist today at *the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy* (https://vstup.ukma.edu.ua/education-program-info?ep-id=45) and at *the Ukrainian Catholic University* in Lviv (https://jewishstudies.ucu.edu.ua/), both within the history departments. The program at NaUKMA is supported by the Vaad of Ukraine. As mentioned above, this is the only specifically "Jewish" project that the Vaad continues to support during the full-scale war, which demonstrates the importance of the program for the community. The number of students who enroll in these programs each year is small, but the programs are stable and the teaching is of a high standard.

The only difficulty is the institutionalization of Jewish studies as an additional narrow specialization only at the master's level. During the four courses of basic higher education in the bachelor's program, students do not have the opportunity to specialize in Jewish studies. NaUKMA and UCU provide bachelor's students with a strong general education, but Jewish studies is a sufficiently specific branch of the humanities that it is only possible to gain a complete understanding of it within the framework of specialized master's courses. Suffice it to say that two years is clearly insufficient to master Hebrew to a level sufficient for reading literature and sources. Previously, NaUKMA also offered *a* two-year *Certificate Program in Jewish Studies* (https://www.cpjudaica.org.ua/), which offered undergraduate students a wide range of courses on Jewish history and culture as an additional (non-major) specialization. In recent years (even before the full-scale war), the Certificate Program lost its affiliation with NaUKMA and is now formally affiliated with *the Institute of Oriental Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine* (NASU). With its separation from the university, the Certificate Program has become less cohesive and systematic. It now operates as an online educational platform. The program is arguably the undisputed leader in informal Jewish education in Ukraine. Its online courses and individual lectures are quite popular with a wide audience. The program's success shows there's a demand for informal Jewish education. Obviously, it can't fill this niche on its own. It seems like something similar to Russia's Arzamas educational project could be a good idea. But informal education comes in lots of different forms.

The development of Jewish education in Ukraine is hampered by a lack of financial support and a shortage of qualified personnel. The existing centers of higher education in Jewish studies in Ukraine appear to be insufficient to train specialists both for work in communities and for the study and introduction of the rich Jewish spiritual and cultural heritage into the broader scientific and cultural sphere.

Formally, several universities and academic institutions have departments dedicated to research in the field of Jewish studies. However, there are no systematic research projects. In practice, work is carried out within the framework of the personal scientific interests of specific employees and teachers. Such researchers can be found at *the Institute of Philosophy, the Institute of Oriental Studies*, and *the Institute of Ethno-National and Political Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine* (the latter even has *a* formal *Center for Jewish History and Culture* headed by Anatoly **Podolsky,** https://ipiend.gov.ua/struktura/tsentry/tsentr-ievrejskoi-istorii-i-kultury/). Ten years ago, *a* promising *Center for Jewish Studies* was established at *the National University "Ostrog Academy"* under the leadership of biblical scholar Dmitry **Tsolyn.** In particular, they held several summer schools on Semitic philology and Hebrew studies at a truly world-class level. However, in recent years, the Center has not been active due to a lack of funding.

At the individual level, researchers are united by *the Ukrainian Association of Jewish Studies* (https://uajs.org.ua/). The association published an annual collection on Jewish studies (https://judaicaukrainica.ukma.edu.ua/), which, however, has not been published for more than five years, and occasionally holds small thematic conferences.

Last but not least, we should mention *the Center for the Study of the History and Culture of Eastern European Jewry at NaUKMA* (https://www.judaicacenter.kyiv.ua/), headed by Leonid **Finberg**. Although the Center does not conduct research itself, being affiliated with the publishing house *"Dukh i* Litera," it publishes more books on Jewish topics in Ukrainian, including fiction, research, and popular science nonfiction, than all other Ukrainian publishers combined.

Despite the publishing house's undeniable successes (in particular, the publication of a number of high-quality academic books, as well as new translations of fiction from Hebrew and Yiddish), with its current workload, "Dukh i Litera" is unable to significantly influence the situation that has developed over decades of dominance in Ukraine by Russian and Russian-language book production. It should be borne in mind that before the war, most Ukrainian Jews lived in large cities in the center, south, and east of the country and were largely Russified in linguistic terms. Most Ukrainian Jewish newspapers (when they were still published) were published in Russian. The systematic linguistic Ukrainization of the Ukrainian Jewish information space began relatively recently. While it did not take much time to translate the organization's website into Ukrainian, filling the book market with high-quality publications requires much more resources and effort.

Until recently, Israeli and Russian Russian-language publishers such as Shamir, Gesharim, Lechaim, and Knizhniki largely satisfied the demand for Jewish literature in Ukraine. In the context of isolation from the Russian information space, the demand for Jewish-themed publications remains unmet in the Ukrainian book market (and the broader cultural market). Jewish communities lack even Ukrainian-language prayer books and a basic set of sacred texts and traditional commentaries, the publication of which requires significant intellectual resources and expertise that Ukrainian publishing projects have not been able to provide to date. Intellectual discussions in world Jewish studies have been passing the Ukrainian audience by for decades. In this respect, Ukraine has fallen hopelessly behind not only Russia but also Poland.

Book projects such as the Ukrainian edition of a prayer book or sacred texts with traditional commentary, or a series of translations of the most important studies on Judaism in recent decades, cannot be commercially viable in the Ukrainian context. With funding, however, and despite limited human resources, such projects are nevertheless feasible. Publishing books is much cheaper than restoring historic synagogues, creating museums, building megalomaniacal memorials, or even holding large-scale public events. Meanwhile, this area is extremely important

both for maintaining identity and for shaping a modern, competitive, and culturally attractive model of external positioning for the Jewish community.

3. The impact of the war on the Jewish community

The consequences of full-scale Russian aggression for the Jewish community are difficult to quantify in formal terms. The war has touched the minds and souls of everyone in Ukraine, including those who were forced to leave, leaving deep scars.

3.1. Direct damage

As a result of the fighting and Russian shelling, Jewish cultural sites—synagogues, cemeteries, memorials, as well as schools and offices of organizations—have been damaged.
According to the monitoring project "Religion on Fire," 17 Jewish religious sites were damaged in various ways as a result of the fighting. It is important to pay particular attention to religious infrastructure, as under international humanitarian law, religious buildings have special protected status, the same as medical facilities, educational institutions, and cultural heritage sites.

The damage varies in nature. While the two synagogues and the Karaite kenasa in Kharkiv that were damaged by shelling can be restored with relatively little effort, the old synagogue and the new community center in Mariupol were completely destroyed during the fighting and cannot be rebuilt. Synagogues were hit by rocket fire not only in frontline cities, but also in Chortkiv in the Ternopil region in the west of the country, hundreds of kilometers from the combat zone. Russian rockets and shells scarred Jewish cemeteries in the Kyiv, Odesa, and Sumy regions. For the Jewish religious tradition, which treats the physical remains of the dead with extreme reverence, this is extremely painful.

However, it must be acknowledged that, by and large, no irreparable damage has been done to Jewish material cultural heritage. The most important sites, both from a historical and architectural and from a religious point of view, have not been damaged, at least not yet.

3.2. Indirect damage

Much more significant is the indirect damage, which has seriously undermined the very ability of Ukraine's institutional Jewish community to continue its normal activities. This is not just a matter of festivals and summer camps for children not being held in the country for the fourth year in a row. Formally, "frozen" projects could be resumed after the hypothetical end of the war, provided that financial resources are available. However, the war has dragged on, and some changes are becoming irreversible.

In the first weeks of the war, chaos, the rapid advance of Russian troops, and fears that large areas could be occupied caused a mass exodus of the population to western regions and Europe. Despite the relative stabilization of the front line by the end of 2022, Ukrainians are in no hurry to return to their homes due to constant shelling and destruction of infrastructure, which has led, in particular, to power outages. The consequences of the departure of a significant part of the Jewish community are particularly noticeable in Kharkiv and Odesa; and to a lesser extent in Kyiv and Dnipro (which have taken in a significant number of displaced persons from the eastern regions of the country). Previously, small communities in western cities less exposed to shelling, such as Uzhhorod, Chernivtsi, and Ivano-Frankivsk, even benefited from large-scale forced resettlement. But overall, the community has suffered enormous losses in human potential due to the departure of activists and professionals. Many leaders, as well as rabbis, were foreigners or had other citizenships – they were the first to leave. While those who left initially continued to participate in the life of the Ukrainian Jewish community as much as possible from afar, after three and a half

years, the need to integrate into society in their new home began to take up all of the refugees' energy and time.

Many active members of the community joined the armed forces. Although they maintain ties with the community, it is clear that their new social environment, life priorities, and the specialization they often acquire in the army will make it difficult for them to return to active community life, especially professional life, after the hypothetical end of hostilities. A former secretary-referent to the head of one of the main Jewish organizations, who has become a highly skilled unmanned aerial vehicle operator, is unlikely to return to his pre-war occupation.
Those who remained behind also changed their priorities. Activists who were previously inclined toward volunteer work now clearly have areas where their efforts are much more meaningful to society than cleaning an old Jewish cemetery. A significant part of the activities of the organized structures of the Jewish community is now also directed not toward specifically "Jewish" projects, but toward humanitarian work or assistance to the front. However, a large number of activists previously involved in community projects now prefer non-Jewish, nationwide initiatives. The same applies to financial participation. The few remaining members of the urban middle class who have retained their income would rather donate money to buy a car for a combat unit than to install a "memorial wall" made of fragments of matzevot (gravestones from the Jewish cemetery) collected from vacant lots.

However, crowdfunding has never been a strong point of the Ukrainian Jewish community. Its internal sponsor was big business. A whole galaxy of large entrepreneurs was connected with metallurgy, while others were successful in the banking sector. However, the war has undermined the foundations of their businesses. Virtually all those who previously supported Jewish organizations have either lost all their assets or, at best, no longer receive the income that allowed them to generously help the community. Political conflicts must be added to the damage caused by the occupation, hostilities, and the destruction of logistics. A number of Jewish figures came into conflict with the ruling authorities and found themselves either in exile or, in the worst cases, in prison. The most prominent examples here are Vadim Rabinovich and Igor Kolomoisky, mentioned above, but there are others.

As mentioned above, Russian oligarchs and their charitable foundations, which previously supported projects in Ukraine, have stopped funding them. This process began back in 2014, but due to the complexity of the jurisdictions of various foundations, many businessmen who made their fortunes in Russia and even maintain relations with the Kremlin while living in Europe or Israel, such as Vyacheslav **Kantor,** Mikhail **Mirilashvili**, and Mikhail **Fridman,** remained interested in influencing processes in the Ukrainian Jewish community. A striking example is the story of *the Babi Yar Holocaust Memorial Center* founded by Mikhail Fridman. Before the full-scale war, thanks to significant financial investments and lobbying efforts, it had practically begun to determine state policy in the field of Holocaust remembrance, at least directly on the territory of the Babi Yar National Historical and Memorial Reserve. Although many of the Memorial Center's initiatives were sharply criticized and its main functionaries were foreigners, generous funding also allowed a large number of Ukrainian intellectuals and cultural figures to receive some money and even implement their projects. After the start of full-scale aggression, Mikhail Fridman was hit with sanctions, and the Memorial Center's activities were curtailed.

Overall, despite emergency fundraising for humanitarian needs and increased assistance from foreign, primarily American, charitable initiatives, the Ukrainian Jewish community has lost a significant part of its material base. The flow of funding for humanitarian projects from abroad is already slowing down, and it can be expected to dry up completely after the war. This prospect should be recognized, as it may cause Jewish activities in Ukraine to shrink below the level necessary to sustain Jewish life.

3.3. Aliyah and emigration

As already mentioned, the military action has forced millions of Ukrainians to leave their homes. Ukrainian Jews, like all other citizens of the country, are involved in this massive flow of forced displacement within the country and flight abroad. In the neighboring countries, with the support of the Jewish Agency for Israel and other organizations, camps were set up in the first days of the war to provide refugees with necessary assistance and further transport to Israel.
It is important to take into account the difference between the situations of Jews and other Ukrainian refugees abroad. Unlike other Ukrainians, ethnic Jews from Ukraine have a state that is ready not only to help and immediately accept them, but also to grant them citizenship. The requirements for identity documents and proof of repatriation rights have been quickly simplified, and the process of issuing Israeli passports has been sped up. Israeli government agencies are actively working to support new repatriates (*olim,* as they are called in Hebrew), who have often lost everything in their homeland, and to help them integrate into Israeli society.

It is difficult to say how many of the millions of Ukrainian refugees who have been abroad for four years will return after the end of the hostilities. As noted above, depopulation will be one of the serious problems facing Ukraine, slowing down post-war recovery. However, it can be said with certainty that, in percentage terms, the Ukrainian Jewish community will suffer disproportionately greater human losses as a result of emigration due to the war than Ukrainian society as a whole.

In 2022, more than 15,000 people made aliyah from Ukraine. The majority, of course, left in the first few months, with the flow slowing down thereafter. According to the Israeli Ministry of Aliyah and Integration, about 2,000 new repatriates arrived from Ukraine in 2023 and about 1,000 in 2024 (Israeli aliyah statistics are published for the year according to the Jewish calendar, i.e., approximately from September to September, which makes it somewhat difficult to calculate). It is clear that this represents a significant percentage of the pre-war community.

It is difficult to say how many Jews have found refuge in Europe and the United States. Many of them – probably more than among Ukrainian refugees as a whole – had relatives, friends, and colleagues abroad who were not only able to help them in the early stages but also facilitated their integration into their new society. This is especially true for those who were previously active participants in community life or professional employees of Jewish organizations. It can be assumed that fewer of them will return to Ukraine.

The mass departure of refugees abroad not only reduces the size of the Jewish community, but also weakens its institutional capacity. After the war, a new generation of activists, community professionals, and future Jewish leaders will need to be consciously formed practically from scratch.

3.4. Social and humanitarian work of community institutions

Apart from the losses, however tragic they may be in such a large-scale war, it is important to note some significant positive developments. In extreme circumstances, the Jewish community has shown itself to be a visible and active part of Ukraine's generally well-developed and strong civil society.

In the first months of the war, the synagogues and Jewish community centers in Kyiv were filled with far more people than during the most important Jewish holidays. This was a natural increase in religiosity among the congregation during a period of existential challenges. On the contrary, the religious function of the Jewish community took a back seat in Ukraine at that time. The social

function, which had always been important to the community, came to the fore. Suffice it to say that in March 2022, the FEOU issued an order allowing rabbis to take calls on their cell phones on Saturdays. This violation of one of the most familiar prohibitions concerning the observance *of the Sabbath* was justified by the need to help people and save human lives (the principle *of pikuah nefesh)*. Obviously, people can only call a rabbi on Saturday in an emergency. This is just one small, almost curious, but very characteristic example of how the community responded appropriately and flexibly to extraordinary circumstances.
The changes in community life were more serious. Many Jewish community infrastructure facilities, such as the Menorah Center in Dnipro, were turned into multipurpose humanitarian hubs. Food, medicine, personal hygiene items, and other humanitarian supplies were often purchased and delivered by representatives of Jewish communities from European countries. Humanitarian supplies were unloaded at synagogues and community centers, distributed to those in need, or transported further. As a rule, they were sent to regions closer to the zone of intense combat operations, and after the successful offensive of the Ukrainian army in 2022, to the liberated territory. However, humanitarian aid was also distributed in the surrounding areas, helping lonely elderly or sick people in need who were left without proper state care or without the help of relatives and friends who had gone to the front or moved further west to safer regions or outside Ukraine. Sociological studies show that residents of liberated territories and frontline regions often recall receiving assistance from Jewish organizations – less often than from *the International Red Cross* or *the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees,* but at about the same level as major European humanitarian organizations such as *Caritas* or *People in Need*.

In the first months of the war, many Jewish community centers became transit points for displaced persons and refugees. Here, people received medical care, psychological support, food, and shelter. The Jewish community provided assistance to those in need regardless of their ethnic origin or religious affiliation. The humanitarian projects of *the Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union* (UCSJ) in Lviv should also be mentioned in this context.

In some cases, lonely pensioners and people with limited mobility needed physical help to leave. First and foremost, Jewish communities helped their own members and their relatives, but the Vaad of Ukraine, for example, initiated a large-scale program to evacuate them from the frontline zone. After the first few months of emergency response to the rapidly changing situation, Jewish communities moved on to more systematic activities. A striking example of this is the Vaad Ukraine program "Recovery During War," designed for families who have been severely affected by the fighting, have lost family members, and are in need of psychological rehabilitation (https://vaadua.org/sites/default/files/files/2023/Presentation-2023-eng.pdf). This is one of the largest psycho-emotional support programs in the country. It provides for a long-term (three weeks) stay in a safe region away from the combat zone with constant support from highly professional psychologists. In recent years, virtually all of Vaad's activities have been focused on this program.

To sum up, the Jewish community of Ukraine has emerged as a prominent and quite effective participant in the humanitarian processes unfolding throughout the country and beyond. The success of the Jewish community in humanitarian work today is ensured by certain structural features of its organization that had developed before the full-scale war.

Firstly, it has an existing social infrastructure and significant experience gained in charitable activities in the past. Due to socio-demographic reasons, Ukraine's Jewish community has been rapidly aging in recent decades. Many young and middle-aged people have left for Israel, the US, or Germany, leaving elderly people living alone in the care of community institutions. The community, drawing on traditions of religious charity (*tsedaka)* and effectively utilizing opportunities that opened up with the arrival of American-style organizations such as the Joint in

the post-Soviet space, has managed to build a large-scale patronage network. This proved to be an excellent basis for scaling up this experience in order to respond to the current challenges posed by the war.

Before the war, the established system of patron-client relationships, which taught many to treat the organized structures of the Jewish community as consumers and in some ways even suppressed grassroots initiative, was criticized by many observers. But in extreme conditions, when a huge number of people objectively needed help, Jewish organizations, drawing on their accumulated experience, were able to scale up their activities relatively quickly and effectively. This proved to be extremely necessary and, for many, simply lifesaving.

The second factor that enabled the Jewish community to take the lead in Ukrainian society as a whole in terms of the effectiveness of humanitarian work in wartime was its numerous working contacts with community institutions abroad. International Jewish solidarity proved capable of extremely effective mobilization. Decades of religious, personal, working, and institutional ties helped the Jewish community quickly organize optimal logistics chains for the delivery of various essential goods from Europe (or from Israel and America via Europe) and for receiving the flow of refugees traveling in the opposite direction. In Moldova, Poland, Hungary, and Romania, with financial support from Western organizations and direct assistance from local Jewish communities, camps were set up to provide comprehensive assistance to refugees, both Jews and others in need. Humanitarian aid began to arrive through international Jewish organizations in the West. Community buildings were turned into warehouses for food, medicine, hygiene products, and children's items. Community organizations compiled lists of those in need, unloaded and distributed hundreds of tons of humanitarian aid.

Times of crisis always mobilize and consolidate. The Ukrainian Jewish community feels powerful support from around the world, which has been shaped by a wave of solidarity with Ukraine in the global Jewish diaspora. This support will be extremely necessary after the war ends. Unfortunately, it seems that this is still a long way off.

Conclusion

Any attempt to summarize the achievements and problems, trends and needs in a country as large as Ukraine at such a difficult time as now will be, first of all, subjective and, secondly, incomplete. During the preparation of this report, more than ten interviews were conducted with community leaders, professionals, and activists, but all assessments and conclusions, with all possible errors, remain the sole responsibility of the author. A number of topics important to the community were left out of the report, such as museum and memorial activities, Holocaust remembrance, restitution issues, and a wide range of cultural activities, including, for example, music and festivals. The aim of the report was to focus on those aspects that the author considers essential for the formation and maintenance of Jewish identity and the development of a community that is going through a difficult period.

As mentioned above, after the end of the war in Ukraine, there will be significantly fewer Jews than before the start of the full-scale aggression. The community will have to be "rebuilt" from scratch, and in many ways on new foundations. This is undoubtedly a dramatic situation, but it is not unique. Even without recalling attempts to revive community life in Europe after World War II, a much closer example can be found.

At the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, in the final years of Perestroika and immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was a mass exodus of Jews from the region – the "Great Aliyah"

and emigration to the US, Germany, and other countries. In terms of numbers, the community shrank several times over, if not by an order of magnitude.

Contrary to the widespread belief that there was no Jewish life in the Soviet Union, in fact, tens of thousands of people participated in various informal associations, from underground religious circles to semi-hippie hangouts, in the 1970s and 1980s. Having mostly survived the Andropov persecutions, during the years of Perestroika, these activists became the core of the Jewish community that emerged from the underground, active and eager to openly proclaim their Jewish identity. Crowds filled not only regional cultural centers but also the Kremlin's Palace of Congresses to celebrate Jewish holidays, which were now legal.

Despite the specific, still Soviet economic conditions, this community stood firmly on its own two feet. It had no sponsors. People organized themselves to clean up old cemeteries, chipped in 50 kopecks or a ruble to start publishing a newspaper, and so on. Most of the activists of that generation emigrated. Many of those who left, especially those who repatriated to Israel, were the most conscious bearers of Jewish identity. In many cities, neither continuity nor institutional memory of this generation has survived. Within 10–15 years, the next generation of Jewish activists was convinced that community life in their city began in the second half of the 1990s, when Chabad, the Joint, and Sohnot arrived and large domestic businessmen appeared as sponsors. In a sense, after the wave of the "Great Aliyah" subsided in the mid-1990s, the Jewish community really had to be rebuilt from scratch.

Of course, this analogy is conditional. Post-war Ukraine will find itself in a much more dramatic situation than post-Soviet Ukraine. However, this example shows that the Jewish community has significant potential for survival, despite all circumstances.

Recommendations

External support remains critical to the survival of Ukraine's Jewish community. Of course, in terms of humanitarian challenges, it may seem a little strange to allocate funds to anything other than overcoming the consequences of the war (not to mention that the most rational way to help Ukrainian Jews today is to provide material support to the Ukrainian Armed Forces). However, once the current active phase of hostilities has ended, it would be desirable to avoid a situation in which donors, with relief, finally stop spending money in an attempt to cover the boundless humanitarian needs in Ukraine and switch with relief to more familiar activities. After the war, it would be ideal not only to maintain donors' attention to Ukraine, but even to strengthen it.

When the war ends, Ukrainian Jewry will face the acute question of preserving its identity and the very existence of the community. In these circumstances, donors should consciously choose strategic priorities, preferably with long-term planning.

Charity and social work, which even before the war received the lion's share of funding, are undoubtedly important for the Jewish community, but they do not ensure its development or even its survival. Funding for Orthodox religious institutions has helped strengthen the "core" of the Jewish community, but has also led to a certain degree of self-isolation. Meanwhile, as mentioned above, the key to the development of the Ukrainian Jewish community lies in its outreach to the outside world.

In these circumstances, it seems that funding should be given first and foremost to information, publishing, educational, awareness-raising, and cultural projects aimed at creating a stable and attractive information environment. In addition, it is important to support research and scientific

activities that would preserve and bring into wide circulation the enormous Jewish material and spiritual cultural heritage, which is still underappreciated in Ukraine.

The Jewish community of Ukraine itself should consider reformatting not only its activities but also its own image. It seems that greater openness in communication with the surrounding society would be beneficial. Over the years of war, it has long ceased to be a "community unto itself," becoming an important element of Ukraine's multi-ethnic and multicultural political nation. It would be ideal to develop an acceptable model for preserving identity that is compatible with harmonious integration into society (without assimilation). It seems that this could be facilitated by strengthening pluralism within the Jewish community itself, in particular through broader representation of reformist and progressive Judaism at the community and institutional levels, as well as at the conceptual level in intellectual and media discussions.

Internal flexibility and openness to the outside world could be the key to the successful development and prosperity of Ukrainian Jewry after the war, provided that sufficient external support is available.