



Ukraine

Bible Restrictions Rank: **71**
MINIMAL ACCESS RESTRICTIONS

Bible shortage has been confirmed



An Overview of Bible Access in Ukraine

Ukraine, a nation of approximately 38 million people, remains deeply shaped by its historical Christian roots and ongoing war with Russia. An estimated almost 90% of the population identifies as Christian, translating to nearly 34 million believers across the country. However, despite the widespread presence of Christianity, access to the Bible remains uneven, with estimates showing less than 40% of believers have access to Scripture, especially in areas impacted by Russian occupation and non-Orthodox communities.

Across most of Ukraine, there are little to no restrictions on Bible access. The nation's constitution guarantees religious freedom, and believers from various traditions can generally access Scripture freely. In fact, Ukraine has near-universal literacy and high levels of internet penetration, creating a promising environment for both printed and digital Bible formats.

Yet this freedom is not uniform. In Russian-controlled areas, which now account for roughly 20% of Ukraine's territory and include over 8 million residents, Bible access is significantly hindered. In these regions, the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) is given exclusive favor. Other Christian groups, particularly Protestant and Catholic communities, face intimidation, confiscation of materials, and the risk of detention. Bibles not published under ROC sanction can be considered "extremist" materials, especially if printed in Ukrainian or linked to non-ROC groups. While some ministries have managed to resume limited Bible imports into these areas by routing through Russia, the situation remains precarious.

Religious oppression in these territories is severe and often violent. Some leaders, especially from Protestant and Ukrainian Greek Catholic backgrounds, have been detained, tortured, or even killed. Churches have been sealed, destroyed, or repurposed, and private homes searched for Christian literature. Such conditions make Bible ownership dangerous, forcing many Christians to practice their faith in secret or without access to Scripture altogether.

In contrast, the rest of Ukraine, particularly in government-controlled areas, enjoys relative religious openness. However, the ongoing war has dramatically strained distribution networks and made physical Bible access difficult in conflict zones. Over 3.6 million people are currently displaced internally, and infrastructure in many areas, though technically functioning, has suffered under bombardment and sabotage. While around 70% of the population is urban and connected, the war has damaged communication lines, electricity grids, and logistics routes, complicating Bible distribution both in print and digitally.

Economically, the conflict has driven much of the population into poverty. Though food availability remains relatively stable in government-controlled regions, millions are at risk due to inflation, unemployment, and displacement. With pressing needs like shelter and sustenance, the ability to purchase a Bible, physically or online, becomes an afterthought for many families. This reality is compounded in areas where Christian materials are scarce, heavily regulated, or unsafe to use.

Before we continue, would you take a pause to pray for Ukraine?

How can I pray for Ukraine?

- **Provision.** Lift up prayers for the fulfillment of the Bible shortage across Ukraine. Pray that every believer, in every corner of the country, receives the Scripture to strengthen their faith amidst the trials.
- **Global Partnerships and Support.** Ask the Lord to raise up partnerships and collaborations that establish innovative solutions to overcome the barriers to Bible distribution, especially in conflict-affected areas.
- **Peace and End of War.** Pray fervently that the hostilities in Ukraine would cease. Let's plead heaven for a resolution to the war that allows for the free and safe dissemination of the Bible, paving the way for healing and reconciliation within the nation.

After praying for Ukraine, continue reading on the next page to learn more.

Bible Access Restrictions

Minimal Access Restrictions

- Import restrictions for part of the country
- Print restrictions for part of the country
- Storage restrictions for part of the country
- Distribution restrictions for part of the country

Other Limiting Factors

Some Other Factors

- Poor infrastructure

Bible Shortages Among Believers

- Bibles are needed for believers and seekers
- Impacted by armed conflicts

Main religion: Christianity

Country population: 37,938,000

Christian population:

33,834,000, 89.18% of total population

World Watch List: #69

WHAT'S BLOCKING BIBLE ACCESS IN UKRAINE?

A Nation Caught in a Warzone

The ongoing war in Ukraine has created major barriers to Bible access, particularly in areas under Russian occupation. Since Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, religious freedom in occupied regions has deteriorated sharply. In Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia, Russian occupation forces have imposed severe restrictions on all Christian groups not aligned with the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC).

Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox Church of Ukraine communities have seen churches raided, properties seized, and leaders arrested or even killed. Many religious buildings have been destroyed or looted, and Christians caught in possession of Scripture or gathering for worship outside ROC-approved channels face harassment, threats, or worse.



Hostile Territory for Non-ROC Christians

In Russian-controlled areas, non-Russian Orthodox Christians are often labeled as "extremists" or "foreign agents." Meeting for worship, distributing Christian materials, or conducting baptisms outside ROC oversight is either banned or extremely dangerous. In Luhansk, all unregistered religious organizations are banned, and since 2019, all Baptist publications have been prohibited.

Reports include pastors being abducted, tortured, and murdered, churches sealed off, and believers forced to worship in secret. Russian authorities have been documented using surveillance, smear campaigns, and even violence to suppress Christian activity that does not fall under their control.

Legal Restrictions and Denominational Conflict

In mainland Ukraine, a different kind of barrier exists. Due to security concerns and accusations of collaboration with the Russian regime, the Ukrainian government officially banned the Russian Orthodox Church in September 2024.

While this ban is aimed at severing ties with pro-Russian religious entities, it has created tensions and disrupted Christian communities that were formerly aligned with the Moscow Patriarchate.

Displacement and Destruction

The war has displaced millions and destroyed at least 600+ religious buildings between July 2022 until today. Displaced believers, many now living in temporary or unstable housing, often lack access to Bibles. In territories under bombardment or military control, the logistical networks for printing, importing, and distributing Bibles have been crippled.

Unmasking the Forces That Restrict Bible Access in Ukraine

Ukraine	Islamic Oppression	Religious Nationalism	Ethno-religious hostility	Clan oppression	Christian denominational oppression	Communist and post-Communist oppression	Secular intolerance	Dictatorial paranoia	Organized corruption and crime	Reference
Persecution Engines →										<p>The more fully shaded the circle in orange, the stronger the level of persecution. The number of "+" signs indicates the frequency or intensity of the driving factors behind it.</p>
Persecution Drivers ↓	Not at all	Not at all	Not at all	Not at all	Strong	Not at all	Not at all	Strong	Not at all	
Government officials					++++			++++		
Ethnic group leaders										
Non-Christian religious leaders										
Christian religious leaders					++++			++++		
Violent religious groups										
Normal citizens					++					
Extended family					++					
Political parties										
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups								+++		
Organized crime										
Multilateral org. & Embassies										

In Ukraine, two major forces of persecution restrict Bible access: **dictatorial paranoia** and **Christian denominational protectionism**. These operate in stark contrast depending on the region: in Russian-controlled areas, the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) enjoys privileged status while non-ROC denominations are heavily repressed; in mainland Ukraine, recent government policies have placed significant restrictions on ROC-linked churches due to national security concerns. These pressures are driven by both government authorities and religious leaders on both sides of the Orthodox divide.

The World Watch List by Open Doors sheds light on the broader context of persecution of Christians. But now we have to ask the question: How does this affect Bible access? Furthermore, where can we pinpoint the problem so we can address the need and demand for Bibles in Ukraine?

A CLOSER LOOK AT PERSECUTION ENGINES

A persecution engine is simply this: the source of persecution in the country. A persecution driver (or actor) is the one “driving” the persecution. Taking a closer look at these engines and drivers, in proper context, will give us insight on how we can solve the problems of Bible access in the country.



Russian State-Controlled Religious Oppression

In Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine, dictatorial paranoia is manifest in sweeping restrictions on religious freedom, particularly targeting Christian groups not aligned with the ROC-Moscow Patriarchate. Government officials and ROC leaders in these areas collaborate to suppress non-ROC Christian expression. This includes blocking Bible distribution, raiding worship services, confiscating religious literature, and detaining church leaders.

For example, In February 2024, a priest from the Orthodox Church of Ukraine was abducted in Russian-occupied Kherson and found dead two days later with signs of torture. And in March 2024, Russian militants seized Ukrainian Greek Catholic churches in Donetsk, barring believers from entering and praying.

Christians in these regions are forced to operate underground or not at all. The act of owning or distributing Bibles is deemed “extremist,” with believers at risk of interrogation, detention, or worse. The state-sanctioned persecution reflects a dictatorial paranoia where any non-ROC religious activity is equated with political dissent or espionage.

Meanwhile, in mainland Ukraine, dictatorial paranoia takes a different form. As a national security measure in response to Russia’s invasion and the ROC’s support of the war, the Ukrainian government officially banned the Russian Orthodox Church from operating in the country as of September 2024. While this move was aimed at curbing foreign influence, it also disrupts Christian communities associated with ROC traditions and their access to Scripture.



Rivalry Within The Church

The ongoing war has deepened divisions within Ukraine’s Orthodox community, fueling Christian denominational protectionism on both sides. This form of persecution arises when one Christian group (often aligned with state power) suppresses others in order to protect its doctrinal authority or institutional control.

In mainland Ukraine, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), recognized as autocephalous since 2018, has grown in influence. Many Ukrainians now view the UOC, formerly aligned with Moscow, as complicit in the invasion. As a result, UOC churches have been vandalized, shut down, or taken over, and some priests have faced arrest or imprisonment, such as the abbot in Dnipropetrovsk sentenced to five years for supporting the Russian invasion.

In contrast, in Russian-controlled areas, ROC-affiliated leaders and officials target the UOC and other denominations like Pentecostals, Baptists, and Greek Catholics, labeling them as “American sectarians” or political threats.

This mutual antagonism between religious factions, each backed by their respective authorities, has resulted in widespread harassment, closure of churches, disruption of worship, and the confiscation or banning of Bibles. It has created a climate of distrust, fear, and division within Ukraine’s Christian community, making the free flow of Scripture exceedingly difficult in both occupied and government-controlled regions.

THE URGENT NEED FOR BIBLES IN THE UKRAINE

Against the backdrop of war, persecution, displacement, and rising spiritual hunger, Bible access in Ukraine remains alarmingly low. Given the size of the Christian population, a significant number of Bibles is still required to bridge the gap of access. This highlights not only a logistical issue but a profound spiritual crisis in a nation torn apart by conflict.

A Church in Decline, A Crisis of Access

While many countries report church growth, Ukraine has witnessed a 10% decline in the number of Christians in recent years. The war has displaced millions, shuttered churches, and led to the destruction of more than 600 religious buildings. Christian leaders have been abducted, imprisoned, or killed, especially in Russian-occupied areas where non-Russian Orthodox churches are strictly repressed.

In this context, providing more Bibles is not simply a response to church growth. It is an act of rescue. It's about anchoring believers who are being spiritually isolated and stripped of their sacred texts.

Bible Formats for a Nation in Crisis

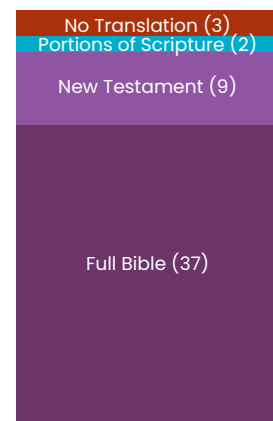
For most Ukrainians, **printed Bibles** remain the most accessible and most requested format. This is especially true in rural areas and among the elderly, who may not use smartphones or the internet regularly. That said, nearly 80% of Ukrainians have internet connectivity, making **digital formats accessed through the internet** an important secondary priority, particularly for younger believers and displaced populations.

The Translation Gap

Language diversity poses another layer of complexity. While 51 languages are spoken by Christians in Ukraine, of these languages:

- Only **37** languages have a full Bible translation
- **9** additional languages have access to only the New Testament
- **2** have just a portion of Scripture translated
- **3 languages still have no translation at all**

That means nearly entire communities are still underserved or unreached by the full message of Scripture. In a war-weary nation, where people are desperately searching for meaning and hope, the ability to read or hear God's Word in one's heart language can be life-altering.



Spoken Languages *with* Believers in Ukraine

THE CLARION CALL

The call for Bibles in Ukraine is not just a matter of statistics; it is a cry from the heart of the church under siege. It's the plea of a displaced mother who longs to read the Psalms to her children. It's the quiet prayer of a community pastor with no Scripture to teach from. It's the silent hunger of prisoners, soldiers, and seekers longing to hear God's promises but have no access to His Word.

This is the moment for the global Church to act. An impossible mission? Not quite. Amid war and persecution, we can deliver peace through God's Word. And amid spiritual division and confusion, we can restore direction through the truth of the Gospel.

By meeting this urgent demand—through translation projects, distribution networks, and innovative formats—we can ensure that no believer in Ukraine is left without a Bible.

The window is open. The need is great. The time to act is now.



-2.0%
Annual Church
Growth



Bibles needed for both
**Believers
& Seekers**



**Printed
Bible**
Preferred Format



**Internet
Bible**
Format 2nd Priority