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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

UN Says 730,000 People Have Fled Ukraine for Russia Over Conflict

By The Moscow Times

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People wave to the passengers of a train terminating in Moscow, at a railway station in the eastern Ukrainian city of Donetsk.

GENEVA — About 730,000 Ukrainians have left the country for Russia this year due to the fighting in eastern Ukraine, the European head of the United Nations agency for refugees said Tuesday, pointing to a far bigger exodus than previously thought.

The figure strips out seasonal data and numbers for people who would normally have crossed the border for trade or tourism purposes, the UNHCR's European director Vincent Cochetel told a news briefing.

"The 730,000, it is the 'plus' compared to other years," he said. "They are not tourists. We've seen them at the border, just like in any other conflict. They walk, sometimes they just walk across the border, they come with plastic bags. Many of them are really destitute."

A further 117,000 people are displaced inside Ukraine, a number that is growing by about 1,200 per day, he said.

Russia's Federal Migration Service has said it has this year received applications from some 168,000 people who had fled Ukraine. Cochetel said the 730,000 figure included those people who had asked Russia for protection.

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