

Poland Sees Doubling of Ukrainians Immigrants Amid Crisis

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A boy looks out the window as he rides in a car on the road near Artemivsk, eastern Ukraine.

The number of Ukrainians trying to move to neighboring Poland has more than doubled this year, authorities said Tuesday, as Ukraine released data showing how badly fighting in its east was battering its economy.

Ukrainian citizens filed 9,579 applications for temporary residence in Poland from Jan. 1 to March 23, already more than twice the 4,753 registered in the first four months of 2014, the state office for foreigners said.

"We have a difficult situation in Ukraine and a military conflict in the east, so one may expect a further inflow of Ukrainians into Poland," said the office's spokeswoman Ewa Piechota.

Clashes in industrial eastern territories with separatist fighters that Kiev says are backed by Moscow have weighed on Ukraine's currency and raised fears for its gas supplies from Russia.

Both sides in the conflict, in which more than 6,000 people have died since last April, have

accused each another of violating a cease-fire agreed in February.

Ukrainian Finance Minister Natalya Yaresko said on Tuesday the country's economy was likely to contract 7-10 percent in the first quarter of 2015 due to the financial toll of the conflict.

Ukrainians already make up a quarter of all foreigners residing in Poland. The Polish office for foreigners said 42,000 were currently legally registered.

Poland's Mazowieckie region, which includes the capital Warsaw, said on Tuesday it received 3,114 residence applications in February 2015 — 180 percent higher than the corresponding month in 2013 and 62 percent higher than 2014.

Polish Deputy Prime Minister Janusz Piechocinski said in March that Ukraine's economy was starting to disintegrate, creating a risk of hundreds of thousands of immigrants flowing into Poland.

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