



Uniting for Ukraine: A Four-Year Retrospective

History of Uniting for Ukraine (U4U)

When Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, over 10 million people – nearly one-quarter of Ukraine's population – were displaced within the first few months. In March 2022, former President Biden announced his intent to welcome up to 100,000 Ukrainians fleeing the war. Between February and April 2022, between 30,000 and 35,000 Ukrainians were granted humanitarian parole by U.S. border officials. As ports of entry at the border became overwhelmed, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) needed a more expedient way to process large numbers of arriving Ukrainians.

In response, the Biden Administration launched the Uniting for Ukraine (U4U) program. Modeled after the Afghan sponsored parole program, U4U provided a pathway for Ukrainian citizens and their immediate family members to come to the United States on humanitarian parole through U.S. sponsors. Under the program, beneficiaries could live and work for up to two years, while their sponsors agreed to provide financial support for the duration of their stay. Sponsors began submitting applications to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) in April 2022, and the first group of vetted beneficiaries arrived at the end of May. Almost 240,000 Ukrainians were paroled through U4U between 2022 and 2024 before the program was suspended in early 2025. Now, many of these parolees face major challenges and uncertainty in the United States.

Policy Changes Affecting Ukrainian Parolees

Immigration laws have not changed much since the U4U program was launched. Aside from the Laken Riley Act and H.R. 1 budget bill enacted in 2025, most changes came from the Executive Branch rather than the Legislative Branch. While some states passed laws affecting rights and enforcement of noncitizens in those states, only Congress can pass and repeal federal statutes, and immigration bills rarely garner enough bipartisan support. But even under current statutes, executive policies can have drastic effects on immigration pathways and protections, as federal agencies implement new rules and procedures to align with the administration's directives.

Among the top goals of this administration are to significantly reduce the number of new arrivals through humanitarian pathways, deport individuals who are considered by the administration to be here unlawfully or against U.S. interests, and remove protections for recent arrivals in the United States. Consistent with these goals, President Trump has issued over 250 Executive Orders since taking office, with over 50 of them directly targeting immigration, border security, and refugee programs. These orders led to numerous regulatory changes that dramatically altered the priorities and operations of the core immigration agencies, i.e. the Department of Homeland Security, Department of State, and Department of Justice.

One of the first actions of the incoming administration was curtailing large-scale entry on humanitarian parole. In January 2025, all humanitarian parole programs were indefinitely suspended, including U4U. This means no new sponsor applications are being accepted, and applications pending as of that date are not being adjudicated. Likewise, travel authorizations have not been issued to new beneficiaries, even to those vetted prior to the suspension.



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Re-Parole

Ukrainians who entered on humanitarian parole were subsequently allowed to apply for re-parole. Those who are approved are typically granted a new parole term of up to two years. It is important to note that the new parole period begins upon the expiration of their previous parole period, not upon the date of their re-parole approval. For those whose parole has already expired or will expire by the time they are granted re-parole, their new parole term is effectively reduced, cutting short their period of authorized stay on parole.

After some technical glitches and a roughly four-month pause in application processing, re-parole adjudications resumed in the summer of 2025. Ukrainians are finally seeing a steady stream of re-parole approvals, particularly for applicants who filed starting in the fall of 2025. With that said, re-parole has not gone smoothly for everyone. Delays remain common, as do inconsistent results, sometimes within the same family.

Many applicants receive Requests for Evidence (RFEs) if they do not submit enough evidence with their Form I-131. This disproportionately affects applicants who filed prior to the summer of 2025, but some who filed later and failed to include sufficient evidence of their urgent humanitarian reasons for re-parole could also receive RFEs. If this happens, the applicant needs to explain why they warrant another grant of parole and submit additional documentation demonstrating how country conditions caused by the war endanger them personally and prevent them from returning to Ukraine.

Unfortunately, a number of applicants are experiencing unusually long delays with no particular pattern we have been able to discern. There is an especially long delay for applicants who filed in 2024 or early 2025, with no meaningful way to expedite them. While a handful of applicants have succeeded in facilitating long-pending applications with congressional assistance, most have not seen any movement since filing. Some parolees ultimately filed a second application and were subsequently approved while the old application remained pending, but this is a costly approach. Plus, re-filing adds to the existing USCIS application backlog.

There are also numerous cases of parolees within the same family receiving different decisions, receiving notices far apart, or not receiving decisions at all. In some cases, USCIS indicates certain candidates require additional vetting, but it is not always clear why some individuals are affected while others are not.

Moreover, over the past few months, a number of applicants have experienced malfunctions and approval errors, some of which resulted in denials. Many of these issues were related to payment glitches not being reported correctly to USCIS, and some of those issues are in the process of being resolved. But there are other issues that have not been addressed, such as shorter re-parole grant periods and inconsistencies between the re-parole and EAD validity.

Additionally, some applicants experience a long wait time between conditional re-parole approval and a final grant of re-parole. In some cases, they wait two or more months after paying their post-conditional approval fee of \$1,020, which is required for a final grant.



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Employment Authorization Documents (EADs)

When someone's re-parole expires, so does their Employment Authorization Document (EAD) based on re-parole. Thus, parolees must apply for new work permits. While some have successfully obtained EAD renewals after being granted re-parole, others have experienced major delays, from several months to well over a year.

For most parolees, the fastest way to obtain new EADs is to request them online on the same form, in conjunction with their re-parole request. However, not everyone is able to use this feature. Parolees who filed in 2024 and early 2025 did not have the option to request an EAD on their Form I-131 for re-parole. They were forced to file two separate forms, and many have been waiting for their re-parole and/or EAD renewal since. Also, parolees who cannot afford the steep application fees need to file fee waivers with their applications by mail, which delays their re-parole and EAD processing while risking additional delay if their fee waiver is denied.

These delays are creating serious gaps in employment authorization, yet few applicants have been successful in expediting their EAD renewal applications, even with urgent letters from employers. Many employers, fearing government investigations or penalties, have let go employees who were not able to obtain EAD renewals. As a result, a growing number of parolees now find themselves in serious danger of losing their jobs, housing, insurance, and even the ability to renew driver's licenses where a valid EAD is needed.

Since the new EAD validity period begins upon the expiration of their previous parole period rather than upon receipt of the new EAD, applicants who already had to wait a long time for new work permits may effectively receive a shorter EAD validity period if their parole already expired. Compounding this problem, new regulations have made many work permits valid for only one year. Humanitarian parolees must now apply each year and wait for new EADs to arrive.

Application Fees

In the past year, re-parole and work-permit fees have skyrocketed. As of May 2026, it costs \$580 to request re-parole online and \$630 to request it by mail, unless the applicant qualifies for a fee waiver. This does not include a final parole grant fee of \$1,020 for those who are conditionally approved for re-parole. The final parole grant fee cannot be waived, and applicants must pay the fee by the deadline specified or they will be denied re-parole.

EAD renewals cost \$470 if filing online and \$520 if filing by mail. Additionally, there is an EAD application fee of \$280 that must be paid separately and cannot be waived. Parolees must now pay this fee each year to renew their employment authorization. This brings the total cost for re-parole and work permits to \$2,350 - \$2,450 per person, which is cost-prohibitive for some households.

Consequently, parolees with limited means are forced to make difficult choices about renewals. Some choose to rely on TPS for valid status and EADs, only to learn that TPS-based processing is at a standstill. Others determine they cannot afford to pay for all family members and decide to leave the United States to prevent separation or avoid unlawful status and/or employment.



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Temporary Protected Status (TPS)

In addition to re-parole, some Ukrainians are eligible to apply for Temporary Protected Status (TPS), which grants them the right to stay in the U.S. and apply for TPS-based work permits. However, TPS is currently open only to citizens of Ukraine (or stateless persons who last resided there) who arrived in the United States by August 16, 2023 and don't have disqualifying criminal or other factors. This precludes Ukrainian citizens who arrived after that date, as well as the many non-Ukrainian spouses and children of Ukrainian citizens who came here on U4U.

Even for Ukrainians eligible for TPS protection, Ukraine's TPS designation expires October 19, 2026. This means Ukrainians who have already been granted or who have pending TPS applications will only have TPS protection for a few more months, if at all. By law, the Secretary of Homeland Security must review Ukraine's TPS designation no later than 60 days before it expires to determine whether to extend and/or renew it. As of today, no action has been taken.

Equally problematic is the virtual standstill in TPS processing, both for those requesting initial TPS grants and those who requested to extend their existing TPS during the specified re-registration window. Hardly any Ukrainians who applied for TPS after the third quarter of 2024 have received decisions. TPS adjudication does not appear to be a priority for USCIS, and this is causing many Ukrainians – including parolees with gaps in parole or EADs who were relying on TPS protection – to lose lawful status and employment authorization based on TPS.

Temporary Visas and Permanent Residence

Beyond re-parole and TPS, Ukrainian parolees have limited options to extend their stay, either long-term or short-term. As a result, some Ukrainians have been forced to leave the United States because they or their family members are unable to find a lawful way to remain here.

Unfortunately, parolees are not allowed to apply directly for nonimmigrant (temporary) visas in the United States. Unlike Ukrainians who entered on visas, those who entered on humanitarian parole cannot apply directly for a Change of Status to a nonimmigrant visa, since entry on parole is not considered a lawful nonimmigrant status for Change of Status purposes. In order for them to obtain a student, visitor, temporary worker, or other nonimmigrant visa, they must leave the United States and interview at a U.S. consulate abroad.

Meanwhile, Ukrainians who seek green cards through immigrant (permanent residence) visas face other challenges, whether they apply through family, employment, or diversity pathways.

For family-based immigrant visas, a relatively small proportion of Ukrainians have qualifying U.S. relatives who can file petitions to sponsor them. Those eligible to apply for family-based immigrant visas are now encountering "extreme vetting" by USCIS and the State Department. This includes lengthier and more aggressive interviews, FBI background checks, mandatory social media scrutiny, intensive marriage investigations, and even re-review of parolees' U4U sponsors who filed I-134a applications on their behalf. Aside from adding to processing delays, these measures require certain candidates to re-interview, subjecting them to new threats.



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As for employment-based green cards, parolees are unable to directly apply for permanent residence through employment-based immigrant visas, since parole is not considered a sufficient entry for employment-based Adjustment of Status. Although U.S. employers may petition to sponsor U4U parolees for employment-based visas, once the petition is approved, beneficiaries must leave the United States to pursue the rest of the process. This means parolees must choose one or both of the following routes: 1) Leave the United States, interview, at the U.S. consulate in Ukraine or another country where they have residence, then re-enter with an approved visa from the State Department, or 2) leave the United States on TPS, return and be admitted on TPS rather than parole status, and apply for adjustment of status to USCIS if a visa is available to them.

Both routes pose risks. It can take years to obtain an employment-based immigrant visa, so parolees must either wait overseas while their application is pending or find a means by which to remain in the United States lawfully so they don't accrue unauthorized presence. Those who can't wait upwards of a year or more to obtain an Advance Parole Document will automatically terminate their parole upon leaving the U.S., while those who manage to obtain one must return while their advance parole is still valid. Meanwhile, parolees who travel after obtaining a TPS grant and TPS-based advance parole must return while their TPS is still valid. The current TPS term expires October 19, 2026 for those who are granted the extension. Even with advance parole, they may not be allowed to return

Another historic green card avenue, the Diversity Visa (DV) lottery, is currently unavailable. In late 2025, the State Department suspended the issuance of new Diversity Visas. For those who previously won the DV lottery or were already issued DV visas, USCIS is not adjudicating new applications for Adjustment of Status. If the suspension remains in effect, those with pending Adjustment of Status applications may not be able to complete their adjustment in the required calendar year, thus losing their chance to take advantage of the DV visa they won.

While asylum is also a potential path by which to seek permanent residence, asylum is not a realistic option for most Ukrainians due to its restrictive eligibility under current laws. Even though USCIS has resumed adjudicating affirmative asylum adjudications, most Ukrainian nationals do not meet the legal threshold to file a viable application. Simply fleeing war is not a sufficient qualification on its own. The applicant must show significant past persecution or a well-founded fear of future persecution in the form of unlawful or political detention, torture, violation of human rights, physical violence, or some type of severe non-physical harm. The persecution must be based on their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, and it must be committed by their home country's government or a group from which their home government cannot protect them.

The legal requirements for defensive asylum, i.e. asylum requested to an immigration court by individuals already in removal proceedings, are the same as those for affirmative asylum. However, asylum grants by immigration judges have all but vanished under current immigration directives. Many Ukrainians facing removal tried to obtain asylum but were denied. Some now face deportation, while others have already been deported.



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Enforcement and Detention

The number of reported detentions of Ukrainians has risen dramatically over the past year. Those with expired statuses are at risk, but those with valid statuses and documents showing their authorization to be in the United States are also apprehended with increasing frequency. Many of those detained have pending re-parole, TPS, asylum, or adjustment of status applications with USCIS.

For those detained with valid humanitarian parole, DHS often terminates their parole status upon commencing removal proceedings against them. This is because parole is not a formal immigration status per se; it is simply permission granted to a person to enter the U.S. for a limited time and for a limited purpose. Due to its discretionary nature, parole can be taken away at any time if DHS determines the parole grant is no longer needed.

According to the most recent data from the [Deportation Data Project](#), between January 2025 and early March 2026, over 370 Ukrainians were placed in immigration detention, adding to approximately 45 Ukrainians already held in detention. As of early March 2026, there were 177 Ukrainians in detention, including 22 women. Some had been there for as long as two years.

Ukrainian detainees have been dispersed across 116 different facilities used by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Additional adults are held in state or local correctional facilities, with some later transferred to DHS facilities. All detained Ukrainian children were held in the South Texas Family Residential Center in Dilley, Texas. Children detained in 2025 (but subsequently released) included four girls born between 2009 and 2011 and three boys born between 2012 and 2016. Three of them spent over three months each in ICE custody.

A number of detentions involve Ukrainian parolees operating rideshare vehicles (ex. Uber and Lyft), driving trucks or other commercial vehicles, delivering food or groceries, and working at construction sites. A large proportion of immigration detentions have resulted from arrests by other types of law enforcement, such as state and local police or transportation authorities.

Truck drivers are particularly at risk due to a new federal rule that restricts Commercial Drivers Licenses (CDLs) and Commercial Learner's Permits (CLPs) to a very narrow category of employment-based visa holders (H-2A, H-2B, E-2) and requires holders to have corresponding EADs. Parolees are no longer allowed to obtain new CDLs/CLPs or renewals, and they cannot apply for these work visas without leaving the United States. Even parolees who technically hold unexpired CDLs are being targeted for enforcement by state transportation authorities.

Also concerning is the increasing tendency to apprehend Ukrainians at USCIS immigration interviews, immigration court hearings, or after they are denied an immigration status by USCIS. To a lesser extent, Ukrainians have been detained during large-scale enforcement surges, such as those that took place in Chicago and Minneapolis. While a small proportion of those detained have some criminal history, a majority do not have any criminal convictions or violations in the United States or elsewhere.



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Deportations

Although there have been isolated removals of Ukrainians from the United States since 2022, deportations have ramped up significantly since 2025. ICE now conducts large-scale chartered flights regularly, with most Ukrainians being deported to Jasionka in Eastern Poland. With few exceptions, Ukrainian nationals are then transferred to Ukrainian custody and taken across the Ukrainian border. Males of conscription age report being screened immediately for military fitness then sent directly to their posts, without given time to see their relatives in Ukraine.

The Deportation Data Project reports that the U.S. government deported approximately 150 Ukrainians between January 2025 and early March 2026. Of those, 22% of Ukrainians were deported while their case was still under adjudication either by an Immigration Court or the Board of Immigration Appeals, in violation of their due process rights. Approximately 20% of deportees had previous criminal convictions ranging from misdemeanors to more serious felonies, but others did not have any criminal history in their records. These figures do *not* include 50-60 or more Ukrainians estimated to have been deported on ICE chartered flights between March 15 and April 30, 2026.

On November 19, 2025, Ukrainian border authorities reported that 50 Ukrainian citizens, including 45 men and 5 women, were deported from the United States to Poland. According to media reports, some of the Ukrainians deported via Poland in November had entered the United States under the U4U program and had pending applications for re-parole. A number of them were separated from family members who remain in the United States. On March 17, 2026, two small ICE Air jets arrived in Poland carrying an unknown number of Ukrainians. According to anecdotal reports from families of passengers, dozens of Ukrainians were on the March flights. On April 30, 2026, an estimated 30 Ukrainians were deported to Poland on. Few details are known about which Ukrainians were on this flight, but it is understood that they were also repatriated to Ukraine.

In addition to Ukrainian citizens, the United States has deported stateless individuals whose Ukrainian citizenship has not been recognized by Ukraine's government. Some had lived in the United States for decades and previously held green cards. In fact, hundreds of thousands of people born in the former Soviet Union remain stateless throughout the world. Those who left Ukraine before it became independent in 1991 did not automatically acquire Ukrainian citizenship; they had to apply for it through a formal process. Not all applicants are eligible, and some are denied. Among those deported to Poland and repatriated to Ukraine were stateless individuals who had been unsuccessful in obtaining Ukrainian citizenship.

As the number of detained Ukrainians grows, more deportation flights are expected, though stakeholders are given little notice as to when the next flight will take place. ICE does not disclose its upcoming flight plans, so attorneys and family members of potential deportees generally learn of upcoming flights after they are placed on a flight list. The Embassy of Ukraine may not be aware, either, unless it is contacted on behalf of a Ukrainian national. While immigration groups such as Human Rights First monitor the ICE deportation tracker, only flights already logged at selected airports are confirmed. Thus, future flights are difficult to predict.



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Advocacy to Help Ukrainian Parolees

Due to significant processing delays, uncertain legal statuses, and regulatory challenges facing humanitarian parolees, advocacy is needed to safeguard protections for Ukrainians who cannot return home. Those who sought refuge here deserve a chance to live in safety, provide for themselves and their families, contribute to communities that welcome them, and pursue more stable statuses in the United States. The following actions can help ensure their well-being:

1. **Redesignate and extend Ukraine's Temporary Protected Status (TPS).** Ukraine's current TPS term expires October 19, 2026. As the war continues to claim civilian lives and bring massive destruction, country conditions remain dangerous throughout, preventing Ukrainians from returning home safely. An extension of the current term would allow Ukrainians who already hold TPS to extend their protection through a shorter application process. A redesignation of Ukraine's TPS for another term would open eligibility to a new pool of applicants who entered after August 16, 2023.
2. **Resume the Uniting for Ukraine (U4U) program.** Americans across the geographic and political spectrum came together to welcome Ukrainians to their communities. Many more are eager to sponsor families who were left behind when U4U suddenly stopped.
3. **Expedite TPS, re-parole, and EAD applications for Ukrainians.** Too many parolees and other displaced Ukrainians face expired statuses and work permits. Aside from risking detention, they could lose jobs, homes, driver's licenses, and health insurance.
4. **Advance the "Protecting Our Guests During Hostilities in Ukraine Act"** introduced in 2025. Congress can pass this measure either as an independent bill or as part of larger legislation to grant statutory short-term protections to Ukrainians who arrived through the U4U program for as long as the war in Ukraine continues.
5. **Advance the "Ukrainian Adjustment Act"** re-introduced in 2025. This would provide a statutory framework for Ukrainian parolees to seek permanent residence even if they lack a qualifying U.S. relative or employer to sponsor them.
6. **Consider Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) for Ukrainians.** DED would allow all Ukrainians who meet certain requirements to immediately receive protection from removal and access to work permits, relieving USCIS backlogs for TPS and re-parole.
7. **Stop apprehending Ukrainian parolees in lawful status and those attending USCIS interviews to seek other statuses.** Individuals who came here through officially recognized channels, were vetted extensively, followed the rules, and paid costly fees should not be penalized, especially those with clean records.
8. **Restore non-domiciled Commercial Driver's License (CDL) eligibility to U4U parolees.** Ukrainian truck drivers are losing their livelihoods due to rigid new rules. This harms U.S. businesses and consumers while needlessly detaining skilled workers.

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