



PROTECTING DISPLACED UKRAINIANS IN THE UNITED STATES: How to Ensure the Safety and Stability of Those Who Can't Return Home

Who Are the Displaced Ukrainians in the United States?

Up to 510,000 Ukrainian nationals are estimated to be living in the United States on temporary statuses. A significant proportion of those who fled Russia's full-scale invasion are young women, students, mothers with children, elderly, and disabled individuals who face heightened risk of exploitation. Unfortunately, a growing number of these vulnerable Ukrainians are at risk of becoming undocumented, losing their livelihoods, being placed in detention, and even getting deported. Many more lack viable options by which to extend their stay.

Almost 240,000 Ukrainians were paroled through the **Uniting for Ukraine (U4U) program** between May 2022 and December 2024, before the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) indefinitely suspended the program in January 2025. Prior to that, approximately 30,000 Ukrainians were granted humanitarian parole at the U.S. border. Additionally, tens of thousands of Ukrainian students and family members of U.S. residents were admitted on **non-immigrant visas** between 2022 and 2025. At the same time, numerous students and temporary workers were already present in the United States when the full-scale invasion began and were unable to return to Ukraine.

Why Can't They Return to a Safe Area of Ukraine?

Now in its fifth year of full-scale war, Ukraine faces catastrophic threats of annexation and unmitigated destruction from Russia's escalating assault on civilian targets. In its latest report published August 13, 2026, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has verified at least 68,147 civilian casualties in Ukraine since the full-scale invasion began on February 24, 2022, but warned the real numbers could be higher.

The State Department's 2025 Human Rights Report details numerous war crimes and atrocities committed against Ukrainian men, women, and children. It is also estimated that 700,000 or more children have been abducted and forcibly taken to Russian territories.

At present, **no part of Ukraine is safe**. This includes major cities as well as key ports throughout the country. The State Department warns that even western and non-frontline regions remain subject to Russian missile and drone attacks. In addition to the threat of launched explosives, enemy occupation, and environmental hazards, Ukraine faces constant electricity and water shortages following intensive strikes, leaving millions without heat as fall approaches. Finally, hospitals and other medical facilities are frequently targeted, destroying critical equipment and preventing those seriously ill and injured from receiving medical treatment.

The United Nations estimates that almost 11 million people will need humanitarian assistance in 2026, as civilian casualties are expected to exceed the deadly record set in 2025. Returning Ukrainians to these conditions would not only subject them to immediate harm, but it would further strain an overwhelmed humanitarian system and destabilize international relief efforts.



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What Threats Do Displaced Ukrainians Face in the United States?

Unfortunately, many Ukrainians who sought refuge in the United States are now stuck in limbo as their temporary statuses expire while they await renewals that may never come. As a result, many could soon lose their employment authorization, while others have already lost their jobs, benefits, and housing. Those with expired statuses are also at serious risk of detention and deportation. Yet, soaring re-parole and work permit fees have forced some families to make difficult choices.

For Ukrainians who arrived by August 16, 2023, Temporary Protected Status (TPS) offers a lifeline to stay and work here longer. However, many TPS applications have been pending for at least 12-18 months, leaving large numbers of eligible Ukrainians without protection. Those who are ultimately approved only have protection through next spring, and only thanks to a statutory provision that temporarily extended the term. Ukraine's TPS designation was set to expire October 19, 2026, but since DHS did not take action by the statutory deadline to extend, redesignate, or terminate its designation, Ukraine's TPS term was automatically extended through April 19, 2027 while the administration decides how to formally proceed.

While this helps some Ukrainians, TPS is not open to those who arrived after the cutoff date, those with certain exclusions, and non-Ukrainian spouses and children of Ukrainian citizens. They, along with those Ukrainians still waiting for TPS approval, have few options except to seek re-parole. But re-parole and work permit renewals are also subject to considerable delays and technical issues, with some parolees waiting 8-14 months or longer. Meanwhile, as of 2025, work permit renewals are valid for only one year, forcing parolees to re-apply annually and pay new fees.

Equally concerning is the rising rate of denials for re-parole, TPS, adjustment of status, and other immigration requests. Due to stringent regulatory directives and extreme vetting, an alarming number of Ukrainians are finding their applications denied, sometimes over minor omissions or discrepancies. When this happens, it is usually followed by a swift commencement of removal proceedings against the individual and, in some instances, immigration detention while they await the outcome of their deportation case.

While the clock runs out on their temporary protections, few Ukrainians have been able to pursue permanent immigration pathways. Most lack qualifying sponsors for family-based visas, while those who have ready and willing employer sponsors face procedural restrictions on employment-based visas, which often require consular processing abroad. Additionally, the diversity visa lottery is indefinitely suspended, cutting off a key route for Ukrainians to seek green cards.

Although some Ukrainians have applied for affirmative asylum to USCIS, the legal criteria are difficult for many Ukrainians to meet. Simply fleeing war is not a sufficient qualification on its own, preventing many hopeful asylum seekers from making a strong claim. Those who request defensive asylum in immigration court are even less likely to prevail under the current policies.



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What Can Congress and the Administration Do to Protect At-Risk Ukrainians?

Russia's relentless attacks have forced hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians to remain abroad longer than expected. But between lengthy application processing delays, expiring legal statuses, shrinking immigration pathways, and increasingly aggressive enforcement operations, many Ukrainians are fearful about their safety in the United States. Those who sought refuge here deserve a chance to live in safety, provide for themselves and their families, contribute to communities that welcomed them, and pursue more stable futures in the United States.

Congress and the administration can take some of the following steps to help safeguard protections and promote the well-being of Ukrainians who can't return home:

1. DHS should formally **redesignate and extend Ukraine's Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for 18 months**. As the war continues to claim civilian lives and bring widespread destruction, country conditions remain dangerous, preventing Ukrainians from returning home safely. Under U.S. law, the Secretary of Homeland Security must review a country's conditions at least 60 days before its TPS designation expires and decide whether to formally extend, redesignate, or terminate it. Since DHS did not take action by August 20th, the statute provides an automatic 6-month extension of Ukraine's current designation through April 19, 2027, but only for those eligible for the current term. DHS should redesignate Ukraine for a new TPS term to open eligibility to applicants who came here after August 16, 2023. DHS should also extend the current designation for 18 months to streamline protections for existing TPS holders.
2. Alternatively, the administration should **consider Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) for Ukrainians** to provide protection from removal and access to work permits. Unlike TPS and re-parole, which require each candidate to apply and be approved, DED would allow all Ukrainians who meet the eligibility requirements to immediately benefit, offering faster protection for those at risk. It would also relieve USCIS backlogs by reducing TPS and re-parole applications.
3. Members of Congress can advance the **"Protecting Our Guests During Hostilities in Ukraine Act"** to grant statutory short-term protections to those who arrived through U4U. "Ukrainian guest status" would be distinct from TPS or humanitarian parole by allowing eligible Ukrainians to stay in the U.S. for as long as the war continues. Congress can also consider re-funding Refugee Support Services (RSS) and Transitional and Medical Services (TAMS) to offer a critical safety net for children and adult parolees struggling to afford food and health insurance.
4. USCIS should **re-open the Uniting for Ukraine (U4U) program** and accept new sponsor applications. Americans sponsored almost 240,000 Ukrainians between 2022 and 2024, and many more are eager to welcome new Ukrainian families. DHS should also reissue travel authorizations to beneficiaries who had been approved before the program was suspended.



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5. USCIS should **expedite TPS, re-parole, and Employment Authorization Documents (EADs)** for Ukrainians. Current processing timelines often exceed 8-14 months, leaving many Ukrainians at risk of losing their lawful status, employment, housing, benefits, and access to municipal services. While these backlogs persist, **USCIS should stop penalizing** Ukrainians who apply for re-parole more than 180 days before their current parole expires.
6. USCIS should return to its previous policies of issuing **work permits that correspond with the expiration of their immigration statuses**. Rather than forcing parolees to renew their EADs every year, which entails high fees and long wait times, Ukrainians granted re-parole should be issued EADs for up to two years, while those with TPS should be allowed to work for the duration of their TPS term to avoid gaps in employment authorization.
7. USCIS should **allow Ukrainian parolees to pursue employment-based green cards** without leaving the United States. Employers want skilled Ukrainian workers, and many Ukrainians possess valuable expertise that advances the U.S. economy. But current policies prevent parolees from obtaining employment-based green cards without acquiring a different status or interviewing at a consulate abroad, jeopardizing both their parole and return to the U.S.
8. The administration should consider **easing restrictions on non-domiciled Commercial Driver's License (CDL)** eligibility so Ukrainians who hold these licenses can renew them. For years, Ukrainian truck drivers safely transported goods. Now, they are being detained in record numbers, even those with safe driving records, valid documents, and no criminal history. Not only are Ukrainian families being ripped apart and left without the means to support themselves when their sole income earner gets deported, but U.S. businesses and consumers also suffer.
9. ICE should **not target Ukrainians with valid parole or pending TPS status**. Ukrainians who came here through the U4U program were approved and vetted extensively prior to their arrival. TPS-eligible individuals are legally allowed to stay here while their application is pending. Those who have complied with the law and pose no threat to public safety should not be arrested.
10. ICE should **not arrest Ukrainians who attend routine immigration appointments and green card interviews**. This penalizes individuals who followed the rules, paid costly application fees, completed all the required procedures, and invested years to pursue a lawful long-term status.
11. Members of Congress can advance the **"Ukrainian Adjustment Act."** While many Ukrainians hope to return home someday, some have lost their homes and their families to the war. This vital legislation would provide those who want to rebuild their lives in the U.S. but lack other avenues for green cards with a statutory framework by which to seek permanent residence.

This information is intended for educational purposes only and should not be taken as legal advice.