



Understanding Entry Pathways for Ukrainians

Since Russia invaded Ukraine in late February 2022, hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians have left their country for Europe and the United States. The Biden Administration has committed to welcoming up to 100,000 people fleeing the war in Ukraine. In this Refugee Housing Solutions Fact Sheet, we explain the different pathways Ukrainians may take to arrive in the United States.

How do Ukrainians enter the United States?

There are several pathways to the United States for Ukrainians escaping the crisis in their country. Ukrainians may enter as refugees, asylum seekers, or with work visas; however, a majority of Ukrainians enter the U.S. with family petitions, as humanitarian parolees at the border, or through Uniting for Ukraine (U4U). On [April 21, 2022](#), the Biden administration committed to welcoming 100,000 Ukrainians through U4U; as of December 2022, more than 175,000 applications have been filed by sponsors offering to welcome and help host Ukrainians fleeing the war.

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What is Uniting for Ukraine?

[Uniting for Ukraine](#), or U4U, is a program to provide Ukrainian citizens, or others who habitually reside in Ukraine, a way to enter the U.S. for a two-year humanitarian parole period. Those entering the U.S. through U4U have an American sponsor willing and able to support them. Sponsors are expected to welcome and support newcomers financially while helping with social and cultural acclimation. Sponsors may work with local resettlement agency staff to help families and individuals access social and health care services and job-seeking and rental support, all of which are vital to newcomers. Those entering the U.S. under U4U are given the status of Ukrainian Humanitarian Parolee.

Who is a Ukrainian Humanitarian Parolee?

The word parolee does not suggest or refer to newcomer's status relative to criminality. Rather, the status is used to describe those protected under the [Immigration and Nationality Act](#) (INA) as allowed to enter the U.S. temporarily without an immigrant or non-immigrant visa or another legally accepted status.

The Federal government's [Office of Refugee Resettlement \(ORR\)](#) defines Ukrainian Humanitarian Parolees, or UHPs, as "certain Ukrainian individuals, or non-Ukrainian individuals who last habitually resided in Ukraine, who have been or will be granted humanitarian parole by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security in response to Russia's war on Ukraine. Ukrainian humanitarian parolees paroled into the U.S. between February 24, 2022, and September 30, 2023, are eligible to apply for mainstream benefits, resettlement assistance, and other benefits available to refugees (with the exception of the initial resettlement program customarily referred to as Department of State's Reception and Placement program), until the end of their parole term. These individuals' spouses or unmarried children under the age of 21 who are paroled into the U.S. after September 30, 2023, are also eligible to apply for these benefits."



Entry Pathways Defined:

Humanitarian Parole, Asylum Seeker, and Refugees

What is Humanitarian Parole?

Until the mass exodus of Afghans from their country in mid-2021 and of Ukrainians from their country throughout 2022, **humanitarian parole** was granted sparingly to allow people generally inadmissible or otherwise ineligible to be formally admitted into the U.S. for a temporary period and usually for urgent humanitarian reasons or significant public benefit.

Determining who is authorized for parole is subject to discretionary factors. There is no statutory or regulatory definition of “urgent humanitarian reasons.” [U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services](#) (USCIS) look at many situational circumstances and consider factors such as:

- Whether or not the circumstances are pressing
- The effect of the circumstances on the individual’s welfare and well-being
- The degree of suffering that may result if parole is not authorized

Using these criteria, it is clear why Afghans and Ukrainians were welcomed to the U.S. throughout 2021 and 2022. Ukrainians are granted humanitarian parole through Uniting for Ukraine and at ports of entry.

Who is an Asylum Seeker?

An **asylum seeker** is a person seeking sanctuary but who is not yet legally recognized as a refugee. Systems are in place in the U.S. and elsewhere to determine who qualifies for international protection, and asylum seekers are those awaiting a decision on an asylum claim. However, during mass movements of people as a result of conflict or violence – as was the case with Afghanistan in 2021 and Ukraine and Venezuela in 2022 – it is not always possible or necessary to conduct individual interviews with every asylum seeker who crosses a border. These groups are often called *prima facie* refugees. In the U.S., [asylum status](#) is granted to people who:

- Meet the definition of refugee
- Are already in the U.S.
- Are seeking admission at a port of entry

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Who is a Refugee?

A refugee is someone who has fled from their home country and cannot return because they have a well-founded fear of persecution based on religion, race, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group.

According to the [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees \(UNHCR\)](#), the number of people forced to flee their homes worldwide by the end of 2021 due to conflicts, violence, fear of persecution, and human rights violations was 89.3 million. This is more than double the 42.7 million people who remained forcibly displaced a decade ago and is the most since World War II.

If ongoing conflicts remain unresolved and the risks of new ones are not mitigated, the 21st century will continue to be defined by the constantly growing numbers of people forced to flee – and the increasingly dire options available to them. (See the UNHCR's latest [Global Trends Report](#) for more information)

In late 2022, almost 8 million Ukrainians have fled their country and another 6-plus million are displaced internally with more expected. With significant displacement elsewhere, notable from Afghanistan and Venezuela, in 2022, total forced displacement now exceeds 100 million people. **One in every 78 people has been forced to flee their homes.**

Under the United Nations' [1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees](#) – to which the United States is a signatory – eligibility for refugee protection requires a current or future fear of persecution. And 'persecution' is not defined as a concept; it is inferred as a threat to life or physical freedom. A person may qualify for refugee status under its terms only if they have a well-founded fear of persecution on one or more of the following grounds: race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion

A person is deemed ineligible for refugee protection if they have committed a crime against peace, a war crime, a crime against humanity, a serious non-political crime outside the country of refuge prior to their admission to the country of refuge or are guilty of acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations. (See Exclusion Clauses: [Article 1F of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees](#))

Additional Resources

- **Read:** [Immigration and Nationality Act \(USCIS\)](#)
- **Watch:** [Who is a Refugee? \(UNHCR\)](#)
- **Read:** ['Migrants'? 'Refugees'? Terminology Is Contested, Powerful, and Evolving \(Migration Policy Institute\)](#)