

## SITUATION UPDATE: UKRAINE FEBRUARY 2026

*This is an update and supplement to USCRI's August 2025 [situation and displacement update](#) on Ukraine.*



On February 24, 2026, Ukraine enters its fifth year of war after a full-scale Russian invasion of the country began in 2022. As war rages on, civilian casualties and mass displacement continue to impact people both in and from Ukraine. USCRI's situation update will cover the mass displacement crisis, the humanitarian situation in Ukraine, and the dwindling refugee protections around the world for refugees seeking safety from the conflict.

### Mass Displacement

Unrelenting Russian attacks are forcing many to leave their homes. For those who have sought safety outside of Ukraine, individuals are forced to make difficult decisions in the face of dwindling protections as governments impose stricter migration controls. Four years into full-scale war, Ukraine is a displacement crisis of mixed migration, or cross-border movements of both refugees and returnees. Since the start of full-scale war, around [6.9 million refugees](#) from Ukraine have been registered around the world. With each move, people weigh the real risk of death, new trauma, and the possibility of having to uproot their lives for the second, third, or fourth time.

*Denis\*, a Ukrainian woman, recalls the first time she was displaced in February 2022. At five o'clock in the morning, she saw explosions from her window. Denis lived 50 miles away from the Ukraine-Russia border, in a front-line oblast. She had only two hours to gather her things and escape the explosions.*

*She first went to Türkiye, not because the country was offering protection for refugees, but because she had professional connections. Soon, she saw that other European countries had already accepted large numbers of refugees from Ukraine, so she stayed in Türkiye as long as she legally could.*

In February 2026, there were over [5.9 million refugees](#) from Ukraine around the world, with 5.3 million in Europe and over 540,000 refugees beyond Europe. More than 1.3 million refugees were in

Germany as of January 2026. Poland hosts the second-highest number of refugees at nearly 980,000 as of February 2026. Internal displacement remains high at over [3.7 million people](#) displaced as of December 2025. Most internally displaced people [originate](#) from front-line oblasts and are seeking safety in neighboring oblasts, Kyiv, and Odesa.

Drone attacks have terrorized civilians to leave their homes to relocate. An [independent commission report](#) on Ukraine for the United Nations details accounts of Russian operated drones targeting people on the street, hospitals, and ambulances. The continual and systematic nature of the drone chases and attacks have caused civilians in the Kherson region to flee their homes due to the constant fear.

The need to support refugees seeking safety abroad remains great. In 2025, 29.2 million [border crossings](#) (in and from Ukraine) were recorded, which is about 1 million higher than 2024. Departures slightly increased between November and December 2025. When interviewed by UNHCR partners, individuals said that their move was motivated due to difficulty accessing basic needs, including electricity, heating, and water. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) [reported](#) that an estimated 325,000 returnees—people who have returned to Ukraine from abroad or their original residence after a period of internal displacement—could be displaced *again* due to ongoing blackouts and freezing temperatures this winter. Over one-third (36 percent) of that group expressed an intention to seek safety abroad.

*When Denis's legal stay in Türkiye expired, she had no choice but to go back to Ukraine. After two years of war and displacement, she felt like she was returning to a completely different country. Due to the constant bombing and attacks in Ukraine, she submitted the paperwork to apply for humanitarian parole in the United States. After several months of waiting for approval, she finally received permission to come to the United States from the U.S. Government under the Uniting for Ukraine (U4U) parole program and settled in the state of Oregon, where she found a job assisting other refugees with assimilation and adjustment.*

## Civilian Deaths and Destruction

The year 2025 was the deadliest for civilians in Ukraine since 2022, the start of full-scale war. The UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU) [recorded](#) 2,514 civilian deaths and 12,142 injuries. These numbers are 31 percent higher than in 2024 and 70 percent higher than in 2023.



The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) [maintains](#) that the most vulnerable people in Ukraine are those who are displaced. People are often forced to evacuate multiple times. Housing vulnerability is high, and people with disabilities, children, and older people have more trouble accessing support. [Single-parent](#)

[households](#) also face challenges accessing basic needs, addressing mental health, and managing trauma. Psychosocial support [needs have grown](#), including for [women](#) who have taken on additional roles and responsibilities throughout society during the war.

Property loss and destruction will result in long-term consequences. More than [62 percent](#) of internally displaced persons report that their homes are totally or partially destroyed or occupied. [Destruction](#) of health and education facilities has not ceased, putting the right to health and education at risk for years to come.

### Access to Basic Needs

Due to aid cuts, UN-coordinated aid to Ukraine has reorganized its [humanitarian response](#) and hyper-prioritized essential services. The main priority for OCHA and many of its resources are focused on front-line response.

Attacks on Ukraine's [energy grid](#) have resulted in loss of power, heat, and water for civilians this winter. In a twelve-month period, [70 percent](#) of the nation's energy facilities were hit. On February 3, 2026, Russia launched its [worst attack](#) on Ukraine's energy infrastructure this year, even after reassurances were made as part of peace negotiations. Parts of Kyiv were subject to emergency power cuts due to the damage, leaving people without power, heat, or water. Attacks on energy infrastructure have led to a rising concern for [hypothermia-related deaths](#). On February 12, 2026, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk [called](#) on Russia to stop attacking Ukraine's energy infrastructure during one of the coldest winters in recent years, citing temperatures as extreme as minus 20 degrees Celsius (minus four degrees Fahrenheit).

Access to basic needs is at risk, especially as economic strain continues. [One in three households](#) report that insufficient income is their most urgent challenge. Consumer price inflation hit 15.9 percent in May 2025 and remains high today, which contributes to household financial constraints.

While Ukraine's economy has been [resilient](#), recovery after the end of the full-scale war will take decades and significant resources. As of February 2025, the recovery needs were estimated to be [\\$524 billion](#) over a decade, solely for war-related recovery. Ukraine's infrastructure continues to be a target for Russia as countless buildings, both business and residential, have been destroyed in major cities. Skilled labor shortages due to wide displacement have heavily impacted Ukraine's economy, where unemployment has soared to record levels during full-scale war. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that [4.8 million jobs](#) were lost in Ukraine since the start of full-scale war.

### International Protection

In the [European Union \(EU\)](#), over 4.3 million people from Ukraine were under temporary protection as of December 2025. The EU's temporary protection scheme for refugees from Ukraine has been renewed until March 4, 2027. Women and children represent most of the people under temporary

protection. Adult females and children made up about 74 percent of people with temporary protection. Adult males 18 years and over accounted for only about 26 percent.

Nearly all refugees from Ukraine in Europe are [protected on a temporary basis](#). Only two percent of refugees have obtained other legal immigration status, such as refugee or asylee status. That means that **the majority of refugees anticipate policy changes that may result in lapsed protections, immigration enforcement, and difficulty accessing social protection and benefits**. Racialized minorities, such as the [Roma](#), face exclusion and marginalization when seeking Ukrainian refugee protections in Europe.



As of February 2026, approximately [264,000 refugees](#) from Ukraine were in the United Kingdom (UK). While the UK used to offer temporary visas for refugees with family members in the UK, that program ended in February 2024. Now, the only protection pathway available is through the [Homes for Ukraine](#) sponsorship scheme, which require British and Irish sponsors to volunteer housing for at least six months. Visa validity periods have shortened from three years to 18 months. The shortened visa period puts refugees at risk of homelessness and joblessness, as landlords and employers are less willing to take on someone whose immigration status may lapse within months.

After four years of war, refugees have rebuilt their lives and established roots in their new communities in the UK. These [human stories](#) show that there is a desire to stay permanently, or at least for the foreseeable future. Refugees now see their future in the UK and are wary of lasting stability in Ukraine even if a peace deal is reached. In the most recent [survey](#) of humanitarian visa holders, seven out of 10 adults reported that they intend to live in the UK even if it is safe to return to Ukraine.

### Uniting for Ukraine (U4U)

The United States has consistently provided military and financial [support for Ukrainian military efforts](#), but it hosts [less than 10 percent](#) of Ukrainian war refugees. [Uniting for Ukraine \(U4U\)](#) launched in April 2022 to allow U.S. citizens, permanent residents, and others with lawful status to



sponsor a Ukrainian national for humanitarian parole, or permission to stay in the United States for two years. While many U.S.-based sponsors were motivated by their ties to Ukraine, others welcomed the opportunity to help refugees find safety in America. By the end of 2024, approximately [240,000 Ukrainian refugees](#) were granted humanitarian parole under U4U. While significant, countries in Europe are hosting far more refugees from Ukraine, at over 90 percent.

In May 2022, Congress [authorized](#) Ukrainian parolees to have access to the same resettlement assistance as refugees, due to their vulnerability and sudden displacement. Access to benefits stopped for parolees arriving after September 30, 2024, because Congress failed to authorize funding, despite the continuation of arrivals.

*Denis arrived after the cut-off date for Ukrainian parolees to access resettlement assistance. She was given no assistance, and she feels lucky to have found a job very quickly. In her work, she provided services to refugees who were adjusting to their new surroundings. She says that for the first two to three years, refugees experience high stress and fear. Then, in 2025, more uncertainty kicked in when re-parole and work authorization renewals were suddenly stuck in processing due to U.S. policy decisions. Life was suspended in mid-air.*

On January 20, 2025, under [Executive Order 14165](#), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was ordered to [scrutinize](#) all “categorical [immigration] parole programs,” including U4U. As a result, Uniting for Ukraine (U4U) is now closed to new applicants and sponsors. On January 23, 2025, an internal U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) [email](#) directed a pause on all re-parole applications and other benefit requests, including asylum and adjustment of status, filed by U4U parolees while DHS conducts a review of parole policies.

On May 28, 2025, nonprofits and parole beneficiaries [secured temporary relief](#) in federal court, which stopped USCIS from categorically suspending re-parole and other immigration benefits applications adjudications. Still, delays persist. **Long delays without explanation have caused uncertainty and distress for U4U beneficiaries, who fear losing access to protection benefits, detention, and deportation while waiting for a decision.** Families who live under threat of immigration arrest and deportation have made the difficult decision to uproot their lives here in the United States and move to start over in Europe.

The “*One Big Beautiful Bill Act*”(H.R. 1) [shortened](#) maximum parole and work authorization periods to one year. U4U parolees were previously granted two years of parole status. H.R. 1 also imposed unwaivable fees of [\\$1,000](#) for re-parole applications and \$275 for work authorization renewals, which are added on top of existing [USCIS fees](#). Furthermore, on December 2, 2025, USCIS [announced](#) that it would pause all asylum adjudications, including those filed by refugees from Ukraine, until further notice.

Litigators representing Ukrainian parolees in the [Doe v. Noem case](#) in Massachusetts are continuing to fight for fair processing. On February 10, 2026, plaintiffs provided [notice](#) to the court that USCIS adjudication holds were being applied to Ukrainian nationals and that a U4U beneficiary is being detained until his re-parole application is granted, despite having filed for re-parole on time.

*Refugees from Ukraine like Denis feel that the “United States took us in, but what’s next is unknown.” She has lived four years without any certainty of any permanent status, and now she is dealing with job loss and the threat of losing her rented home due to unexplained delays in work authorization renewal. In terms of returning to Ukraine, her answer is clear right now. Bombings and drone attacks are touching all parts of the country. She recalls how in February 2022, she lost everything—her home, her car, and her business—in a split second.*

*Denis also wants people to know that even at war’s end, returning to Ukraine would entail another immigration and assimilation process. When she returned to Ukraine mid-war, she found that it had become a completely different country. The war has vastly impacted Ukraine’s cities, infrastructure, economy, and society. Even as an adult who has spent her childhood and decades in Ukraine, she feels that returning back to Ukraine after four years of war would be the start of a new immigration process.*

Children represent a large proportion of refugees from Ukraine at [more than 30 percent](#). [More than a third](#) of Ukraine’s children are currently displaced. Some have spent four years growing up in U.S. communities, going to school, and dreaming about their futures. As the war stretches on, policymakers and world leaders need to consider if uncertain, temporary statuses align with the best interests of each child.



*A new displacement would be concerning for an adult, but Denis is even more worried about children and younger generations. She reminds us that children and young adults who have spent a larger proportion of their lives abroad would find it even more daunting to adjust and start over. Recovery after four years of displacement, of life suspended in mid-air, is no small feat for anyone, particularly children.*

## USCRI Recommendations

- The European Union, countries in Europe, the United Kingdom, Canada, and other refugee-hosting nations must continue protecting refugees displaced from Ukraine by maintaining existing temporary protection schemes, expanding eligibility, ensuring uninterrupted access to social protection programs, and offering permanent immigration pathways.

- **The United States Government and Congress must continue supporting refugees from Ukraine by:**
  - **Restoring access to resettlement benefits:** Congress first authorized access to resettlement assistance for Ukrainian parolees in 2022, [renewed](#) it after a [lapse](#) in 2024, but then failed to renew it for Ukrainian parolees who arrived after September 30, 2024, resulting in an arbitrary cut off of crucial services for thousands of newcomers.
  - **Restoring access to humanitarian parole:** Uniting for Ukraine (U4U) was abruptly [suspended](#) on January 28, 2025, leaving refugees and their sponsors without final adjudication decisions. U4U should be restored and applications that were pending before suspension should be prioritized for processing.
  - **Expediting re-parole applications:** Since January 2025, U4U beneficiaries have faced unreasonable delays after submitting timely applications for re-parole and work authorization, resulting in lapses of parole periods. Scared of immigration enforcement, detention, and deportation, refugees have had to face another unknown. Potentially without status for an uncertain period, some have uprooted their lives again to seek refuge in other countries.
  - **Streamlining re-parole process:** Ukrainian parolees have always had to file twice in order to renew their authorized stay and work authorization, unlike other groups. USCIS should streamline this process by allowing Ukrainian parolees to file once for both re-parole and work authorization renewal.
  - **Lifting adjudication delays and holds:** USCIS has imposed an adjudication suspension of all asylum applications filed by all nationals. USCIS should not systematically delay access to immigration relief to all nationals without sufficient justification and assurances that adjudication will eventually continue.
  - **Lowering filing costs:** Due to the *“One Big Beautiful Bill Act”* (H.R. 1), all parolees have been subject to additional, unwaivable filing fees for shorter periods of protection. Congress should act to remove additional fees and increase validity periods, and USCIS should lower application fees and expand eligibility for fee waivers.
  - **Supporting permanent pathways:** People who have been paroled into the United States and have spent years rebuilding their lives and raising their families here should be offered a pathway to permanent lawful status. Refugees from Ukraine have spent their stay receiving support from local communities, contributing back to their communities, going to school, and building careers for several years. Forcing or compelling another displacement would cause unnecessary harm and upheaval. U.S. Representatives can cosponsor and support the *“Ukrainian Adjustment Act of 2025”* ([H.R. 3104](#)).

- **Protecting refugees until Ukraine is safe:** Refugees from Ukraine should not be forced to return during war or when it is unsafe. Members of Congress can cosponsor and support *“Protecting Our Guests During Hostilities in Ukraine Act”* ([S. 696](#); [H.R. 2118](#)), which would grant guest status and work authorization until conditions allow for the safe return of civilians to Ukraine.
- **The public must continue to support refugees in their communities.** Reach out to your nearest [refugee resettlement](#) or immigration support office. Share housing and job opportunities. Donate resources and time providing assistance for newcomers.
- **All foreign governments and international actors engaged in peace talks must prioritize safe migration strategies,** ensure that returns are voluntary, provide assistance with voluntary returns, and uphold the safety and dignity of all displaced and impacted people.

*\* Interviewee name has been changed.*

#### Read more:

- [Independence Day of Ukraine: Situation and Displacement Update](#) (August 2025)
- [Three Years of War in Ukraine: We Must Support Women-Centered Refugee Solutions](#) (February 2025)
- [Ukrainian Refugees Still Need Protection Abroad](#) (February 2025)
- [The Humanitarian and Displacement Situation in Ukraine](#) (October 2024)
- [Ukraine: An Update on the Mass Displacement Crisis](#) (October 2024)
- [USCRI Update: The Humanitarian Situation in Ukraine](#) (March 2024)

#### Watch:

- [Echoes of Home: Ukraine](#)