

UNITING FOR UKRAINE

# WELCOME CIRCLE TOOLKIT

## Introduction

As the war continues in their country, millions of Ukrainians have been forced to flee their homes to escape the violence. With the end of the fighting not yet in sight, the United States government has responded by creating Uniting for Ukraine (U4U), a unique opportunity for those residing in the US to help provide a pathway for Ukrainians to find safety in the United States.

The U4U program allows for individuals in the US to financially sponsor Ukrainians to come to the US and temporarily reside here. Ukrainians entering under this program will receive two years of humanitarian parole, allowing them to live and work in the US for this period of time. Supporters agree to financially provide for these Ukrainians, as well as assist them with finding housing, accessing medical care, and navigating public systems.

To apply, supporters must know Ukrainian beneficiaries **or** be matched up with Ukrainians through an online system in order to list the beneficiaries on the application. Supporters submit financial forms to the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) for vetting and USCIS conducts background checks on the supporters and beneficiaries. Then, if everything is approved, Ukrainians are provided with authorization to enter the US.

Given the great need for support for Ukrainians at this time and the nature of the U4U program, USCCB's Migration and Refugee Services (MRS) is issuing an appeal to parishes and other organizations to consider serving as Welcome Circles for Ukrainian families. Welcome Circles will either financially sponsor a family through the U4U program and provide community support for the family's needs after arrival or they will assist with Ukrainian parolees who have already arrived through the U4U program and are in need of additional assistance. Circles would be supported nationally by MRS and regionally by staff within the USCCB network. But parishes and organizations will work independently of the refugee resettlement program operating across many cities.

U4U is a chance for organizations to put a desire to help Ukrainians into action. The following toolkit will walk organizations through steps and considerations of the U4U program to help empower them to welcome Ukrainian parolees to their communities.



**Migration and  
Refugee Services**

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## Is Developing a Welcome Circle a Good Fit for Your Organization?

*Use this quick assessment to determine if your parish or organization would be a good fit for sponsoring a Ukrainian family through the Uniting for Ukraine program.*

	Yes	No
1. Is your organization eager to find a way to help with the Ukrainian crisis in a hands-on, personal way?		
2. Is your organization able to commit two years to assisting a Ukrainian family?		
3. Would one or more of your members be willing to be financially responsible for a Ukrainian family for two years and undergo US Government vetting?		
4. Would a group of your members be willing to provide ongoing support for a Ukrainian family as they start to make a life in your community?		
5. Will you be able to identify permanent housing for a Ukrainian family?		
6. Are you willing to help a Ukrainian family navigate US public systems, such as school enrollment and applying for Employment Authorization?		
7. Are you willing to help a Ukrainian family access healthcare and apply for health insurance?		
8. Will your parish approach language barriers and cultural differences with respect and good humor?		
9. Will you be able to access Ukrainian interpretation, as needed?		
10. Is your organization ready to be a compassionate community of welcome for a family who has lost their home to war?		

**If you have answered yes to all of the above, your organization is ready to begin the U4U process. If you answered no to #3, your group would still be a good candidate for a Welcome Circle for Ukrainian parolees already in the US.**

## What is a Welcome Circle?

Welcome Circles are groups of volunteers committed to helping support Ukrainian parolees who have come through the U4U program. Unlike refugees who come through the US refugee resettlement program, Ukrainian parolees are not assigned to local resettlement offices for assistance. This means that your Circle is meeting the immediate needs of the family on your own. Without your help, these families would have a more challenging time making their home in the US.

### ***How many people should be part of the Circle?***

Your Welcome Circle should be made up of 5-15 people but can include a few more if you have additional dedicated volunteers willing to join. One or more should be willing to complete the USCIS process and serve as the financial supporter(s) for the Ukrainian parolees, if your group is wanting to help Ukrainians who do not otherwise have contacts in the US to sponsor their U4U application.

### ***Who can be part of the Circle?***

Anyone over 18 is welcome, so long as they complete a background check.

### ***How long is the time commitment?***

The humanitarian parole the Ukrainians will be receiving is for two years, so Circle members should expect to be involved in helping the family for this amount of time. The needs of the family will be greatest in their first few months to a year, but there may be some continued needs through the family's second year. If volunteers are unable to commit to the full amount of time, other volunteers can be recruited at a later point to supplement the Circle's numbers.

### ***Should the Circle have a leader?***

Yes, your Welcome Circle should have one designated leader who agrees to be the main point of contact for USCCB and regional coordinators. If there is a need to communicate something to the Circle, this person would be the one contacted and responsible for sharing information with the rest of the Circle.

### **Tips for forming a Welcome Circle**

- Have people with a variety of backgrounds in your Circle, as the family will benefit from your diverse expertise.
- Be sure that at least some of the members of your Circle have daytime availability to take the family to appointments.
- Tap into any cross-cultural experiences your members may have, as these may be useful in patiently approaching any cultural differences that arise with the family.
- Remember that you will be working with a vulnerable population. Be sure your Circle members are committed to confidentiality and healthy boundaries.



### ***How does a group of volunteers officially become a Welcome Circle?***

USCCB is partnering with the Community Sponsorship Hub to support the resource needs of Welcome Circles. Once you have a group together, you will want to complete the Sponsor Circle application. These applications will be submitted online and reviewed by your regional Welcome Circle coordinator. This process will help you think through the aspects of providing support to the Ukrainian family and help you identify where you might need to do more research or enlist more help. After your application is approved, you can begin the official U4U process with USCIS or you will be connected to a family already in the US who needs your support.

### ***How does this model differ from co-sponsorship with USCCB's affiliates?***

For those familiar with the refugee Reception & Placement (R&P) program, you may know about the co-sponsorship model of volunteering where a group of volunteers from an organization agrees to provide a majority of the services offered to a refugee family during their first months in the US. Co-sponsorship groups work closely with resettlement staff to ensure all service requirements are met.

The Welcome Circles program is far more independent than co-sponsorship. Ukrainian parolees are not being assigned to local resettlement offices for any R&P-like services; these services are meant to be provided by the Welcome Circle. Parolees won't have case managers and while Welcome Circles can ask their designated regional coordinator for advice, this contact cannot provide direct services to the parolees.

Additionally, there is no money available at the local resettlement offices to cover any of the material needs of the Ukrainians. With R&P, resettlement offices are given a per capita amount to spend on the material needs of refugees who are assigned to their offices. With U4U, no federal money is available to cover these expenses, which is why part of the Welcome Circle process is identifying financial support for the parolees. The Welcome Circles are solely responsible for helping the Ukrainians meet their immediate needs.

However, some Welcome Circles may be able to utilize other kinds of programs for Ukrainians at local resettlement offices. Employment services or intensive case management may be offered by a nearby office, and Ukrainian parolees may qualify for these programs. Circles should reach out to their regional coordinator to find out what may be available in their area.

## Step-by-Step Guide to U4U

If a Welcome Circle is interested in being a U4U supporter to help Ukrainians who do not have existing US contacts come to the US through the U4U process, start with Step 1. If a Circle is interested in helping Ukrainians who have already come to the US through U4U but now need extra assistance, jump to Step 3.

### Step 1 – Identify financial supporter(s)

Before a Welcome Circle can plan for the arrival of a Ukrainian family, you first have to satisfy the official terms of the Uniting for Ukraine program. This means first identifying who will serve as the official financial supporter or supporters. Potential supporters should be willing to undergo USCIS vetting and verification of ability to financial support the individuals listed on the application. Supporters must also hold lawful immigration status in the US.

### Step 2 – Identify a Ukrainian individual or family

Once you have identified a supporter or group of supporters, you will then need to have the names and contact information for the Ukrainians you wish to support through this program. Many potential supporters may not know a Ukrainian family, so Welcome.US has created a portal connecting potential Ukrainians beneficiaries with potential supporters.

### Step 3 – Complete the Sponsor Circle Application

To prepare your Welcome Circle for assisting a family, you will need to complete the application process created by the Community Sponsorship Hub (CSH) for their Sponsor Circle program. This includes background checks for all the members of your Circle, a knowledge course, the completion of a Welcome Plan, and the signing of a code of conduct. Your application will be reviewed by regional staff for approval, and you will be connected to a regional coordinator who will help provide you training and support through the first 6 months.

If your Circle is wanting to assist a family already in the US, you will be connected at this point through your regional coordinator. Jump to Step 8 of the Guide.

If you are going through the USCIS process, keep reading.

To qualify as a supporter, you must...

- Hold lawful immigration status in the US (citizen, permanent resident, refugee, parolee, asylee, TPS holder, DACA holder)
- Complete USCIS security & background vetting
- Complete USCIS form I-134 verifying ability to financially support a beneficiary

To qualify as a beneficiary, you must...

- Be a Ukrainian citizen (or be the immediate family of a Ukrainian citizen) and possess a valid Ukrainian passport
- Have resided in Ukraine at the time of the Russian invasion (February 11, 2022) and have been displaced by the war
- Complete USCIS security & background checks
- Be 18 or older or traveling with a parent or legal guardian
- Have a supporter in the US who is willing and able to financially support you through the U4U program

#### **Step 4 – Complete the I-134 - Declaration of Financial Support**

Once supporters and beneficiaries have been identified and the application completed through CSH, an I-134 form must be completed with USCIS. This form is a Declaration of Financial Support and will be used both to verify that a supporter has the financial ability to support a Ukrainian for the duration of the two-year parole and to initiate security clearance on the supporter.

Note that more than one supporter can come together to support a Ukrainian beneficiary. One supporter will serve as the primary name on the I-134 form and will then attach information concerning the other supporters. If an organization is going to provide any financial assistance to the parolees, this info should also be included. Additionally, the same supporter(s) can file for more than one beneficiary, such as each member of a family. Each beneficiary requires a separate I-134.

#### **Step 5 – Wait for approval from USCIS**

Following the submission of the I-134, supporters must await approval by USCIS. If approved, the Ukrainian beneficiaries will begin their side of the screening process and ultimately receive travel authorization. If the I-134 show insufficient support and is denied, that decision is final and a new I-134 would have to be submitted by a different supporter or group of supporters for the same beneficiary to be considered for participation in the U4U program.

While waiting for USCIS to complete the vetting process, your Welcome Circle can start to take shape around other aspects of the parole process, thinking through roles and responsibilities. Who will find an apartment and set it up? Who will help with grocery shopping and school enrollment?

#### **Step 6 – Prepare for the Ukrainians to arrive**

Once all vetting and approvals have cleared USCIS, Ukrainians will then have to purchase their own airfare to enter the US. Once you learn from the beneficiaries when they will be arriving, your Welcome Circle should get right to work as you may not have long before the family arrives to prepare for them to join your community. Now is the time to line up housing and an interpretation service. See “What to Do in the Preparation Period” chapter for more info.

#### **Step 7 – Welcome Ukrainians at the airport**

Sending two or three members of the Welcome Circle to greet the arriving Ukrainian family at the airport is an excellent start to forming a relationship with the family. Make them feel welcome and safe by ensuring you have language interpretation available to speak with them. Help the family collect their luggage and drive them to their new home.

#### **Step 8 – Help the family feel at home**

This step will last for the duration of the Ukrainians’ parole. Your Welcome Circle should aim to be supportive and available for the family. Starting a life in a new country is not easy and Ukrainians have the added burden of coming with memories of war and the grief of what they have left behind. Circle members should be patient and compassionate toward the family. Over time, the family will grow more comfortable with their life in the US. In the meantime, there is much that Welcome Circles can do to help the Ukrainian parolees find their way in their new community and feel more at home. See “Providing Ongoing Support for the Family” chapter for more info.



## Sample Monthly Budget

If your Circle is assisting to help Ukrainians qualify for parole through the U4U application, you will need to show sufficient evidence of ability to financially support these beneficiaries. However, even if you are helping Ukrainian parolees who are already here, there may still be significant financial needs that the family will have.

To help your Welcome Circle plan, here is a sample budget for estimating expenses in the first few months before parolees have secured employment. The sample budget is calculated both for a high cost of living and a more average cost. Many of the Ukrainian families are coming without men of fighting age, so the sample budget is based on a family with only one adult. There is also a blank copy of the budget for you to fill in using local costs.

Family members: Adults 1 Children 2

Budget category	High cost of living metro	Mid-cost of living metro
Rent (2-bedroom apt)	\$3,190	\$1,362
Utilities	\$160	\$210
Food	\$1,560	\$1,095
Transportation	\$130	\$95
Laundry	\$95	\$90
Phone & Internet	\$260	\$250
Personal care & clothing	\$250	\$200
Medical expenses	\$230	\$240
Childcare	\$1,030	\$930
Interpretation	\$450	\$450
Other	\$100	\$100
TOTAL:	\$7,455	\$4,130

## Helpful Budgeting Tips

Remember that while the home you provide for the family should be clean, safe, and of sufficient size for the family to live comfortably, the home may not meet your own personal standard of living. Look for rental properties that will be affordable on a lower income.

Food, clothing, and personal care expenses should be calculated based on house brand and low-cost retailers.

Transportation should be calculated on public transportation costs rather than car expenses.

Use the following blank form to estimate expenses for the family your Circle is helping.

## Blank Family Budget

Family members: Adults \_\_\_\_ Children \_\_\_\_

Budget category	Estimated costs	Actual costs
Rent		
Utilities		
Food		
Transportation		
Laundry		
Phone & Internet		
Personal care & clothing		
Medical expenses		
Childcare		
Interpretation		
Other		
TOTAL:	\$	\$





## What to Do in the Preparation Period

Before you begin working with a Ukrainian family, your Welcome Circle will probably be excited and nervous about the upcoming two years. That's normal and a great place to start. Channel that excitement into curiosity and preparation. There's plenty to do before you are connected to a family or before the family is on its way to the US.

### The Essentials

Some of what the family will need upon arrival is very straight forward: housing, furniture and household goods, food, and clothing. Some of the family's needs will require direct financial support, such as securing an apartment. But many other items may be provided by individual donation. It may be good to activate your parish or organization at large around these needs, giving more people the opportunity to contribute to welcoming the family.

Here is a starter list of what to have ready when the family arrives (or shortly thereafter):

#### Housing:

- An affordable rental apartment or house secured
- Utilities turned on
- Wi-fi or other internet available
- Laundry facilities located

#### Furnishings:

- Sufficient beds for the family
- Bedding and bathroom linens
- Clothing storage in each bedroom (closets, dressers, wardrobes, etc.)
- Sufficient living room furniture to allow family to sit together
- Lamps for rooms with insufficient overhead lighting
- Dishes and utensils (at least one set per family member)
- Cookware and cooking utensils
- Knives and cutting board
- Basic toiletries (toothbrush, toothpaste, shampoo, soap, deodorant, etc.)
- Children's items, as needed (car seat, crib, stroller, diapers, toys, books, games, etc.)
- Basic cleaning supplies (dish soap, laundry detergent, broom and dustpan, etc.)

#### Food:

- A week's worth of groceries upon arrival in new home
- A ready-made hot meal for the family's first day
- Closest grocery store identified
- Specialty grocery store identified, if available (international market, European-style bakery, etc.)

#### Clothing:

- Seasonally appropriate clothing, as needed (coats, scarves, rain jacket, etc.)
- Additional clothing, as needed (baby clothes, business attire, school uniforms, etc.)

The Ukrainian family your Circle is helping is going to have ongoing and unique needs, so be prepared for this list to grow once the family arrives. Also, know that if you are helping a family who has already arrived, they may have already accessed some of the items on this list.

### **Available Benefits**

This preparation period is also a good time to explore available resources and familiarize yourself with the support options available to the Ukrainian parolees after they join your community. Different immigration statuses allow for eligibility into different federal and state-run programs. Ukrainian humanitarian parolees should be eligible for general public benefits, such as Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP – otherwise known as Food Stamps), and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

Ukrainian humanitarian parolees are also eligible for benefits available through the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), including cash assistance, employment services, and intensive case management. These programs are administered through local refugee resettlement offices. To explore these options, reach out to your regional coordinator for more information.

Remember also that there may be locally run programs that the family can utilize, such as food banks and rental assistance programs. Exploring all the options ahead of time will help your Welcome Circle feel more confident that you will be able to meet the needs of the family during their parole.

### **Language Interpretation**

While you are busy getting things ready, don't forget to add interpretation to the list. While translation apps and websites can work in a pinch, they should not be counted on to deliver accurate and nuanced interpretation. Fortunately, there are a variety of options for live interpretation services.

In-person interpretation is ideal but can be expensive. Investigate whether there might be someone in your area willing to provide Ukrainian interpretation at a reduced cost or for free on a volunteer basis. Reach out to local language schools or colleges to see if there are students who could provide this service. If there are any Ukrainian cultural centers in your area, this might also be a good place to search for reduced cost interpretation.

If an in-person interpreter is not an option, explore telephonic interpretation services that can provide an interpreter over the phone. These may still be at a fee, so be sure that interpretation costs are always factored into financial needs of a Welcome Circle.

### **Where do we go with questions?**

The U4U program is intended to be a person-to-person model: Individual US residents supporting individual Ukrainians. Unlike refugee resettlement or the Afghan Placement & Assistance program that was created to support the Afghan evacuees, U4U is not structured to allow organizations to financially support Ukrainians. Organizations cannot complete the I-134 form to support Ukrainians; only individuals can do this.

For this reason, Welcome Circles should anticipate that their work with Ukrainian beneficiaries is going to be very independent. However, should you have questions about how to handle a particular situation, USCCB has organized a small network of staff who will focus on U4U. These national and regional coordinators are not in a position to do hands-on work with Ukrainians, but are available to lend assistance to Circles when they need some extra help.

**Reach out to USCCB for guidance at: [WelcomeCircles@usccb.org](mailto:WelcomeCircles@usccb.org)**

## **Providing Ongoing Support for the Family**

With the Ukrainian family safely arrived and moved into their new home, it may feel like the hardest part is done. However, providing ongoing support that meets the changing needs of the family over the course of the next two years will require patience and attentiveness. Yet this is also the time that friendships can form and life-long memories be made.

### **Settling In**

The family is going to be looking to your Welcome Circle for help finding their way around their new community. Take them on a trip to the grocery store and let them select what suits their family. If the store is within walking distance, go by foot. If the store is on a public transportation line, use this opportunity to show the family how to take the bus or subway. If they have trouble finding ingredients or prepared foods that they are used to, help them identify where to access these items, either at another store or online. You can also help identify substitutions that might be less expensive or easier to access. Teaching the family how to use public transportation and showing them where to shop will begin the process of encouraging independence.

Communication with family back in Europe may be very high on the list of needs the family expresses. Be sure to help them have working phones within the first few days. This could mean getting a new SIM card for their existing phones or buying new phones. You will also want to show them how to access the internet.

Now is also the time to identify if the family has any unique needs that need to be addressed quickly. Are there any healthcare needs or medications that need filling? Is there a particular kind of cookware that would help the family prepare familiar foods? Do they need additional clothing? Help address these needs as soon as you learn about them.

### **Culture Shock**

Moving to a new country always comes with some measure of culture shock, so do not be surprised if the Ukrainian family struggles to get used to living in the US. Especially in the first few months, the family may express frustration and confusion over the way things are done in their new community. It is also common to be exhausted while dealing with culture shock, as the mind is working hard trying to navigate a new language and new environment.

Give the family space to process their emotions surrounding being in the US and try not to be disappointed if they do not show enthusiasm about their new community. Over time, culture shock lessens as things become more familiar. Staying present and helping the family feel welcome will support this process.

### **School and English Classes**

School enrollment will add an additional layer of normalcy to the family's life and should be prioritized to take place within the first few weeks. Your local school district can help with figuring out zoning and which school may have English Language Learner (ELL) classes. Understand that the school district may also recommend a different grade level than Ukrainian children may have been enrolled in before coming to the US.

School supplies are another opportunity for the rest of the parish or organization to contribute to the work of the Circle. Ask for donations of the necessary school supplies, including backpacks and school clothes. Alternatively, if you receive a cash donation, the family may enjoy letting children pick out their own backpacks and notebooks for their return to the classroom.

Children aren't the only ones who may be eager to get in the classroom, though. Adults will need to learn English if they are going to get jobs and increase their independence. Look for English classes in the community that meet the needs of the adult family members, including a variety of levels, preferences for classes at a certain time of day, or programs with childcare. It may also suit the family to have English classes online.

## Paperwork

There is going to be a variety of paperwork that the family is going to need to fill out. Be sure you have an interpreter ready to help with all of these appointments and applications:

- Social Security Card (at the Social Security Administration)
- Employment Authorization Document (mailed to USCIS)
- Public benefits (local human services office or online)
- Driver's license or state ID (DMV – note that Ukrainian parolees are not eligible for REAL IDs)
- Medicaid (local human services office or online)
- AR-11 Change of Address form (online with USCIS – note that this is required within 10 days of the family moving into a new temporary or permanent home)
- Asylum application (with the assistance of an immigration attorney – should the family wish to stay in the country beyond the 2 years of parole)

## Healthcare

Ukrainian parolees are eligible for Medicaid, as well as Refugee Medical Assistance. Both of these programs will provide health insurance for the family. While you are exploring which option is best for your family to apply for, seek out low-cost medical clinics for any immediate health needs, such as vaccinations required for school enrollment. Once they have health insurance, you can help them establish a primary care doctor so the family knows where to go when they need a doctor's visit.

Be sure to also communicate when to call 911, where to find an urgent care clinic, and where the closest emergency room is. Writing down emergency information will help until the family has this information memorized.


## Getting a Job

Before any of the Ukrainian family members can get a job in the US, they will need to secure Employment Authorization Documents (EADs). The EADs come with a filing fee of \$410 per application and will take months to be processed (average EAD processing time at this time is 8-9 months). This means that the family will be relying on public benefits and your Circle's financial support for a significant portion of their two-year parole.

While you are waiting for the EADs to arrive, encourage job preparedness by focusing on English language skills. The adults in the family can also work on resume writing, investigating employment options in the area, and taking skills classes that may be offered locally. It is possible that Ukrainian credentials can be recertification for use in the United States, as well, though keep in mind that it may be hard for institutions in Ukraine to be contacted at this time.

Once the EADs are in hand, help the family to find jobs that suit the basic needs of the family. Aim for jobs that offer health insurance and a livable wage. Don't forget to consider childcare needs, English language level, and accessibility to the workplace via public transportation.

Ukrainians in many cases may have to accept jobs that are below their skill level or out of their field of interest. Remember that this is a starter job to meet the needs of the moment, not to build a career. Should the family choose to apply for asylum and remain in the US long term, they can work up from this job into something that better suits them.



## Avoiding Dependency

One of the pitfalls to avoid while supporting the Ukrainian family is creating an over-dependence on your Welcome Circle. It's common for volunteer groups helping newcomers to the US to feel overly responsible for the family or individuals they are helping. It may start to feel more like you are the parent and the newcomers are the children. This is not the kind of relationship you should aspire to have with the Ukrainian family you are helping.

Agree together as a Circle to approach your service to this family with the mindset of teachers. You want to grow the family's understanding of life in America so that they can do things on their own. This is why things like English language learning, public transportation training, and getting a job are so important to the process of assisting the family. They allow the family to take care of their own needs and grow more confident in their own abilities here in the US.

While your Circle may be capable and willing to support the family for 2 years, the family's level of dependence on you should decrease with time. Walk alongside the family as instructors for living in the US and make each interaction a teaching moment.

## Transitioning

Since Ukrainians are provided with just two years of parole, a decision will need to be made before the two years are up about what will happen next. Many Ukrainians may choose to return to Ukraine, while some may want to stay in the US longer. Parole cannot be extended or renewed, so in order to stay longer than two years, parolees will have to explore asylum.

If the family you are helping wishes to stay more permanently in the US, identify an immigration attorney or legal clinic to assist them. Some may be willing to do the work pro bono or at a reduced fee. If the family is eager to return home, respect that desire and assist them however you can to return. Either way, the work your Circle has done has been an incredibly valuable chapter in this family's life.

## Additional Resources

[Uniting for Ukraine | USCIS](#)

[Ukraine Resource Page – Justice for Immigrants](#)

[Welcome.US](#)

[Community Sponsorship Hub Resources for Circles](#)

[Office of Refugee Resettlement | Benefits for Ukrainian Parolees](#)



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