

## **Ukrainian Children and Families in the U.S.: Trauma, Transition and Uncertainty**

On February 24, 2022, Russia led a large-scale invasion of Ukraine. This was a continuation but significant escalation of a conflict that began in 2014 when Russia seized Crimea and provided military support to pro-Russian separatists in Ukraine's Donbas region. Since then, close to seven million Ukrainians have fled their country to seek safety.

More than 280,000 Ukrainians have come to the U.S. since 2022 through a program called Uniting for Ukraine (U4U), which provided temporary humanitarian parole allowing them to live and work in the U.S. without fear of deportation. On January 27, 2025, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) stated it would stop accepting applications under U4U. This followed a January 20<sup>th</sup> Presidential Executive Order promising to "terminate all categorical parole programs that are contrary to the policies of the United States" and "ensure that all future parole determinations fully comply with" the administration's policies. Last week, Reuters reported that the Presidential Administration is weighing whether to revoke humanitarian parole status, putting hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians at risk of deportation during a time of escalating war violence. <sup>i</sup>

Most Ukrainians who have arrived in the U.S. under U4U are women, children, elderly or disabled men as able-bodied men in Ukraine are currently conscripted into the military. These families are often separated from husbands or sons who are fighting in the war. More than 40,000 Ukrainian soldiers have been killed during the conflict, along with over 13,000 civilians, including almost 700 children. <sup>ii</sup> Ukrainian children and families may have experienced war and violence before coming to the U.S., and after arrival, may remain worried about loved ones who are fighting in the war, at risk of bombing, or experiencing deprivation due to lack of food, clean water and adequate shelter. Some have experienced the death, injury or disappearance of friends and family since arrival in the U.S.

Transition to a new country is hard under any circumstances but can be made more difficult when there is not an expectation of permanency. Like most parents, Ukrainian parents want their children to be safe, get an education, and have a future. With uncertainty about their legal status in the U.S., parents worry about being forced back to a war zone, being unable to provide adequate food or shelter for their children, and their children being unable to access education. Rather than return to Ukraine, families may be thinking of migration to another country which would represent additional disruption, adjustment, unknown risks, and potential danger.

Pervasive uncertainty can make it difficult to engage in a therapeutic process, as people are understandably reluctant to unpack trauma and be vulnerable when they feel unsafe, are preoccupied with meeting basic needs, or worried about their future. Providers working with Ukrainian families may need to focus on coping skills and empowering parents with the skills needed to help their children cope during an uncertain time. They may need to strengthen their connection to immigration legal resources that have durable referrals for Ukrainian families who need to understand their rights and immigration options in the U.S. Lastly, they



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should build connections with Ukrainian community-based organizations, churches, and mutual assistance organizations as they can be a vital source of information, resources, and strength (See CARRE's [Mental Health and Psychosocial Service Mapping](#)).

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<sup>ii</sup> [Trump weighs revoking legal status of Ukrainians as US steps up deportations | Reuters](#)

<sup>ii</sup> [Ukraine war in numbers: Full toll of Russia's invasion three years on | The Independent](#)