

HIAS Welcome Circles for Ukrainians: FAQ



Welcome the stranger.
Protect the refugee.

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This FAQ document is not comprehensive and remains a work in progress. It is intended to provide some responses to key questions that those who are considering sponsoring those fleeing conflict in Ukraine may have. Check back regularly for updates.

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Big Picture FAQs:

What is the current situation and what is the need?

Since the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, over [6.5 million people](#) have fled Ukraine into neighboring countries, including Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Moldova, and Romania. Communities located in these neighboring countries quickly mobilized to support those fleeing the war. These communities have been providing short-term accommodations, but volume is high and as time goes on, capacity is stretched.

On April 21, 2022, the Biden Administration announced a special process for Ukrainians under its “[Uniting for Ukraine](#)” program, which creates a special pathway for Ukrainians to enter the United States on a temporary two-year period of parole.

In late 2021, HIAS launched a Welcome Circle project, in partnership with Community Sponsorship Hub, as a model for private sponsorship of newcomers fleeing Afghanistan. This model is now being adapted to support newcomers from Ukraine. Though the logistics of the application process are different, the support newcomers need upon arrival will be comparable.

Because the U.S. administration has opted for a decentralized model of sponsorship, any individual or organization in the U.S. can sponsor any named individual or family fleeing Ukraine. However, many communities in the U.S. that want to help do not have a structure or relationship in place to do this independently.

What is a HIAS Welcome Circle?

The U.S. government (State Department) approved community sponsorship models to aid in resettling and integrating Afghan parolees off U.S. military bases and into local communities, as a complementary pathway to traditional resettlement through the U.S Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). An agency called the [Community Sponsorship Hub](#) (CSH) oversees the Sponsor Circle Program, working in partnership with other organizations functioning as “Sponsor Circle Umbrella Agencies (SCUs).” This model is similar to those already thriving in Canada and other countries. In addition to HIAS’ role as one of the nine agencies partnering with the U.S. government to implement the USRAP, HIAS also serves as an SCU with the Community Sponsorship Hub and is launching HIAS Welcome Circles for Ukrainians (HWCUs) with the goal of activating, supporting, and guiding the Jewish community’s response to this emergency.

HIAS Welcome Circles for Ukrainians will, as was the case with HIAS Welcome Circles for Afghans, involve a group of at least 5 core members who support newcomers’ integration into their new communities in the United States. Tasks will include (but are not limited to) airport pickup, securing housing, enrolling children in school, signing up for benefits, orienting newcomer(s) to their community, and helping the newcomer(s) find employment.

If traditional refugee resettlement works, why is this circle model happening?

The sponsor circle program was an emergency initiative intended to augment the United States' capacity to welcome and resettle Afghan newcomers. It was launched in parallel to the existing and ongoing efforts of the U.S. refugee resettlement program, at a time when agencies were inundated with a higher number of new arrivals than they had welcomed in the previous few years combined.

The Ukrainian response, in contrast, has been launched as a decentralized program that does not flow through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). The program, called "Uniting for Ukraine," requires individual sponsors to submit applications to bring named beneficiaries who have fled Ukraine to the U.S. with Humanitarian Parole (HP) status. Newcomers who enter the country with Humanitarian Parole will not have refugee status and therefore will not be able to access many of the supports available to those who arrive through the USRAP. Welcome Circles can help fill that gap and support Ukrainians to successfully resettle and integrate into local communities.

HIAS continues to advocate for pathways for people fleeing violence in Ukraine to access traditional resettlement structures, including family reunification for all those who qualify, and the Lautenberg program for religious minorities.

HIAS Welcome Circle FAQs:

How will HIAS Welcome Circles work?

The HIAS Welcome Circle for Ukrainians model is designed to be flexible to meet the needs of newcomers fleeing Ukraine, their primary sponsors, and welcome circle members. If you have identified a specific family or individual to sponsor, you can apply to become a HIAS Welcome Circle and submit your plan to provide local support. HIAS will guide and support your efforts with resources, trainings, best practices, staff support, and an online community of practice. For those who are forming a circle and have not identified a specific family or individual to sponsor, HIAS will eventually be able to assist in facilitating connections between those willing to serve as fiscal sponsors and beneficiaries interested in coming to the U.S. Additionally, a circle could be matched with a Ukrainian who was already in the U.S. when the conflict escalated and now needs assistance, or with someone who crossed the U.S.-Mexico border seeking protection from the conflict in Ukraine.

If you already know an individual or family whom you wish to sponsor (a family member, friend, coworker, friend of a friend, etc.), you can form a circle to support them or request that HIAS help match you with an existing circle to support this individual or family.

Which populations can HIAS Welcome Circles sponsor?

HIAS Welcome Circles are eligible to assist:

1. Ukrainians who were already in the U.S. when the conflict broke out and were able to apply for Temporary Protected Status (TPS)
2. Ukrainians who approached the U.S.-Mexico border to seek protection and were granted 18 months of humanitarian parole
3. Those being sponsored from host countries in Eastern Europe to be paroled into the U.S. for two years under Uniting for Ukraine
4. Third country nationals (people from other countries who were living in Ukraine or traveling there for school, tourism, business, etc. when the conflict escalated) are also eligible for this type of support

If your circle is sponsoring someone who is currently being hosted in Europe, then you, a member of your circle, or a representative of an organization you're working with will need to complete an I-134 affidavit of support in order for the newcomer(s) to be admitted into the U.S. This will allow the family or individual to enter the U.S. with humanitarian parole.

Who is eligible to form a Welcome Circle, and what are the requirements?

The guidelines for forming a Welcome Circle are:

- Groups of at least five individuals over the age of 18 who reside in the same local community will be eligible to form a circle. Circles forming under HIAS' umbrella are strongly recommended to launch with a minimum of five people and a maximum of eight people serving as the core group.
- Welcome Circles must commit to a six-month period of support for the newcomer(s).
Note: those circles sponsoring newcomer(s) currently hosted in European countries to enter the U.S. with Humanitarian Parole will also need to demonstrate to the Department of Homeland Security, via an I-134 affidavit of support, that they have the financial capacity to support the individual or family for two years. However, because adults here with Humanitarian Parole status should be eligible to work at some point during this period, sponsors and welcome circles working with them should not expect to fully support newcomers financially for the entire two-year period.
- Welcome Circle members must pass mandatory background checks as part of their application process.
- Welcome Circles members must complete and pass an online knowledge assessment offered through the Community Sponsorship Hub web portal, to demonstrate completion of a required online course that provides information on expected roles/responsibilities of sponsor circles, how to prepare/organize for supporting Ukrainian newcomers, key considerations for

sponsorship (e.g., expectations, power, culture, religion, trauma, and privacy), and how to navigate challenges.

- Welcome Circles are required to submit a “Welcome Plan” through which they articulate the ways they will connect Ukrainian newcomers to supports and services during their initial resettlement phase.

HIAS will vet and certify circles. Upon certification, all core members of a Welcome Circle will have access to:

- The HIAS Welcome Circles for Ukrainians Community of Practice, an online platform through which circle members can access a directory of resources, ask questions, and chat with other circles as well as with HIAS staff.
- Specially developed resources from HIAS and our partners, designed to help circles navigate important topics such as housing, employment, budgeting and finances, setting boundaries and expectations, and trauma informed care.
- Frequent training sessions and workshops with professionals to dive deeper into all of these topics above and more.
- A HIAS Liaison who will be available to answer questions and provide guidance.
- Access to office hours with HIAS’ resettlement experts and legal team, who will provide guidance and support to all Welcome Circles that have formed under our umbrella.

Why form a Welcome Circle?

- You urgently want to help a friend or family member who has fled Ukraine due to Russian aggression/war.
- You want to respond to a humanitarian need.
- You want to connect with those in your community.
- It is aligned with your values.
- You or your family was welcomed to the United States as immigrants.
- You want to support refugee integration.

What are the responsibilities of Welcome Circles?

Welcome Circles are responsible to support the Afghan newcomer(s) with the following:

- Secure housing
- Provide basic necessities
- Provide time-bound income support
- Assist in completing required changes of address
- Connect to legal assistance
- Support in obtaining a social security card

- Support in selective service registration, as appropriate
- Support in accessing medical services
- Support in accessing available benefits
- Support in submitting an I-765 application for employment authorization
- Enroll children in school
- Provide English language support
- Provide job search advice and support
- Provide community orientation
- Complete 30- and 90-day reports

What is the financial commitment of a circle?

There are a few different ways to answer this question.

- First, the requirement: there is no one-size-fits-all requirement. Those sponsors welcoming a newcomer from abroad in Eastern Europe are required to show in their DHS I-134 application that they are financially capable of supporting a Ukrainian newcomer individual or family for a period of 2 years, so that the newcomer(s) do not end up becoming a public charge.
- Second, the reality: most circles will aim for the Ukrainian newcomer(s) to achieve self-sufficiency within a period of about six months. There will therefore be a need to budget for cost of living — rent, food, transportation, technology, phone service, etc. — and this varies greatly across cities and states. For Afghan newcomers with Humanitarian Parole, the official recommendation was to raise a minimum of \$2,275 per individual sponsored, though in areas with a higher cost of living HIAS suggested planning for additional budget beyond this minimum. Depending on your location, it is likely that you'll need additional funds available to put toward those and other expenses.
- Third, the recommendation: we recommend that as you consider whether you are able to form a Welcome Circle, you conduct a [budget exercise](#) based on six months of support to determine the funding you will seek to raise to support this endeavor. Locations with higher costs of living, particularly areas with higher rent costs, may want to estimate a number in the vicinity of \$20,000 to support a family of four. Don't worry if you don't know how many individuals you will be welcoming yet; set up a budget based on the finances you have available and the housing possibilities you have been looking at, and this will be used to determine the size of the family with whom you will be matched.

Keep in mind that whether you are sponsoring someone being hosted abroad in communities in Eastern Europe, or if you are sponsoring someone who is currently in another part of the United States and is either accessing TPS or was granted humanitarian parole at the U.S.-Mexico border, travel costs are paid for independently. Costs can be covered by the Welcome Circle, the beneficiary, a third-party donor, or a combination of the three. Plan to have a conversation with the newcomer(s) you're sponsoring to determine how much they are able to contribute towards travel costs, and plan to budget or fundraise for the remainder of these costs.

There will be some circumstances in which circles find themselves at the end of the six-month period of commitment with unspent funds. If your circle sets up a fundraiser specifically to raise money for this effort, we encourage you to consider including language about how the funds are to be used that allows for maximum flexibility for this work. Remaining funds that are earmarked for one specific family could be put towards one large purchase at the end (for example, a used car or tuition for higher education). Alternatively, if fundraising language is phrased as being used to welcome newcomers more broadly, remaining funds could be used to welcome a second family, or to donate to a resettlement agency.

Is it advisable to launch a circle if we live in a community with a high cost of living and/or a low immigrant population?

There are many factors to consider when assessing how suited a community is for successful resettlement. We have seen success in unexpected places; for example, HIAS clients have been successfully resettled in high-cost places like Westchester County, NY and more rural parts of Connecticut with low immigrant populations. Additionally, HIAS hopes to encourage as many Welcome Circles as possible to form in shared communities, so that our new neighbors hopefully feel less alone.

That being said, we do expect that many Ukrainians who have family or friends in the United States will want to travel to locations where they know people. These locations with large Ukrainian communities are also more likely to have infrastructure to access public services in Ukrainian and Russian. The areas with large Ukrainian communities expected to have heightened demand include the following metropolitan areas – New York, Washington, D.C., Chicago, Sacramento, Seattle, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Detroit, Cleveland, and Portland – but we know that many other cities are already seeing an increase in Ukrainian arrivals.

What federal and local benefits are Ukrainians welcomed through circles eligible for?

Ukrainians granted humanitarian parole to enter the U.S., as well as those granted TPS, do have access to public benefits such as Medicaid, SNAP, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and TANF, and

are eligible for some of the benefits that resettled refugees can access – pending capacity and availability of refugee resettlement agencies in your area – including [Refugee Cash Assistance](#), [Refugee Medical Assistance](#), [Preferred Communities](#), and [Matching Grants](#).

My congregation is located near a HIAS Resettlement Partner or another local refugee resettlement agency. Should we still pursue starting a HIAS Welcome Circle?

If you live near a HIAS resettlement partner (we call them “affiliates”), please reach out to us! We are working with our affiliates and depending on where you are, either a Welcome Circle or another form of community sponsorship may make sense. If you need to be connected with a HIAS resettlement partner, please contact Merrill Zack at merrill.zack@hias.org. If you’re already working with a local resettlement agency, you should continue working with them.

In previous years, my synagogue has helped resettle refugees with local agencies. How are HIAS Welcome Circles different from refugee sponsorship programs we may have done in the past?

Since 1980, when the USRAP was formed and put into place, nearly all community assistance in resettlement has been carried out in partnership with a local resettlement agency. Local agencies provide case management for refugee clients and work with community groups to assist with resettlement. Welcome Circles do not work with a local resettlement agency in the same way, and there is no case management in place for clients. The circle model is based on the Canadian private sponsorship model, and national umbrella agencies — in this case, HIAS — provide guidance and support to circles, but not case management.

I already have identified a family member, friend, or other relationship with a person who was forced to flee Ukraine. Should I form a Welcome Circle in order to sponsor them?

The first Circles we will support to launch are groups that already have identified newcomers that they are going to support and are looking for resources and support about how best to help them in the US. This includes:

1. If you already know someone you want to sponsor through the “Uniting for Ukraine” program to come to the United States, whether you have already filled out the I-134 form or not. [Information and application information on this process can be accessed here.](#)
2. If you already know someone who is here in the country and needs support, maybe because they crossed the U.S./Mexico border, or maybe because they were already here before the war and can’t leave.

I don't know any specific individuals or families to sponsor. What should I do? Can HIAS match me with a newcomer fleeing Ukraine?

If you do not already know someone who you are planning to support with a Welcome Circle, we recommend that still complete and submit your application to become a certified HIAS Welcome Circle. HIAS and our partners have been developing processes for connecting potential sponsors and Welcome Circles with those in need of support. Some of these individuals and families may already be here in the U.S., whether they here before the war began and are now unable to leave or crossed the U.S.-Mexico border as asylum seekers. Others are in Eastern Europe, in host countries to which they fled. Once you have been certified as a HIAS Welcome Circle, we will move you forward to this matching process; therefore, the faster you submit your application, the faster you can begin the process of being matched.

Note: Whether your circle gets matched depends on whether there are folks whose needs match your capacities, and who want to come to the city/state/area where you live. For this reason, we cannot guarantee every circle will receive a match.

Are the newcomers who will be matched by HIAS Jewish?

Some will be, and some will not be. HIAS is committed to helping all those in need regardless of race, religion, and nationality. This program is available to Jewish Ukrainians, non-Jewish Ukrainians, and third country nationals who were in Ukraine when the crisis unfolded and were forced to escape.

Can I sponsor newcomers fleeing Ukraine if I am an individual and not associated with a synagogue, organization, or community group?

As long as you can build a minimum group of 5 sponsors, you can form a HIAS Welcome Circle, join our Community of Practice, and access our resource library, office hours with resettlement and legal experts, and more. HIAS suggests partnering with community members because it makes it easier to find people with a wide range of special skillsets to offer, time availabilities, ages, genders, etc. However, there are many other ways to build your circle. You can speak to members of your extended family or neighbors in your physical neighborhood, put an op-ed in your local paper to recruit community members, etc.

Can Jewish organizations that are not synagogues or congregations (such as Jewish day schools, nonprofit advocacy organizations, other Jewish organizations) and non-Jewish partners (mosques, churches, and secular groups) create a HIAS Welcome Circle?

Yes! HIAS is a Jewish organization proudly grounded in Jewish history, culture, and values, and we work in coalition every day to serve refugees and asylum seekers of all backgrounds. We're in an all-hands-on-deck situation, requiring communities and institutions of all kinds to work together in

welcoming our new neighbors. HIAS will happily partner with non-congregations and/or non-Jewish groups to create a Welcome Circle.

I'm not Jewish. Can I launch a Welcome Circle with HIAS?

Yes! You most certainly can. HIAS works with many communities to support refugees, and the circle program is no different. Please contact Chloe Shiras, Program Manager, Initial Resettlement, for more information at chloe.shiras@hias.org.

We aren't sure our congregation can do this alone. Can HIAS pair us with another congregation in the area to form a Welcome Circle together?

While we can't guarantee that we can find a perfect pairing, we're very happy to work with you to identify a potential partner congregation or organization to collaborate with on forming a circle. Contact Rabbi Sarah Bassin, HIAS' Director of Clergy and Congregations, at sarah.bassin@hias.org for more information.

How big should a circle be? What is the magic number?

Welcome Circles must have a minimum of five people over the age of 18, but HIAS strongly encourages a core circle of five to eight participants to be the only people with regular, high-touch contact with the individual or family you are assisting. Of that group, one will be the designated Welcome Circle lead who will communicate directly with a HIAS Welcome Circle Liaison and HIAS staff throughout the commitment. Circles with more than 10 core members may face difficulties managing team roles, and it could be confusing for the newcomer(s) you are sponsoring to keep track of who they should contact and when, so it is not recommended to form a circle with higher numbers. However, there can be concentric circles of volunteers around this core group made up of those volunteers who have less direct contact with the new neighbors; these volunteers can provide support through researching employment opportunities or schools, identifying healthcare providers who accept Medicaid, preparing new homes, gathering clothing for families, etc.

What direct support does HIAS provide Welcome Circles?

HIAS Welcome Circles will be assisted by HIAS staff who serve as guides throughout this process. These staff will work with circles to build their Welcome Plans, prepare for arrivals, navigate post-arrival activities and challenges, and connect circles to technical and operational resources on best practices in resettlement. HIAS will also offer monthly office hours with technical experts to share guidance and resources on topics ranging from trauma-informed care and boundary setting to employment and housing. HIAS will also facilitate peer-to-peer mentoring, matching new Welcome Circles with lay experts from within the HIAS synagogue network, and we'll offer Jewish resources to ground the experience and the work.

Welcome Plan FAQs:

How can we find appropriate housing?

Housing needs, resources, and challenges will vary from one community to the next. Some areas have high costs, others are affordable but without access to public transportation, and others may have limited options altogether due to housing shortages. You may want to consider housing in two stages: short- and long-term.

Short-term housing could be booked through Airbnb, or it might be an “in-law” suite or apartment owned by someone in your congregation. If you have a room or rooms in your home with a separate entrance, kitchen, and bathroom, then this could be a good temporary arrangement.

Long-term housing will most likely be a rented house or apartment. After the support period ends, the family will be responsible for paying their own rent. For this reason, housing should be affordable, and/or in an area with housing subsidies available from the municipality or state government.

If you plan to have the family living on the same property as a member of your congregation, note that this should be treated as a landlord-renter arrangement with a signed lease and monthly rent payments. Consider how easily the family will be able to access transportation from the location. If it is not near public transportation, you’ll want to plan on helping them obtain a U.S. driver’s license and access to a used car to purchase.

In areas where affordable housing with access to transportation is difficult to come by, consider building relationships with members of the local real estate community who can help you navigate the challenges.

Who should be part of the core group of a Welcome Circle?

Members of a congregation’s social justice/action committee, as well as those with a social work background (even if they’re currently not involved with a congregation’s social justice/action committee), would be great places to start. Try to seek out a mix of skills/specialties to offer (educators, medical professionals, social workers, lawyers, etc). Any members of your wider community with special skills but less availability to join the core group can also be identified to assist as needed. For an example of a possible Welcome Circle structure, see this [Sample Roles and Responsibilities](#) sheet.

It is also critical to understand that at least some members of a circle should be available during workday hours, both to accompany new neighbors to appointments and to respond to urgent matters if/when they occur. Additionally, HIAS recommends seeking out a mix of ages and genders for the core group.

What is the level of detail that is needed to fill out the Welcome Plan?

You should be as detailed as you can, and most importantly, clear about your capacity in each area of the Welcome Plan. If you have already identified housing and spoken with the landlord; collected commitments for in-kind donations of furnishings and household goods; or had conversations with local agencies, charities, Ukrainian community groups, interpreters, etc.; note that in the plan. You may even want to specify in the plan who you've spoken to at a particular agency and what guidance and/or support they've agreed to offer.

I'm having trouble budgeting without knowing how large a family to expect. What does HIAS recommend?

Start by determining how much money you expect your community to raise, and then build out a budget of monthly expenses. That will help to determine what size family you would be able to accommodate. HIAS can help you with this, as well. You can use tools like [this](#) to help consider what expenses to include in your budget – by selecting a city in your area from the menu at the top you can see the average costs in your local area. You can also reference guides for the Canadian model, like [this one](#), which can help determine what costs to plan for and what can be reduced using volunteers and in-kind donations (donations of physical goods and items).

How do we handle and disburse the money that we raise?

Circles will need to show a fiscal sponsor for the Ukrainian newcomers. This can be an individual (which is standard procedure for Humanitarian parole) or an organization (which is a new addition only available for the Uniting for Ukraine program).

As part of the process through DHS, which comes after HIAS' vetting and certification, the individual sponsor will need to show financial statements proving they can support the newcomer(s) so that they will not end up becoming a public charge.

Will I need to actually spend all of the money that I show is available?

No. The government needs to see that sponsors are financially capable of supporting the Ukrainian newcomer(s) for two years, but in practice most families will aim to be self-sufficient well before this time. Exceptions to this may include families who are sponsoring their elderly relatives or individuals with particular health needs.

Unfortunately, no one in our networks (or our circle) speaks Ukrainian or Russian. What if we are matched with a family that has minimal or no English language skills?

It is definitely possible that the individual or family you welcome will not have fluency in English. We encourage you to explore local interpreters/translators in your area. Other free resources include Tarjimly (tarjim.ly), a free app using volunteers from around the world, and Talking Points (talkingpts.org) for free machine translation texting. There are professional interpreters available through for-profits like Language Line (language.com). As part of your Welcome Plan, you will be asked to consider if there are wider Ukrainian cultural groups or resources in the area. If there is a local community that you are in touch with, explore if they are willing to serve as a volunteer or, ideally, paid interpreter.

Application Process FAQs:

OK, I think we're in! How do we get started?

That's terrific. [The application portal is now live at this site](#), through our partners at Community Sponsorship Hub. In the application, you will be able to indicate that your "umbrella" organization is HIAS.

[The application](#) requires multiple steps, and it is our recommendation that you do many of these steps concurrently, so that you are not waiting long between each step. The process may vary depending on your location and specific circumstances, but the core program is the same – forming a community of support for refugees.

The application process is as follows:

1. Assemble a team of 5-8 people and provide their names
2. Initiate background checks for all team members
3. Complete a mandatory "knowledge check" (training)
4. Fill out a "Welcome Plan," detailing how you will provide support. We are happy to assist with the development of this plan, and will be reviewing it down the line.
5. Sign a Code of Conduct (all team members)
6. Fundraise to support this effort
7. Submit the form on the application website, uploading components 1-5
8. Review and certification from HIAS

If you have already identified someone who you will be supporting, we encourage you to begin now on all parts of this process. Even if you are also working with other organizations or through other

pathways, it may be to your benefit to become a certified HIAS Welcome Circle so you can access the extensive resources, trainings, and staff support from HIAS experts, as well as a community of groups engaging in this project from across the country.

If you do NOT have a specific, identified individual or family that you will be supporting, you should begin on items 1-6 above. Please note that you are NOT YET able to do #7 – and you will need to wait to be able to fully submit the application. In addition, we encourage you to do some local research to identify if there is anyone in your community who is trying to bring family or friends from Ukraine and who may appreciate support. If there is nothing of the sort, it may be possible for HIAS to match you with someone who needs help. We cannot guarantee a match, as it will be dependent on whether there is an individual trying to come to your city and state.

Here are a few additional things you can do to prepare for your application:

- Outreach to find beneficiaries: speak to your local JCC, JFS, and other Jewish agencies, as well as Ukrainian Orthodox Churches, etc.
- We invite you to make a consultation appointment with HIAS. Please reach out to Rabbi Sarah Bassin, Director of Clergy & Congregations, at sarah.bassin@hias.org.
- We also have two upcoming sessions with HIAS:
 1. [Special Considerations: Forming a Circle](#) on May 31, 2022 at 7:00 PM ET
 2. [Special Considerations: Budgeting](#) on June 9, 2022 at 7:00 PM ET

Is there any cost to apply?

The only fees associated with applying to become a Welcome Circle are for the individual background checks that each core member of a circle must undertake. Each background check costs \$15. The checks are administered by Sterling Volunteers, through the sponsorcircle.org portal.

I just submitted a request to complete the background check for myself. Can I start moving forward with the application form process while I'm waiting to hear that the check has been authorized?

Yes! We encourage you to start the application process as soon as possible, so you can continue to prepare while background checks are being processed.

Can the actual application be submitted without a finalized/complete background check?

While you can submit your circle's application, no application will be considered complete until all required pieces are submitted, including background checks on every named core circle member

How long does the process from submitting an application to being matched with a family or individual take?

While we wish we could estimate this, we really can't at this early stage. Beneficiaries opt into this program, and matching is based on a set of aligned characteristics between beneficiaries and sponsors/welcome circles. These include family size, medical needs, location preference, even pets, for example. We do not have verified data on the volume of Ukrainians and third country nationals who will want to come to the United States. However, HIAS is expanding our capacity to identify and match those Ukrainians and third country nationals in Eastern Europe who are interested in traveling to the U.S., and as this function rolls out, we will be better able to assess timing.

Before we decide, can we speak with a congregation that has done this before?

Certainly. Please reach out to Rabbi Sarah Bassin, Director of Clergy & Congregations, at sarah.bassin@hias.org, and we'll connect you with a volunteer from a synagogue or local group that has experience in assisting in this way with refugee resettlement.

We want to make sure our group is respectful of the boundaries and emotional distress that the family may have. What is your recommendation?

Keep in mind that the role of a Welcome Circle is to be a resource for capable, intelligent adults to get their feet on the ground in a new and unfamiliar community while they work towards self-sufficiency. The first step is always listening to the family about their wants and needs and respecting their decisions.

We also recommend not asking questions that bring up trauma. If the family you have sponsored offers information about their experiences, listen and be supportive; however, we should never ask people to share these experiences as it might be uncomfortable or cause them distress. Build trust. Dignity needs to be respected. You will find more information on trauma-informed support [here](#), as well as guidance about boundaries and expectations [here](#).

It is also important that circles' members take care of themselves and practice self-care. Being exposed to someone else's trauma can take a toll on us as well.

We need to go through our synagogue's formal process before saying yes — the board of directors, the Rabbis, etc. This takes time. Is it ok if we can't say yes for a month or two?

We encourage you to consider fast-tracking the discussion and decision-making process because of the urgency of this situation. If you are seeking advice for this stage in the process, reach out to Rabbi Sarah Bassin, Director for Clergy and Congregations, at sarah.bassin@hias.org.

After the Sponsorship Period FAQs:

What happens if the family or individual our circle has assisted is not on their feet after six months?

What is our obligation to continue to provide financial support?

Refugees, as a group, have historically been expected to become economically self-sufficient in 3-5 months. Otherwise, the U.S. refugee program and the professional agencies that do this work would not be successful either. It is key to promote economic self-sufficiency from the very beginning, being clear that the financial support from the circle is time limited. Success for them — and for refugees coming to the U.S. in general — requires early economic self-sufficiency, defined as having the income to support basic needs. They will be eligible for welfare cash assistance, but in most locales, that is not enough to pay rent, much less anything else.

The key source of income is employment. Depending on where the families live, this may mean one full-time worker can support the family, but in some cases, two workers will be needed. It is often the case that even high-skilled individuals with fluent English must take jobs below their level of experience until they learn more about the U.S. world of work and are in the position to “compete” for advanced-level jobs. Job search, interviewing, and workplace expectations are likely very different from what they know.

There may be employment services available in your area, but circles play a role in helping adults secure employment. Circles members and their networks should be tapped, and the family should use any connections they have. There may be refugee providers in your area that can help with this. There will be mainstream providers as well. Typically, anyone on welfare is assigned to an employment program. Circles will have access to HIAS’ robust trainings and guidance as well as from national providers, Switchboard (switchboardta.org) and Upwardly Global (upwardlyglobal.org) for higher-skilled professionals.

Providing financial literacy early on, with a major focus on budgeting, is the best way to engage and educate the family, giving them the information, and perhaps eye-opening reality, of their situation at this early stage of resettlement. It’s helpful for them to create short-term and longer-term goals so they know they are not stuck where they are. Perhaps there are connections to high-paying jobs for Ukrainian professionals, but in most cases, finding those jobs takes more time than what they have due to their financial reality. They can be simultaneously working a “survival” job and pursuing their longer-term goals. It may be helpful to think back to when you or your ancestors came to the U.S., how they may have struggled, and where they are today.

Other considerations: There could be emergency cash assistance to help families over a short-term hump. If there is someone over age 65 or someone with a permanent disability, they will be eligible for disability support. If the rent is simply too high for the family, then relocation may be necessary. There also could be subsidized housing options in your area.

I understand humanitarian parole is a temporary status that may run out after two years. What is our responsibility as a HIAS Welcome Circle in applying for another immigration status?

Ukrainians who want to seek permanent status in the U.S. will need to speak with an immigration attorney about their options. Every immigration case is different, and it is essential that Ukrainian parolees receive individualized advice about their specific case and circumstances. Many Ukrainians may not have a pathway to permanent residency in the U.S. at this time. There may be pro bono or low-cost immigration services in your area, and some law schools have immigration clinics. Through your connections, you may be able to find an immigration attorney to conduct a legal intake on behalf of the Ukrainians you are serving to identify if they are eligible for any additional immigration benefits. These connections should be made as soon as possible after arrival, as the immigration system is slow-moving. Ukrainian parolees will need to file for work authorizations.

NOTE: Do not practice law unless you are legally qualified. Errors could have devastating ramifications.

Can you share an example of what success looks like in this model, after six months?

Early success looks like this: the family is in permanent housing and has the understanding and means to cover basic expenses through employment. They are likely still receiving food stamps and Medicaid. The children are attending school, and adults are attending English as a Second Language classes (if needed). They have daily living skills (e.g., transportation, shopping, home maintenance, important U.S. cultural practices) and know where to turn if they need help, especially for medical and other urgent needs. They are aware of basic U.S. laws on child safety, the requirement to notify homeland security when they change address, the need to adjust their status, etc. Families are supported by their faith and/or ethnic community if they so choose. Continued support from circle members as friends would be a great benefit.