News

Ukrainian refugees in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine, walk towards a registration center for internally

Ukrainian refugees in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine, walk towards a registration center for internally displaced people April 21, 2022, after arriving in a small convoy that crossed through a territory held by Russian forces. (CNS photo/Ueslei Marcelino, Reuters)



by Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

April 25, 2022

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

WASHINGTON — The president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the chairman of its Committee on Migration have voiced their support for the Biden administration's "Uniting for Ukraine" initiative to welcome Ukrainian refugees coming to the United States.

"Many European countries have shown great concern for Ukrainians, welcoming them with open arms, and we should do the same," said an April 22 joint statement from Archbishop José H. Gomez of Los Angeles, USCCB president, and Auxiliary Bishop Mario E. Dorsonville, Migration Committee chairman.

"We are particularly concerned with the most vulnerable and hope that support will be given to separated families, the elderly, and those with urgent medical needs," they said. "This sort of initiative requires that the federal government provide an array of services for arriving families, in addition to those supplied by individuals and private institutions, such as churches."

The two bishops added: "As a national refugee resettlement agency, the USCCB is eager to support displaced Ukrainians in the United States, together with Catholic organizations, parishes and people of goodwill across the country."

The USCCB and the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia have partnered with Welcome.US on the Uniting for Ukraine initiative.

Advertisement

Under the provisions of Uniting for Ukraine, Ukrainians must have been residing in Ukraine as of Feb. 11, have a U.S.-based financial sponsor — either an individual or an entity — have received certain vaccinations and met other public health requirements, and pass a series of background checks and security screenings.

However, Ukrainians seeking to enter at U.S. ports of entry along the U.S.-Mexico border will be denied entry without a valid visa or pre-authorization to travel to the United States.

That last provision caught the eye of Archbishop Gomez and Bishop Dorsonville.

"All persons seeking asylum at our borders must consistently be offered the same opportunities for protection set out in U.S. and international law, in accordance with their God-given dignity," they said.

Another concern they had: "This new program does not include authorization for basic services or access to permanent legal status and could unnecessarily strain communities eager to welcome. This is why we and others have requested a more robust use of the resettlement program, both for Ukrainians and other displaced persons, which affords refugees the ability to integrate within American communities, temporarily or as aspiring Americans."

The two bishops said: "We call on the administration and Congress to work together to ensure Ukrainians seeking refuge in the United States are truly welcomed and receive all of the support that entails. And we ask that this same welcome be extended to those of other nationalities who have fled persecution, violence and disaster, including passage of legislation that would provide our new Afghan neighbors with a pathway to permanent legal status."