

Ukraine Refugee Crisis: An Interview with a Ukrainian-American Pro Bono Client

Proskauer For Good on April 11, 2022

More than 10 million people have [fled their homes](#) in Ukraine because of the Russian invasion. Yet we are still awaiting the designation of Ukraine for [Temporary Protected Status](#) to take effect upon the publication of a forthcoming *Federal Register*, and relevant U.S. agencies have not yet produced the logistical and operational plans necessary to carry out the government's [commitment to resettle](#) in the United States up to 100,000 refugees from Ukraine.

In the meanwhile, I had the privilege of representing a Ukrainian-American pro bono client in filing a family-based petition for his mother, who fled Ukraine to a neighboring country just days before her home was destroyed by Russian air strikes.

U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services granted our request for expedited processing and granted the I-130 petition this week. We hope that the National Visa Center and consular processing will be completed soon because each day that passes is another day in which our client's mother lives at risk of danger in the midst of a humanitarian crisis.

In this interview, our client shares his story.

Erin: Your immigration journey began in 2014, when we filed your application for asylum. Why did you come to the United States?

Andriy*: I fled to the United States because I suffered anti-gay violence due to my sexual orientation. It was not safe to be out as a gay man in Ukraine. There were underground gay clubs in Kyiv, but homophobic people would find out about them and wait outside to attack gay men leaving the club at night. I tried to hide my relationships and my gay identity, but after being outed and attacked, I had to escape.

Erin: You recently became a U.S. citizen. What was it like to navigate the U.S. immigration system?

Andriy: The journey took seven years! I was fortunate to have found [Immigration Equality](#) at the beginning, and they connected me to you for pro bono legal assistance with my asylum case. Applying for asylum was emotionally difficult because it required me to talk about traumatic experiences from my past. Winning asylum was bittersweet because it saved my life, but it also meant that I would not be able to see my mother and grandmother again for many years because for legal and safety reasons asylees cannot return to the countries in which they were persecuted.

After I won asylum, Immigration Equality and Proskauer assisted me in becoming a Legal Permanent Resident and, several years later, a U.S. citizen. The first time I held my U.S. passport in my hands, I cried tears of joy. It's still hard to believe it's real.

Erin: As a U.S. citizen, you were able to file a Form I-130 petition for your mother, and USCIS has just approved this petition. Why is it so important that the consular processing be completed as soon as possible?

Andriy: I am very worried about my mother's safety. In February, she was in Ukraine with my grandmother, who had contracted COVID-19 and was hospitalized. The hospital sent my grandmother home because it was overcrowded with COVID-19 patients and there were frightening rumors that Russia was going to launch an attack on Ukraine. My grandmother passed away from COVID, but there was no time for my mother to arrange a proper funeral for her – my mother had to escape Ukraine.

Three days after my grandmother passed away, my mother fled to a neighboring country. Three days after my mother fled Ukraine, Russia invaded. Soon after that, we found out that Russia had dropped bombs on residential areas in my mother's hometown, and there were dozens of civilian casualties.

The death of my grandma combined with the destruction of our family home in Ukraine has been emotionally devastating for my mother and me, but I know we are tremendously blessed because my mother made it out alive. I hope my mother will receive an immigrant visa interview soon because her situation is still dangerous and unstable. If we can be reunited in the United States, my mother will be safe and I can help her as she heals from her tremendous grief and loss.

I am grateful to Proskauer, and to you and [Kosta Karamanakis](#), especially, for supporting my mother and me in this process and for obtaining approval of my I-130 petition so quickly. It has given us a reason to be hopeful even in very sad times.

**Client's name has been changed.*

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