



Home Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Home Office policy on Ukrainian refugees, HC 1193

Wednesday 9 March 2022

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Members present: Dame Diana Johnson (Chair); Ms Diane Abbott; Paula Barker; Carolyn Harris; Adam Holloway; Tim Loughton; Stuart C. McDonald.

Questions 1-53

Witnesses

I: HE Vadym Prystaiko, Ukrainian Ambassador to the UK.

II: Zoe Bantleman, Legal Director, Immigration Law Practitioners' Association; Helen Manis, immigration lawyer; Enver Solomon, Chief Executive Officer, Refugee Council; and Iryna Terlecky, member of the board, Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain.



Examination of witness

Witness: HE Vadym Prystaiko.

- Q1 **Chair:** Good morning. Can I start by welcoming His Excellency the Ukrainian Ambassador to the Committee? Thank you so much for agreeing to appear before us. I know that your time is limited, so we will aim to finish by 10.25 am, if that is acceptable. I know you have another important meeting to go to.

Before we begin today's questions and ask you to make some initial observations, I want to express the solidarity of everybody on the Committee with you, Mr Ambassador, and our admiration for the bravery that the Ukrainian people are showing in the face of this illegal invasion of your country. We meet in the Parliament of a country that, for a time, some 83 years ago, stood alone in the face of Nazi aggression. They tried to bomb us into submission. However, in the end, we were not alone, and although we in the UK, our allies in NATO and countries across the wider world are debating how best to support your people in a way that protects civilian lives across Europe and beyond, I can tell you in the clearest terms that you are not alone now.

This morning, we are keen to hear your thoughts and comments on the current offer for protection and sanctuary for Ukrainian people by the Government and how that is working. We understand that, as of this morning, 750 visas have been issued under the family scheme; however, we also understand that there are 22,000 applications. I wonder whether, in your opening comments, you could talk in particular about the biometric passports that Ukrainians hold, and whether that is helpful to the processes in the United Kingdom. You have kindly agreed to take some questions from Members, as well, which we are grateful for. We are very keen to hear from you.

Vadym Prystaiko: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I feel the Committee's support; it is something that Ukrainians would very much like to hear. I was humbled and touched yesterday by the reception of my President in Parliament. Everybody was united—all the parties across the whole spectrum of your political forces. I am touched, even now, to see the ribbons with the Ukrainian colours on your lapels. Thank you. This is something that Ukrainians need right now.

I am more than happy to take your questions, but I will allow myself a short introduction. I do not want to waste much of your time—I know you are following what is happening in Ukraine through the media. I know that some of your media are brave enough to be represented in Ukraine; some of them have been shot at. I hope that everything is fine with them. We are trying to find them and to get them out of Ukraine, if need be, but those brave people wanted to stay there.

We are talking about civilians, now, who are suffering the most. As of today, our official statistics show that 7 million-plus people have already been displaced. They are moving west through the only lifeline corridor to Slovakia, Hungary and Romania, but mostly to Poland. By my estimations



HOUSE OF COMMONS

and the latest information I received, Poland has already received more than 1.2 million Ukrainians, Hungary 190,000, Slovakia 128,000, small Moldova 83,000, and Romania 79,000. Some 200,000-plus people have already crossed to other European nations.

The logistical operation is huge and very difficult, and it is not secured. One of the requests that you probably heard yesterday in Parliament from my President was for a no-fly zone. That is not just over Ukraine—we understand how difficult and critical that decision of NATO could be—but to cover the situation where people are unfortunately stuck on the border between Ukraine and neighbouring states. We do understand that security checks must be thorough, especially at times of military conflict, but we also believe that some bureaucratic procedures could be simplified. We will deal with everything later.

This is where your question about biometric passports comes in very handy. Yes, we do have biometric passports—same as you. The problem that we could not resolve over all these years is purely technical. Our passports are not recognised in your airports, so when I come, I can't use your system, although technically they are the same passports. The beauty of it is that the chip holds all the necessary information about the person.

I also understand that some security exchanges have to be made—the protocols have to be discussed and agreed upon. As you know, we are not a part of the European Union. This process started way before you left the European Union, so you are still using that system, which was established quite a long time ago. We had a visa-free regime with European nations, and most of the procedures were already done, so I do not believe that it will be very difficult to finish that quite quickly here with the UK. That is the security part.

We understand that you have to be in control of the immigration flows in your own nation. That is totally your right. We are happy that you have already managed to establish both of the layers of the refugee response—first, extending visas for those who are already here legally and, secondly, on the reunification of families. I met yesterday with people who are here—people who already came to stay with their relatives and families. They came to my embassy. Some of them I know personally. These people are very happy and very thankful.

We are now coming to the most sensitive issue: how we open up more possibilities for those people who have no specific connection to UK citizens and now want to come here. I want to tell you right away that the natural place for Ukrainians is close by, where most of the Slavic tribes are—if I may put it like that—in the independent nations like Poland and Slovakia, where people do not have any language barrier. We speak easily to those people; we understand their culture, their allegiances and everything. Most Ukrainians will naturally stay close to their homes and their roots. Unfortunately, families are now split. The elderly and the women with kids fled Ukraine, while most men and women are fighting



HOUSE OF COMMONS

back home. This is a very difficult psychological moment as well, and we have to understand how to manage that.

Yesterday, I talked to your Education Secretary, who offered that the curriculum will be translated into Ukrainian to allow kids when they come—or if they come—here on this soil to be able to be immediately placed in schools. That is a good point, but we have our own system, which we also used through covid, like you—they have prepared their curricula—and we do not believe that people will stay long enough to really be placed here and rooted here.

I also had a conversation with the CBI—the biggest union of businesses here. They offered so many business opportunities and job opportunities to allow Ukrainians, in a dignified way, to earn their living and not be a burden on your social system—we do not want that. Most of these people are well educated and have their own business ideas. Most of them work in professions that can be done remotely, like IT. The IT sector is the strongest, in our case. We are the No. 1 outsourcing destination in the world for your businesses—second only to India, with 1 billion people. You can imagine how developed the ties with you are and how much we can take advantage of those established ties.

The decision to allow people to be connected to the NHS and other services is very welcome. We understand that, in most cases, these kids need to be treated psychologically first, and for some other things as well.

Today, we reached agreement with the Russians that humanitarian convoys will be allowed to leave some of the besieged cities. It is a very painful decision. We still have to talk to the aggressor who is killing our people each and every day; on behalf of all those people who are waiting to be evacuated, we have to do it. We have to bring things as simple as water to cities like Mariupol, which is a resort town on the Sea of Azov, very warm and kid-friendly—the shallowest sea in the world. It was a famous resort for small kids; now, it doesn't have potable water. We have to get that there.

We do not have any idea how we will ease this humanitarian crisis. All the humanitarian organisations who used to work with us are accumulating money, to be frank, but they are not acting yet, because they are saying that the security situation is not permissive. We have to use our military convoys right now to allow food and water and medical stuff into Ukraine. That is the only route we have.

I will stop here to allow more questions.

Chair: Thank you; that is a very helpful overview. I am sure we will have quite a few questions, but I am conscious you have to leave at 10.25 am. I will come to Tim Loughton first.

Q2 Tim Loughton: Mr Ambassador, can I repeat the Chair's comments about the fortitude of the Ukrainian people? I think we are all glad that the British Government have done a lot in support, in a whole host of ways.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

The Government have also said that we will take an uncapped number of people coming from Ukraine, but I think we are all rather frustrated that that seems to be a rather slow and, as you mentioned, bureaucratic process. Your comments about Poland and other countries are interesting, and I think we have understood that many people coming out of Ukraine will want to stay close to Ukraine, particularly if they have left sons and fathers and husbands behind to fight.

We have said that there is not going to be a cap, although, as you have said, Ukrainians coming here do not want to stay here permanently, in most cases—they want to be able to go back home and rebuild their families. Aside from those with Ukrainian family links—perhaps you will say roughly how many Ukrainians there are in the UK at the moment—do you think many who do not have a family link will apply to come through the sponsored route? For them, it seems to be a very bureaucratic system at the moment. We absolutely need to speed it up and show far more urgency. Do you have any idea of numbers in those respects?

Vadym Prystaiko: Thank you, sir. I am scared of the offer of a three-year stay. Frankly, we hope that we will not have to be in a war for such a long period of time. I am very thankful for the generous offer—there is no irony in my voice—but I hope that we do not have to use it. We want to finish this war much earlier and get Ukraine back, because we have to rebuild our nation and have people to repopulate it.

On numbers, we estimate that there are roughly 50,000 or 60,000 Ukrainians living right now—in a peaceful time—in the whole of the UK. It is not on the level of Canada, where out of 33 million people there are 1.3 million Ukrainians. Historically, it is not a place that you would immediately expect Ukrainians to come.

However, I guess that people will unite with their families, and as we have 50,000 or 60,000 of them, I would expect at least 100,000 people to come here to their relatives. Some of them will be members of families of your citizens who have no Ukrainian blood but who, for different reasons—their marriage or their connections—have established themselves. We are not aware of these people and we cannot take them into consideration, but that is a good basic number that we can start working with.

Q3 Tim Loughton: Some of us would like the Home Secretary just to send some planes over to Kraków or Warsaw or Budapest—wherever—and bring back planeloads of mostly mums with young children, and then sort out the bureaucracy and the paperwork back in the UK. As far as you are concerned, what is stopping that?

Vadym Prystaiko: If you want to send planes, send F-16s. That would be much better.

Q4 Tim Loughton: Well okay, but in terms of the refugees who we need to give homes to?

Vadym Prystaiko: I would not advise sending planes to pick up kids and women, because that is what we will have to do as a nation. We will fight



right now. The skies are not ours; in most cases, the skies are in Russian hands.

Millions of people have already made their way to nations like Poland. These people are opening their hearts and minds. Many Polish people are calling me and my friends and telling me, "We have family—so many of them—already here." Nobody is complaining, but I know that they are straining their capabilities themselves. These nations have to be helped logistically. I know that the United States sent some troops on the ground to help logistically with this huge number of people.

People are trickling in smaller numbers further into the European Union, so I expect that they will find their way all the way here through Calais, which was mentioned a couple of times in different papers, or any other way. I would not expect there to be a huge influx of Ukrainians here, but we will see how the situation develops from here.

Q5 Ms Abbott: All members of the Committee really want to offer our support to the Ukrainian people, who are displaying such fortitude. Looking at films and online clips, I have noticed that there are circumstances in which black people and Syrian people have been pushed off trains and literally put to the back of the queue. Some of us are a little concerned about that. Have you any comment to make about that?

Vadym Prystaiko: Thank you for raising this. It has been raised many times, and I am quite happy to meet this question straightforwardly. Ukraine is a very homogenic society; we don't have many people of different races on the streets—for many different reasons we are not going to discuss—and foreigners are sticking out of the crowd. It doesn't mean that we are racist; it's just the way the people understand. But what you describe in these situations—I checked myself, because we don't want it to happen—was that Ukrainians were trying to allow foreigners to come out first. That's all the problem is: when you have to prioritise young people who have a foreign passport that is not visible against women and children of Ukrainian citizenship who are trying to get on the same trains.

The police have to do a much better job explaining to people why these young Ukrainian males are splitting from their families and staying behind and somebody else is leaving. That is where people-to-people conflicts can come. It is difficult to explain why the foreigners have to leave right now—right here, right away—even if they are from a neighbouring nation. We are not talking about different races in most of the cases—a different face or anything. We are just trying to somehow—I don't know; maybe we will have to gather the foreigners in some other places so they will not be visible and there will not be conflicts with Ukrainians trying to flee in the same direction. This is something that will have to be taken care of, and we will be doing it.

Ms Abbott: Thank you.

Q6 Stuart C. McDonald: Thank you, ambassador, for coming to address us today. I echo the words of the Chair and other Committee members in



HOUSE OF COMMONS

sending our solidarity. You spoke about some of the technical issues with regard to biometric passports. If we can we address those, would you like to see the UK follow what Ireland has done and what was already the case in the Schengen area and just lift the requirement for a visa altogether?

Vadym Prystaiko: This is very sensitive; I understand how sensitive it is for your society as well, especially after the immigration crisis—refugee crisis—with Syrians. We believe that was manufactured by Russians pushing these people out from Syria, with floods of migration—wave after wave—to Europe.

That will definitely resolve all the issues, but how reasonable and justified it is in your own system is, frankly, for you to decide. We will be happy if all the barriers are dropped for some period of time when we can get the maximum of people. Then we will deal with that, and my embassy is here to help: to organise for those people—we have our own lists and we will help them—and to talk to people. We are now talking, for example, with the Mayor of London about where can we resettle these people. Should we have a place where they can stay all together, so it will be easier for the embassy to give them service if they need it, or for somebody else to look after them—or should they be allowed, as any other citizen is, to go wherever they like and wherever they believe the opportunities are? This is the process—a sensitive process, and, in most cases, private. In most cases—we have the same lawyers as yourselves—we cannot use the information or gather it from people, because it is private information: where they want to go and so on. At particular times, drastic measures should be taken. I believe something like a drop-in could be considered as well.

Q7 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Thank you. My other question is in relation to other limitations on the family scheme just now. I understand that if you are settled and have permanent residency here in the United Kingdom, you can have family members join you here, but if your visa is time limited—for example, if you are a student or you are on a worker’s visa that is not permanent—you cannot apply to bring anybody here. Do you have any comments on that, and do you have any figures available about the number of Ukrainian nationals in the United Kingdom just now who have these time-limited visas and therefore do not benefit?

Vadym Prystaiko: No, I don’t. Frankly speaking, this exchange never happened before, and nations tend to keep this information to themselves. I agree with you that we would rather have had this information and the exchange established a long time ago, but that is not how nations are working in peaceful times. Nowadays—I actually have to check; I didn’t know that. That is a good point; thank you very much. I thought that there was a sort of covering principle that everybody who is legally here can use the system.

Stuart C. McDonald: No.

Vadym Prystaiko: Thank you for clearing that up. I will talk to Secretary Patel about this. I would expect that it would be the natural way that, if



HOUSE OF COMMONS

we are talking about Ukrainians who have no connections, the first group of people, who are legally here already with an extended visa, will be the first choice—the first portion of people—to be allowed to invite somebody. It might come to the more bureaucratic processes that we are trying to cut, but we are happy to work with your Home Office to try to understand how we can do it more easily.

Stuart C. McDonald: Thank you very much.

Q8 **Chair:** That there is this confusion shows the complexity of the scheme, doesn't it?

Vadym Prystaiko: Another thing: frankly speaking, talking about biometric passports, I have to say that most people do not have their passports with them. Their homes were burned, and we are not printing passports in my embassy. We have to take the information securely and remotely and send it to Kyiv, and they would print and bring the passports that are ready here. I cannot help much here with biometrics. I have machines to read them, but I cannot programme the blanks and I do not have blanks. That is not how our system works.

Q9 **Carolyn Harris:** First, may I offer you and the good people of Ukraine the respect, prayers and solidarity of the people of Wales, where I come from?

Vadym Prystaiko: Thank you.

Carolyn Harris: Our hearts are breaking for you as we watch these things unfold on the television—it is truly traumatic. What more do you feel we could do to help the Ukrainian people who come here to feel welcomed and to assimilate into UK life?

Vadym Prystaiko: You know that you have a specific responsibility towards us? John Hughes was the Welshman who actually established Donetsk, and its first name was Yuzivka just because of his name. It was established about 200 years ago, but I still have his portrait in my embassy. That is a specific connection.

We have to resolve things, but I believe that, with everything we have already discussed in these proceedings, if you can vote for some temporary releasing from the rules, to allow people to get here, we will take care of them. I do not expect many of them to come. As you all say, I do not want to see these pictures of people banging at the door somewhere in Calais and scratching at doors that are quite sealed.

If you can release that, we can resolve this issue right away. I have consuls here in my embassy and another consulate in Edinburgh, and we will be able to co-ordinate with those people. We have the information needed and all the procedures. Please: the Ukrainian Government is operational. Not all of them are in Kyiv—they are mostly in western cities—but the system is working. Everything is working remotely. Some of your IT companies are helping to support us, because we are being bombarded, our systems are being bombarded, by the Russians, on top of what they are doing with their rockets and tanks. But the Ukrainian



HOUSE OF COMMONS

system is operational. We have all these records. We have managed to get them out of Ukraine in time—again, with the assistance of some of your IT companies.

Carolyn Harris: Thank you, ambassador.

Q10 Paula Barker: Ambassador, I would like to give you my solidarity and respect from my constituency of Liverpool, Wavertree. If I may, I just want to drill down a little more into the family visas. The Prime Minister has said that the UK can take 200,000 refugees. I note that you said that 750 family visas have been issued for 22,000 applications. In your view, what practical steps could the UK take to process those applications quicker and remove some of the barriers that the Ukrainian people are facing?

Vadym Prystaiko: I believe that, as we have discussed already, the biggest issue here, which Secretary Patel has discussed with me on various occasions, is security. It is not even a particular—because for kids with Ukrainian birth certificates, it is okay; we can translate it and confirm that it is a Ukrainian certificate. A small one-year-old kid is not a security threat—as long as the document is recognised here, we will deal with it later. Those ones, with their parents, can be processed much quicker. The rest of this lies within the technical issue that we discussed with biometric passports. They have everything—fingerprints, and the full set of needed information, are there—and the resources with which we can pull out the information are operational.

I have to give you an example. I have your officer sitting right now in my consulate, which is against everything we signed—the Vienna convention on consular relations. We have to cut old 16th-century traditions of diplomacy. I believe that some of the traditions—much younger ones—can be cut as well.

Q11 Paula Barker: I heard on TV this morning worrying reports that young women in Ukraine were being asked to take identification photographs by those who were offering to transport them. I know that people have gone to Ukraine to assist, because people are worried about potential trafficking of young women. Are you aware of that, and is there anything that you can tell us about it?

Vadym Prystaiko: We have established mechanisms to avoid trafficking. Not all of them are perfect; you probably understand that we are uncovering new schemes that people are using, specifically now these people are especially vulnerable. Our consulate will try to reach out to the maximum number of people who are heading towards the UK. In most cases, when they have UK relatives it is much easier.

I also do not understand how I can reach out to people who are coming right now. We even discussed with your Secretary of State how to identify those persons who are already on this soil. In most cases, as a priority people are talking to their own embassy and telling them, “Guys, I am here.” Frankly speaking, we are preoccupied with many other causes and things we are trying to do—in most cases just humanitarian aid over



HOUSE OF COMMONS

there. We are even sending food right now. Ukraine used to be the breadbasket of Europe; now we need food. It is as simple as that. This is a priority number something.

We have a special form—a very primitive one—to allow with my signature and stamp to check documents, because in most cases your people have never seen Ukrainian documents. My consuls can tell that this is a student's ticket, and this is the driver's licence, which is different. Thank God, last May, with the Home Secretary we cleared our Ukrainian ID cards and driver's licence so they are recognised here and we don't even have to replace them. It was right on time, so we can use those documents, which most Ukrainians have. We have to be creative and move fast. I believe we will find a solution.

Q12 Chair: Could I ask about the issue of Ukrainians trying to access the visa application centres outside Ukraine? We have been particularly focused on what is happening in Calais, and the inability of Ukrainians there to apply for their visas. Are you able to give us any update about what is happening to Ukrainians who have made that journey across to northern France?

Vadym Prystaiko: Visa centres is an issue that we were discussing with you a long, long time ago—even before the war. You used to produce visas in Ukraine, in Kyiv, for all Ukrainians, which is the biggest nation by territory in Europe, so even travelling to one particular place was a hassle. Then you moved it to Poland, years ago. It was much more difficult to get to Poland. Then you moved it all the way to these islands.

To process visas, there were always bureaucratic hassles. When I came here as ambassador, I got my visa on time, but even though I was already approved by your Government, my wife did not have it. Even with simple things like that, the bureaucracy is so tough.

When we reached agreement for the visa-free regime with the Europeans, which worked quite beautifully for almost 10 years, we never managed to open this particular nation. I know that you have strict immigration policies, but all Europeans had them at the same time. We opened up to your citizens in 2005, so all these years we were allowing all your citizens to come, and then we had to face criticism within the country—"Why are all the westerners coming with no visa, when we still have to wait in line?"

When the European Union opened, we had an even tougher time because we had to explain why the UK is the only one sticking out of the crowd. Even with Americans, we were given 10-year multiple visas, which is more or less a visa-free regime—we have a passport for 10 years; we have a visa for 10 years; you do not have to care about anything. Unfortunately, it was not the case. Even diplomatic passports, service passports, journalists' passports and religious leaders' passports were all treated equally here, but that is the usual way: when you try to find specific categories, you can safely open up. Like now, you can talk about women and kids of some age, which is a less risky group from a security point of view. This category we can rule out. Over these years, we have had



HOUSE OF COMMONS

negotiations with your people who said, "No, no, we are treating everybody equally." Maybe that is good in theory, but in reality, if you have a one-year-old kid, they are definitely not a terrorist. You can strike them off the list of potential terrorist risks.

Q13 Chair: Are you able to say anything about the Ukrainians who are currently in Calais and trying to get to the UK?

Vadym Prystaiko: I have not yet contacted any of them. It is very difficult. I have seen the reports. As always, with journalists, you have to find out who they talked to. We do not know the person. We do not know whether they were actually Ukrainian or were presenting a passport. We are trying to reach out to our embassy in Paris, but what is going on in Calais we need to have people on the ground to understand, and my embassy is quite preoccupied with many other things. You can imagine what is happening with these people.

Q14 Tim Loughton: Ambassador, all of us as MPs have had lots of constituents asking what they can do to help. I know there is a problem with people sending lots of clothes and other supplies. Well intended though it is, it is not the most practical thing. A number of people have approached us to ask, "Can we volunteer?" They might be medically trained people. I gather there have been queues outside the Ukrainian embassy of people wanting to do something. Is that practical? Is that something you would recommend or not? It's difficult.

Vadym Prystaiko: We are not in closed session, right?

Tim Loughton: We are in open session, so what you say now will go out to the people listening.

Vadym Prystaiko: There are very kind and well-intentioned people sending kids' bicycles and expecting us to send them all the way to Ukraine right now, which it is not reasonable to do, and resource-wise it is not possible. Yes, people are giving, and some are coming with particular help like tactical medical stuff. They are brave people and know what to do immediately, so these people can be helpful on the ground in helping get civilians out of these areas. Some people are coming with logistical support. Again, they are brave enough to use their own trucks and buses, but we have to stop them from doing that because we do not want to take care of yet another citizen of the UK in our territory. Instead of fighting, sometimes we have to divert our forces to take care of them. Like your journalists being shot at, we have to take care of those ones.

We are not encouraging people to go, but at the same time I cannot stop most of them going there. Assistance is given by the DEC, which is getting money. Even the Queen put in money. I will see the Royal Family today at one of the centres next to my embassy. People are packing. Yesterday I came at 11pm and people were in full swing. They were packing things and sending them. Royal Mail came up with the idea to use their own trucks to go to Ukraine, so all the businesses are coming and people are coming from all over the place. I don't see the difference between how it is here in London and everywhere else around the UK. The response from all



HOUSE OF COMMONS

parts of the UK is equally huge, and that is what is allowing Ukrainians to be supported, and they feel it.

I know that Adam will have something to share with us. He had first-hand experience of what was happening there.

Adam Holloway: Well, we've got to give you every possible support.

Vadym Prystaiko: Thank you.

Q15 **Tim Loughton:** One thing that has been mentioned is body armour. I know you want military equipment, and absolutely we need to give more of that. I gather that Ukrainian citizens have been buying body armour over the internet from British firms and others in the West to send out there to equip your volunteer and reserve forces. Is that something that we could deliver more of through the Government, through other people who might have some of this stuff, or through firms that produce it in the West?

Vadym Prystaiko: On buying here, with the assistance of many people, even food rations, the ready-to-eat meal packs, it is not very practical to move them from the UK, but that is where we have had an immediate response. We are so humbled by the eagerness to help right now. As soon as we establish better routes, we will be able to acquire things like body armour and food close to our borders and we will probably switch our activities there. Because I have a response here and I have people coming and offering money, armour and food, I have to use these channels, and trucks can go themselves. I have to sign something to help them on the borders between different nations to allow European nations with whom you have different relations at different times to clear the procedure for them, and then there is asking the embassy of the Ukraine to help all the trucks with your numberplates.

On the body armour specifically, this is a sensitive issue. Its use is sometimes considered. We believe it is not considered at this particular time. Humanitarian funds and companies would rather help financially to acquire food and medicine than armour. But you are right. The territorial units, defences and people who stayed behind defended their own houses in small villages against murderers—in most cases not even Russian military, but against criminals, murderers and anybody who comes. It is not military. They have to be protected somehow as well. This is difficult. I am trying to resolve this. I will probably talk to Ben Wallace to resolve this issue as well.

Q16 **Chair:** Could I just ask one last question? In recent weeks, people have been booking rooms in Ukraine using Airbnb as a way of trying to put some money into the local economy and into people's hands. Is that something that you welcome and support?

Vadym Prystaiko: Some people are very creative. In some cases, we are facing problems that we would not expect. For example, Russians are trying to kill all the connections and are destroying the cellular towers. We can no longer rely on cards; as here, most Ukrainians own bank cards. We



are unfortunately returning to the practice of markets—bazaars, as we call them—with people saying, “We need things as simple as cash—to exchange something.” That is where we have found ourselves in the 21st century: allowing more cash to be generated and circulated. I also see Airbnb being used. People here are booking for Ukrainians to come and settle here in hotels, sports facilities and universities. Right now, we are working on how to allow them this, in case they come here.

Chair: Thank you very much for your time. I know that you are incredibly busy, but we are very grateful.

Vadym Prystaiko: This is very important, sincerely. Thank you.

Chair: We hope that we will keep talking and having a dialogue with you and the embassy. We send our very best wishes to you and the Ukrainian people.

Vadym Prystaiko: Thank you to the whole Committee.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Zoe Bantleman, Helen Manis, Enver Solomon and Iryna Terlecky.

Q17 **Chair:** We are going to start the second part of our meeting slightly early. Thank you very much to our panel for joining us. We have three people appearing virtually and Enver Solomon in the room. First, it might be helpful to all Committee members if I ask everybody to introduce themselves. Enver, would you introduce yourself to the Committee?

Enver Solomon: I am Enver Solomon and I am the chief executive of the Refugee Council. Many thanks to the Committee for inviting me to give evidence.

Chair: We are very grateful that you are here. I know that it was short notice, so thank you very much. Next, we have Zoe Bantleman.

Zoe Bantleman: I am Zoe Bantleman and I am legal director of the Immigration Law Practitioners’ Association, otherwise known as ILPA. Thank you for inviting me today.

Chair: You are very welcome and we are pleased to see you. We also have Helen Manis.

Helen Manis: Yes, I am Helen Manis. I am an immigration lawyer and I am one of 300 pro bono lawyers who have been volunteering with the Ukraine family scheme since it opened on Friday.

Chair: Iryna Terlecky, would you introduce yourself?

Iryna Terlecky: I am Iryna Terlecky. I am a board member of the Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain, which was founded in 1948 and is the largest representative body for Ukrainians in Great Britain.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q18 Chair: Thank you again to everyone for attending at such short notice. We will have some questions from members of the Committee, but I want to start with you, Enver. What is your assessment of the steps that the Government have put in place to assist the Ukrainian people fleeing from their country? How are we doing and where are we?

Enver Solomon: Unfortunately, I do not think that we are in a very good place. We are looking at the worst refugee crisis in Europe since the second world war. We have a scheme in place that has issued only hundreds of visas to allow Ukrainians to come here. We have Ukrainians queuing up in Calais and at the visa application centre in Poland, unable to access documentation.

I think that the Government are making a fundamental error: they are not adopting a “refugees first” approach, which they should be adopting; they seem to be adopting an approach of paperwork over people—people who have lost everything through no fault of their own. The Government appear to have chosen to tinker with a standard visa scheme, which is a managed migration route, rather than to respond in a way that is required for an urgent humanitarian crisis.

That is a gross oversight of the Government. Unfortunately, it sends a message to Ukrainians that we are not welcoming them—we are not creating a system that is quick, fair and efficient to enable those Ukrainians to come to the UK who want to come here. As we heard from the ambassador, the majority will want to stay in neighbouring states and will have connections to other EU countries, but there will be some who want to come to the UK, and we have to facilitate a mechanism for them to come here rapidly. The best way to do that, in the immediate short term, is to waive any visa application, to allow people to come here, to fast-track them into the country, giving them recognition as a refugee and a limited period of leave to remain in the UK, and to welcome them into this country.

My own organisation has had a number of requests from people who want to help Ukrainians. As we heard from the Ukrainian ambassador, the British people want to welcome Ukrainians. Unfortunately, the Government approach is out of step with where public opinion is at the moment.

Q19 Chair: Thank you for that. May I ask you about the security issues? The Minister, when he spoke to the House of Commons yesterday, was keen to stress security and the need to ensure that we know who is coming into the country and whether there is any security risk. What do you say about that? How would you tackle that particular issue?

Enver Solomon: I recognise, of course, that security is a legitimate concern. It was a concern when we evacuated thousands of people in a rapid, very dangerous situation from Kabul last summer, but there are mechanisms that we can use to address those challenges.

There is currently a Home Office app that can be used to take biometric information, and Ukrainians have passports with a chip in it that could be used with that app, as I understand it. For those who, as the ambassador



HOUSE OF COMMONS

explained, will not have documentation, there is a mechanism for carrying out an assessment when people arrive at the UK border, in a way that is done ordinarily when people are fleeing conflict in any other nation, to determine whether there need to be checks. Biometrics can be carried out at the border. We do that at the moment, for visitor visas, for anyone coming into the UK, so that can be done at the border.

I do not think that the issue is insurmountable or one that cannot be overcome. These are people who are fleeing out of desperation, who want to come to a safe country, who want to be welcomed. We need to facilitate a mechanism that allows that to happen. We can fast-track them into the country, do the necessary checks and grant them refugee protection.

Q20 Chair: Thank you. Iryna, would you like to say anything about your understanding at the moment of the Ukrainians in the UK, obviously worried, concerned and wanting to bring family members over? Have you got anything you would like to tell the Committee about that experience?

Iryna Terlecky: I think everybody has had the same sort of experience. The process is bureaucratic and slow. People are desperately worried. We are getting hundreds of emails every day, including messages from people who have gone over to Europe to collect relatives and are still facing huge difficulties in getting the right paperwork at the right time.

One of the things I really want to say is that we are immensely grateful to all the immigration lawyers who are giving their time for free. But actually, it is quite an indictment of the system and how it is working that everybody needs an immigration lawyer, and this is just for family members coming over. When we get to the point where there are refugees who do not have family members here, the process at the moment is, at best, opaque. In some cases, it does not yet exist.

I want to say that the Ukrainian community here was founded by refugees at the end of the second world war. My father was a refugee and came here with nothing. The Ukrainian community built themselves a life and created, through the community, the family that they had left behind. It is a very close-knit community. They will want to play a full part in welcoming refugees and putting their arms around them. For that to happen, we really need the Home Office and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to join the dots between them, so that the community can play a full part in welcoming refugees when they are here.

Chair: Thank you. I am now going to move to other members of the Committee, starting with Paula Barker.

Q21 Paula Barker: Thank you to all our witnesses today for the work that you are doing to assist the effort. I have two questions, if I may, for Mr Solomon. I was very interested in the comments that you made regarding the lack of an announcement of the equivalent of Operation Warm Welcome. You talked about how critical it is that planning and strong collaboration with councils and public health are embedded into any of the plans going forward. Are you having any conversations with the LGA about



HOUSE OF COMMONS

how we can best collaborate with them and local authorities in general? As we know only too well—we have seen it with the people of Afghanistan quite recently—local councils are often left with a huge burden, and they also need our support as well.

Enver Solomon: Absolutely; I agree. I think local government is critical to how we respond and how we support Ukrainians. I have had one conversation with the Local Government Association. Unfortunately, they were trying to work out what the Government's plans were, because the Government has yet to set out details about the community sponsorship pathway announced by the Home Secretary in Parliament last week, so we still do not know how that will operate.

But I think the learning from the Afghan experience is that it is vital that the Government works in partnership with local authorities, and that support is co-created and developed by them working together effectively. We saw a terrible situation with Afghans, whereby they were being placed in hotels without local authorities even knowing about it, so they were not even able to do basic safeguarding checks on hotel accommodation that was housing dozens and dozens of very vulnerable children. We cannot have that being repeated for the situation when Ukrainians come to this country.

It is vital that the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities—I am very pleased that it is leading on this scheme, rather than the Home Office—ensures that adequate resources are put into the system to provide support to Ukrainians and their families when they arrive, because there will be safeguarding issues and health needs for children. There needs to be additional capacity to enable people to register with GPs to have a basic initial health check. That needs to be done in collaboration with the Department of Health and Social Care, so that the public health system has additional capacity and resource to do that.

There is no doubt that, as the ambassador said, many Ukrainians who come here will have incredible means, the ability to integrate, and their own networks to rely on. But those will not be good enough—I cannot stress that enough. From our experience of having worked over seven decades with people who have fled war—from the Vietnamese boat people right through to the Afghans recently—people need some specialist support and assistance to navigate the system and to understand how to access benefits and healthcare. The Ukrainian community will be able to help, but there needs to be additional casework support available as well for those who need it.

Paula Barker: You have actually answered my second question, because I was going to touch on the issue of hotels. We have seen Afghan citizens placed in hotels, often with little support and with safeguarding issues, as you say. You have answered that, so thank you.

Q22 **Tim Loughton:** Enver, let us be clear about the situation at the moment. Say a mum and a couple of kids have come across the border into Poland. If they were to make their way to Kraków airport and try to get an easyJet



HOUSE OF COMMONS

flight to London, they would be refused, unless they had been able to go to God knows where to get a visa, let alone if they had a passport or not.

Alternatively, if a Ukrainian citizen had got into a minibus and driven from London all the way to the Polish border, and filled it up with relatives or other Ukrainians, they would probably be able to get across the Schengen zone and arrive in Calais at the Eurotunnel, and would again be stopped by Border Force, without those visas, and then be directed to Brussels, Paris or a semi-fictional visa processing centre on the road to Lille, or whatever we hear about.

Basically, that is the situation at the moment for anybody who is in a position to get themselves to a mode of transport to try to get to the UK, who might have family over here, who on the face of it would qualify, from everything we have been told by the Home Office.

Enver Solomon: That is indeed correct. In addition, I note that there are limitations to eligibility, because you can bring your family member over to the UK as a Ukrainian only if you have settled status or citizenship. It is interesting that the ambassador didn't even realise that.

Tim Loughton: That was interesting.

Enver Solomon: He didn't realise the narrowness and restrictiveness of the family visa scheme.

Q23 **Tim Loughton:** Some of us think this is not rocket science but quite a good idea. If the Government were to commission a few planes to fly to Kraków, Warsaw, Budapest or whatever, get a load of people who'd very clearly just come across the border, who will mostly be women and young vulnerable kids, put them on that plane and bring them back to the UK, and then sort out biometrics, paperwork or whatever, in a secure part of an airport or hotel reception centre, is there a problem with that?

Enver Solomon: No, but the critical thing is that you would have to waive visa requirements in the short term, in the way that has been done in other EU nations. It is vital that that is done, so that people can come, who want to come.

People will want to come in different ways and by different mechanisms. As the ambassador said, most people will want to go to the EU or neighbouring countries, but for those who want to come here, we have got to provide them with safe passage. If they don't have the mechanism to come here safely under their own steam, there is an argument for providing some kind of safe-passage mechanism for them to travel to the UK.

Q24 **Tim Loughton:** But you don't need to waive the visa requirement. You just need to say, "We can sort out the visa when you arrive at Luton or Gatwick or whatever."

Enver Solomon: Well, you do, because what visa are they going to be able to apply for? I am sure my legal colleagues will want to come in. On what grounds will you allow them to come into the country? You have to



HOUSE OF COMMONS

say either, “You don’t need a visa to come into the country,” or, “We are treating you as a refugee and fast-tracking your application under the refugee convention to come and stay in the UK—

Q25 Tim Loughton: So, it’s doable.

Enver Solomon: It’s absolutely doable.

Tim Loughton: It is just a question of where you do that processing. We can argue about what deal of processing is needed. It is just: for goodness’ sake, let’s get them out of a chaotic state in Poland and get them somewhere safe, and into a safe home as soon as possible. There is no reason why that can’t be done here, if for some reason it can’t be done on the border with Ukraine.

Enver Solomon: There is no reason. The Home Secretary has the powers and ability to enable us to welcome Ukrainians.

Chair: Shall we bring in the lawyers?

Tim Loughton: Helen Manis wants to come in.

Helen Manis: I just wanted to say that that is definitely something that we have thought of. The border officers have the power now to allow a Ukrainian who turns up at the border to take their biometrics and grant them leave outside the rules for six months. The issue is that they cannot get on a plane without a visa, because the plane has something called carrier’s liability. The aeroplanes won’t let them on without a visa. If you waive the carrier’s liability, they will be able to get on the plane, and then the border officer will be able to grant them entry to the UK. They have that power, and they can take their biometrics.

We are obviously seeing so much pressure on the visa application centres, that would release some of the pressure on them dealing with thousands and thousands of people turning up.

Q26 Tim Loughton: That was the question, you are absolutely right. So, if easyJet or British Airways let people on their planes, they could be fined for having done so. There are perfectly good reasons in normal circumstances why we brought that in, but if there were to be a suspension of that carrier’s liability specifically for people who are Ukrainian, or that there is a good chance they are Ukrainian and coming from Ukraine, they could arrive at Gatwick Airport and be granted a six-month visa in normal circumstances. Then we could sort out how we work out where they go, whether it will be more than six months, or whatever—once they are in the UK. That could happen with a simple suspension of that condition, yes?

Helen Manis: Yes, I think that is it. That is one suggestion that the lawyers asked me to put forward to you about how we can speed up the process of getting Ukrainians in.

Tim Loughton: Thank you; that is really helpful. Zoe Bantleman wants to comment as well.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Zoe Bantleman: There is a second, even easier solution to all this, which the Home Secretary could easily provide. She might propose to lay an Appendix Ukraine to the immigration rules, and amend immigration rules imminently, I understand. At the same time as laying those requirements in the rules for the various new schemes, however, she could also delete a single word from the immigration rules—"Ukraine" in Appendix Visitor, the visa national list. That would mean that Ukrainians were treated the same as nationals of various different countries from North America to South America, Africa, Asia and Europe in being allowed to come to the UK without first applying for entry clearance as a visitor.

The Home Secretary could then instruct the border officers to decide, once people have arrived in the UK, in the same manner as Enver described—taking their biometrics but also subjecting them to the requirements of Appendix Visitor, which includes the general grounds for refusal. Those grounds contain very wide powers for the Secretary of State to deny someone leave to enter.

Arriving at the border does not mean that a person is automatically granted leave to enter; it is for the border officer to assess that. They could assess the security concerns and whether someone falls to refusal under the general grounds, which include wide public interest grounds as to whether someone is conducive to the public good or their entry is not. Then, once in the UK on a visitor route, the Home Secretary has already allowed a concession for people to switch from the visitor route to various other immigration routes.

All she needs to do is to remove a single word from the immigration rules, and that would allow Ukrainians to board a plane in the same manner as Americans and South Americans can board planes to the UK, without changing any of the other restrictions that she might well want to keep on airlines and Eurostar having the £2,000 fine should they allow someone on to a plane to arrive in the UK without having the appropriate visa. That would be a very simple solution, which ILPA stands behind.

Tim Loughton: Thank you. That is very helpful.

Q27 Chair: If that is so straightforward and simple, why have the Government decided that they want to pursue changes to widen the family visa route for Ukrainians? We have been discussing the bureaucracy, but what about the cost of that—the visa application centres and everything else? Enver, do you have a view of why they decided to go down that route?

Enver Solomon: Well, you have to ask Ministers that question. They made that decision. I can surmise, but I cannot speak for them. My sense is that the Government were trying to take, as I said earlier, a restrictive approach to this. They sought, in effect, to tinker with a standard visa scheme, which is a managed migration route, to deal with what is a humanitarian crisis. Now, did they do that because, ultimately, they wanted to limit the number of Ukrainians who could come immediately to the UK? You will have to ask the Minister that, but that is what it looks like.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Chair: We have the Minister next week, so we will ask that question. Carolyn Harris next.

Q28 **Carolyn Harris:** Enver, you have already said—I think we all agree—that what we are witnessing is the worst we have seen since the second world war. It seems to me, and given the answers to the question asked by my colleague Tim Loughton, that our current system is so clunky and bureaucratic that it prevents the UK from being in any way proactive in resolving the issue. In comparison to our European cousins, are we the worst?

Enver Solomon: At the moment we certainly look as though we are far behind what EU countries are doing. They have waived visa requirements and allowed any Ukrainian to stay in an EU country for up to three years. We have not done the equivalent. In comparison to our neighbours, we look rather mean-spirited and less kind and welcoming.

Q29 **Carolyn Harris:** To anyone who wants to answer, if you had a wish list, what can we do now to change the situation?

Enver Solomon: Zoe and legal colleagues have explained something that could be done very simply, vis-à-vis the immigration rules. The view of my organisation, and many people in the refugee sector, is that a first immediate short-term step is to waive visa requirements, allow any Ukrainian that wants to come to the UK to come, and grant them protection status in the UK as a refugee. These are refugees.

I was speaking to a colleague in the Welsh Government yesterday, and he emphasised the point to me—and this wasn't an esoteric point—that those who arrive as refugees have particular rights as refugees. Those rights include eligibility for services such as housing, as well as exemption from the DWP habitual residence test. If those arriving from Ukraine, or elsewhere, are not granted refugee status, the Committee should note that my colleague was saying that devolved nations would need to ensure that they have up-to-date legislation around eligibility for housing, healthcare and education, to ensure that any new bespoke form of leave is included in eligibility regulations. Again, that seems a more bureaucratic and complex way of doing it, when you could easily grant them refugee status and allow them to have access to all the rights and entitlements that they need in Scotland, Wales and England.

Q30 **Chair:** I wonder if any of the other witnesses would like to respond to that final question? Would anyone like to say what would be on their wish list?

Zoe Bantleman: If I may, we wrote to the Home Secretary, to the Minister for Safe and Legal Migration and to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities with our wish list last week. It is quite a lengthy wish list, I should add. However, our first and key recommendation is the same as Enver's—to waive visa requirements. There are numerous ways that this can be done. There is the way that I just mentioned, which would be one very easy way. Also, the Home Secretary has control of part of the immigration rules—part 11A—which allows temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced

persons. Even following the UK's exit from the European Union, the Secretary of State could use that part of the rules to also allow Ukrainians, who are displaced persons, to enter the UK.

Our second key ask is in relation to the biometric requirements. I know that various security concerns have been raised. Enver and I were in a meeting yesterday where we heard that there were some intelligence community concerns about security. That was the case with Afghanistan, but that did not prevent people from entering and registering their biometrics at the border. It is also the case for non-visa nationals, who arrive at the border from the various countries that are not on the visa national list, that they enrol their biometrics at the border. They do not have to have a particular type of chip in their passport; they do not even need to have a biometric passport to enrol their biometrics at the border.

While there might be security concerns, one question we have is how many and how wide are those security concerns? Millions of people are displaced, and that must be balanced. There are a few ways in which the Home Secretary could avoid the biometrics requirement or reduce it before the application process. One is through the UK ID check app—if biometric chips were compatible. That was used for the Hong Kong BNO route; it is also used for European nationals applying for skilled worker ICT visas. The second way is to enrol at the border, which would be very sensible. That wasn't just used for those evacuated from Afghanistan during Operation Pitting; it was also used for those who arrived from Hong Kong and were granted leave outside the rules in the one-year period between the summer of 2020 and the summer of 2021, regardless of what passport they had. They could even arrive with an expired BNO passport. That was due to the implementation of security legislation in Hong Kong. Those are countries where there were security concerns, and people arrived without having to enrol their biometrics at a visa application centre—those being the crucial words—before arrival.

We have heard numerous reports about the lengthy queues and about unaccompanied minors travelling across borders to wait for days or months for visas before they can join their families in the UK. To waive the requirement would be to remove that significant amount of red tape, which would mean that vulnerable, displaced people would not have to make dangerous journeys in order to meet that administrative hurdle for which there have been other solutions.

The third way is to reuse biometrics for people who have already enrolled them with the Home Secretary. There will be Ukrainians who have already visited the UK and have enrolled their biometrics in previous visa applications. During the covid-19 pandemic, for persons in the UK, the Home Secretary reused those biometrics where she already had them captured on her system. That would speed up the process for some. While arrival at the border is the simplest solution for everyone—with enrolment and biometrics at the border—there are also various other solutions that could be employed.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Our third ask would be in relation to the substantive requirements for the routes. As Enver mentioned, the ambassador did not realise that the Ukrainian family scheme is so limited in its purview. Ukraine Advice Project UK, of which Helen is a member, is an amazing effort by various members of ILPA, although ILPA has not arranged it; it is completely independent. One of the main issues that it is facing is that some Ukrainian nationals are in the UK with limited leave. They are here as skilled workers or as students—they might even be child students, in the care of a school—and they are unable to sponsor their Ukrainian family members, or other family members who are resident in Ukraine, to come over to the UK. While they cannot return to Ukraine, they also cannot bring their family members here.

There is nothing that advisers can tell people to do, other than, “Try to get a visit visa to come to the UK and travel to an application centre,”—to make that perilous journey in the hope, not the certainty, that such a visa may be granted—“and you might be able to come to the UK. But then, there’s no option for you. Maybe then the humanitarian route will be open, and maybe then you could switch to that, but we don’t even know the requirements or when it will be open. We don’t have any information about that scheme, so perhaps you won’t be able to switch into that route either.” It is therefore extremely important for the Home Secretary to consider the expansion of the family scheme, and to provide guidance on that humanitarian route, so that people know what to tell people about what they can expect.

Q31 **Chair:** Thank you. Iryna, is there anything that you would like to say?

Iryna Terlecky: Yes. We have also been talking to the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Department and our churches and community organisations, and indeed have our own wish list. Most of that covers what people have said before, about making processes simpler, easier to understand, much less bureaucratic and much more sympathetic.

As I think Enver Solomon mentioned, there is also a desperate need for full and proper co-ordination between Government agencies and local government. At the moment, we are hearing about people coming in; we do not know where they are, necessarily, or how they have got in, but they are starting to come to us, as a community organisation, to ask for support, in one way or another.

There is not, at the moment, a clear, single source of truth, or of guidance, that will help us to signpost people to the right place for help. We cannot do it ourselves; we realise that we are not competent in this area. There are lots of people who are more competent than us. But there will be people coming here who turn to the Ukrainian community and our Ukrainian churches, and we desperately need very clear and helpful information so that we can point people in the right direction. Without that, it will be much more difficult for the Ukrainian community to play the part that it wants to play in helping to welcome and settle refugees who come here.



Q32 Stuart C. McDonald: Thank you to all our witnesses. You have all made a very persuasive case in relation to the need for visas to be waived altogether and the practicalities of doing that, so I don't need to go over that again. Could I turn to some of the other limitations and restrictions on the family rules? We have heard about the fact that if you have limited leave here, you will not be able to bring family members. But incrementally over a few days, various categories of relationship have been added to the rules. Are there still gaps there—for example, stepchildren and partners who have not lived together for two years? Maybe I can start with Helen.

Helen Manis: The scheme was widened last night with some guidance that got circulated around the lawyers, so I think we are now allowed to include cousins. Stepchildren is still an issue. Another practical issue that we have is how we prove the relationship. We are told that we have to provide birth certificates and that we have to translate the birth certificates. These are real practical problems that are very difficult to ask people to be doing while they are making their way to a visa centre that may or may not be open. There is one step that is saying what the family relationship should be, and there is another step, which is how we prove that family relationship.

Q33 Stuart C. McDonald: What would your answer to that be? Let's just assume that, for security reasons, the Home Office still insists that people have to get a visa in advance. There cannot be any security-based argument for any of these restrictions—it is simply a policy decision. There is no reason to limit it to certain relationships.

Helen Manis: Yes. My view is that if you will insist on this, perhaps a UK sponsor can present themselves, identify themselves and make themselves available to be responsible for the Ukrainians who are coming over. But practically, to ask someone to provide a birth certificate, translate the birth certificate, upload it and turn up to a centre that may or may not be open—it is proving almost impossible to do that.

Q34 Stuart C. McDonald: Can I turn to Ukrainians who were already here when the invasion started? How successful has the Government been in providing status to people and ensuring that they will have stability? Does it depend on what category of visa you are in? Are there still problems with people being required to seek to switch or extend into categories that they might not qualify for? Are people who are here visiting family even allowed to use the family rules to secure a longer status? What are the gaps there?

Helen Manis: I think the family scheme for Ukrainians has not opened up yet for people applying inside the UK. Anyone can correct me if I am wrong, but it is not even open yet. I do not have details of that. If you are a Ukrainian who would be eligible to apply under the family scheme inside the UK, you cannot do that right now.

Q35 Stuart C. McDonald: What is the status of everybody else? Zoe, I don't know whether you want to chip in on this. What precisely has been done to extend visas for people who were already here?

Zoe Bantleman: In answer to your previous question, just to come back to what Helen said, my understanding is that it is not yet possible for people who are inside the UK to apply under the Ukraine family scheme. For those who are here—as visitors, for example—we do not know whether they will be able to switch on to that scheme, and we do not have the guidance and rules yet. That is my understanding as well.

The other issue is that there will be people who are here with leave that will soon come to an end, for whatever reason—for example, students who are sponsored by a university and who may come to the end of their course very soon or in a few months' time. They will have a period of leave granted after the end of that course, just for them to wrap up their ties to the UK, which is usual under the immigration rules. There is no automatic extension for them until the end of the year, as there has been for certain categories of the rules, such as for HGV drivers or pork butchers and seasonal workers. There isn't an automatic extension for people.

When this was raised with the Home Office, my understanding is that the Home Office said there were safeguarding concerns, because they did not want people to be tied to a sponsor at the end of their leave. That is not sensible for certain categories such as students. The reason for that is that students at the end of their leave are not really tied to that sponsor. In fact, they are allowed to work outside of term time at the end of their leave. So it could be a very simple grant of leave outside the immigration rules, which is something that has been employed numerous times in the past two years—again, Afghanistan and Hong Kong have been precedent for that—to grant people leave outside the rules, or an exceptional assurance, as was done during the covid-19 pandemic, to make sure that they don't become overstayers and don't become subject to the hostile environment.

Otherwise, the risk is that those persons will be making human rights applications and that will become an administrative burden for the Home Office to process, or they may make asylum claims that will add to the backlog of asylum claims being processed. So there are simple solutions that the Home Secretary could take in relation to people who are here whose leave may be ending soon, either because it is going to expire or because it will be cancelled earlier than it was due to expire, for example if they decide to leave their employer or their course earlier. Leave outside the rules would protect them in the best way, to make sure that they don't become subject to the hostile environment.

In relation to other people who are left out of the family scheme, as you mentioned, there are also, you might say, durable partners, who would not have evidence of having lived together for two years, particularly people who are in LGBT+ relationships, who won't have evidence of having been married, because I believe same-sex marriage is not lawful in Ukraine. That will mean that they will have to provide evidence that they have cohabited with their partner for two years. This is an additional evidential burden placed on people fleeing the Russian invasion. In our



view, that is quite unnecessary. Some type of concession should be made for unmarried partners and flexibility, particularly in relation to the evidence, could be provided by the Home Secretary, within the rules and within the guidance.

Was there a separate category that you wanted me to address?

Q36 Stuart C. McDonald: That's very helpful; thank you very much. I will just finish with a question to Enver Solomon. I think you said earlier that there are issues around entitlements if Ukrainians don't have refugee leave in particular. We have just heard that there are concerns about the system being able to cope with the additional tens of thousands of asylum claims. What is the best way to do this? Is it to provide some sort of status that is not the same as refugee status but has all the rights and entitlements alongside it? Or is it to provide an accelerated refugee humanitarian process, which basically says, "If you have a Ukrainian visa and you are in this country, we will give you five years' refugee leave"?

Enver Solomon: It is really interesting to look at the bigger picture here. Let us remind ourselves, as we heard from our colleague from the Ukrainian community, why Ukrainians came here previously to settle in the UK. They came here after the horrors of the second world war. We welcomed them as refugees. This country, proudly, was one of the founding fathers of the UN convention on refugees—the international treaty that is designed to deal with the situations that we are facing today.

We need to honour that treaty. It is very simple: people who are refugees have rights as refugees to seek safety in a country of their choosing. We can fast-track them so that they get limited leave to remain here as a refugee, with all the rights and entitlements.

What we are doing instead is using a complex, bureaucratic immigration system that has evolved over many years under multiple, successive Governments, and that has often been designed to try to make it more complex and more difficult for people to have legitimate reason to stay in the UK. That immigration system is not the mechanism we should be using in response to a humanitarian crisis. We have an international convention—the UN convention on refugees. We should be using that to grant people safety and protection immediately in the UK, if they choose to come here because they are fleeing the bloodshed in Ukraine. It is as simple as that, and there is no reason why we shouldn't be doing that today. And of course, let's remember what Wendy Williams said in her inquiry into the Windrush scandal: we always need to see the face behind the case. We can see the faces daily on our television screens of Ukrainians who are desperate to be safe. That is all they want—to be safe for themselves and for their children. We need to see those faces and respond to them as refugees who need our protection.

Q37 Stuart C. McDonald: While all this is going on, the Nationality and Borders Bill is being significantly amended in the House of Lords but continues to make its way through. What should we learn from this invasion and flight of refugees about the significance of that legislation and



what it means for how we approach refugees and those seeking asylum?

Enver Solomon: It is an important question, because unfortunately the provisions in the Bill are going to differentiate the rights of refugees depending on how they arrive in the UK. It is our view that that is deeply flawed because it would, effectively, punish a Ukrainian refugee who today made a so-called irregular journey over land to come to the UK to seek protection. Under the Bill, they could be criminalised and they could be subject to being prosecuted and held in prison for up to four years.

The situation that is unfolding in Ukraine highlights the flawed narrative that the Government has that there are some people who are deserving refugees, who come through safe routes, and some who are—so-called—less deserving, who come through irregular routes. As we heard from the ambassador, people flee; they are not able to bring their documents with them. They don't have a choice and they want to get to safety. We need to enable them to be granted safety if they have a legitimate claim—a reasonable claim—for protection under the UN convention. It is imperative that the Government ensures that its borders Bill honours that commitment under the UN convention on refugees, which, as I say, we were one of the founding fathers of after the horrors of the second world war.

Q38 **Adam Holloway:** It is a great shame, isn't it, that things designed to help refugees have become extremely complicated and that these people are being treated in the same way because the rules are complicated because of our attempts to stop economic migrants abusing these routes? I have a question for Zoe and Helen. As I understand it, men of military age are not being allowed to leave Ukraine. Indeed, I was in Ukraine last week and although there were thousands and thousands of people waiting to cross the border, I didn't see any men; it was women and children. Given that, is it not possible to filter people at our border? It would be, I would have thought, a relatively small number of people in whom there would be a security interest. And to Mr Solomon, what are these security concerns?

Enver Solomon: On the security concerns, you will have to ask the Home Secretary.

Q39 **Adam Holloway:** I am just asking what you imagine they are. Can you give us any insight?

Enver Solomon: I have heard the Home Secretary say that she has been briefed by intelligence agencies around security concerns. I assume it is in relation to, potentially, Russian operatives coming into the UK. I don't know; you will have to ask the Home Secretary and Home Office Ministers about that. We are not privy to that information. But the reality is that people do come here and there are always security concerns. The same was the case with Afghanistan. There were concerns in the security community about potential Taliban operatives. It is not a reason to stop people being granted protection and safety in the UK who need it.

Q40 **Adam Holloway:** Go on, Helen, you're an expert in getting people into the country. Is there any reason why people couldn't be filtered at the



border?

Helen Manis: No; we absolutely think they should be filtered at the border. Just to reiterate what you were saying, every client that I am acting for is elderly. I have a 98-year-old man; I have a 70-year-old widow. I have young women with young children. These are the people that we are acting for on a day-to-day basis. They are just trying to make their way to see their family in the UK. I don't see any security concerns from the people that I am acting for.

One other thing that I want to say is that even if you do insist on biometrics, you have to allow people to be put in a position where they can give their biometrics. We have had clients who have travelled thousands of miles to get to Lviv visa application centre. On Sunday, it was closed with no notice—by just a sign, put up on the window, saying, "We are now closed"—so we had to reroute everyone to Poland. Poland are not accepting people in, because they haven't made the correct appointment on the system, but the appointment system has completely crashed. Even if you do insist on biometrics, you have to give people a chance to give their biometrics.

Zoe Bantleman: I have three points to make. One is about the security concerns and the powers that the Home Secretary already has, and that the laws and rules contain. One is that, at the border, border officers could impose conditions on any leave granted, if there were security concerns. For example, a reporting condition could be imposed, requiring a person to attend a police station to register within seven days. That is ordinarily a reporting condition that is imposed on entry clearance visas. It could simply be done at the border, and then the police would know who was there, in addition to having taken their biometric information.

If further security concerns were to come to light at a later point, under our existing laws and rules a person's leave could be cancelled on that basis. They could be detained and they could be refused immigration bail, if there were public safety or national security concerns, and they can be electronically monitored by the Home Office's GPS devices. Other measures such as curfews can be imposed, in addition to reporting conditions. So, there are wide powers under our existing legal framework to handle security concerns.

The second issue relates to the people who are arriving here. We know from the Nationality and Borders Bill, and from the new plan for immigration, that the Home Secretary wants to tackle criminal gangs of smugglers. That is certainly a laudable ambition. The Home Secretary has also committed to tackling violence against women and girls.

Yet, as you say, Ukrainian men under the age of 60 but over the age of 18 cannot leave the country. Therefore, we are talking about elderly people and maybe women and children, who will travel alone in these treacherous conditions, where there are dangers of shelling and other violence, which will be compounded by risks such as trafficking, exploitation and the destitution they may face in the countries they travel to. If anything, it is



HOUSE OF COMMONS

our view that these will expose some to criminal gangs of smugglers. These restrictions—these administrative hurdles—are not only unnecessary but they are counterproductive to the Home Secretary’s overarching aims for the immigration system.

The third issue is to follow up on what Helen said about biometric appointments. Look at the TLScontact visa application centre website. TLS is processing these biometrics, let’s be clear—not the Home Office. This is outsourced to a commercial agent with which UKVI has a contract. There is not even a centre in every “frontier country”, as the Home Office refers to the countries surrounding Ukraine. For example, Slovakia does not have a visa application centre.

Although we know that the Home Secretary has surged staff to process these applications, and that a new application centre has been opened in Rzeszów in Poland to process Ukraine family scheme visas, it is simply insufficient and is not the solution. We don’t think that Home Office staff—civil servants—should be sent to a dangerous warzone or to frontier countries. The solution is to get people out of that warzone, which can be done simply through the amendments we have proposed.

Another concern we have heard is that the TLS staff, who again are not civil servants, are taking an opportunist approach towards people who need to attend these centres, because of the limited number of appointments and the limited hours that they are open. In Warsaw, they are open only on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, from 9 am to 1.50 pm, even though they operate from 8 am to 5 pm for appointments. In Hungary, they are open from 9 am to 2 pm, on Monday to Friday. In Moldova, they are going to be open only for eight more days in March, and eight days in April.

Appointment availability is very limited. Staff at the centres have been recommending to vulnerable groups that they pay an extra amount of money in order to have an earlier appointment. We have heard, for example, that in Istanbul, TLScontact staff have offered people \$100 per person for a walk-in appointment and assisted scanning. In other places, it cost €80 per person for a specific appointment early in the morning. So we are worried about the commercial and opportunist approach taken at the visa application centres to which these refugees are forced to go under the current administrative system.

Q41 Ms Abbott: I was very struck by the way that the Government are treating Ukrainian refugees. What struck me from the beginning was that they were just defaulting to the very restrictive approach that they have to refugees and migrants generally. They did not anticipate that the British public, for better or worse, would feel much more positively towards Ukrainian refugees than they do towards other refugees. I have never seen the *Daily Mail* raise millions of pounds for any other group of refugees or migrants.

On the security point, there was an urgent question yesterday and Kevin Foster got quite a few questions from MPs on both sides. This issue about



HOUSE OF COMMONS

why you have to have biometric tests and what this security is all about came up more than once, and he said—I am looking at *Hansard*—“We have seen people presenting themselves at Calais port pretending to be Ukrainian,” and that we are one of the countries “in the crosshairs of Mr Putin’s Russia and his regime.” Then he referred to Salisbury and said, “We only have to look back a short period to see the impact in this country of attacks by those pretending that they had come here to look at a cathedral spire.” Somebody came back to the security thing and again he said, “We have...seen at Calais...people presenting with false documents”. And the Home Secretary on Monday talked about people traffickers at Calais. Do you have a response to any of those points?

Enver Solomon: We see people turning up at our borders with all kinds of challenges and we deal with them. There is no reason why we can’t deal with them. We have the mechanisms, the security apparatus, the checks and the processes to do that. I struggle to understand why that is a rationale that the Government is holding on to for not allowing any Ukrainian who is a refugee to come to the UK to seek protection. I really don’t see the rationale for it. It is interesting that other EU countries—Germany, France, Spain—who no doubt have security concerns as well are not using the same rationale. That stands out quite starkly, doesn’t it? I really think that the Government is trying to find a reason for justifying its very restrictive, limited approach in trying to not enable refugees from Ukraine to be given a rapid, fair hearing when they get here and to be granted refugee status.

Q42 **Ms Abbott:** We have Kevin Foster coming in front of us next Wednesday, and you have all raised points that you would want to make. Mr Solomon, if you were able to ask Kevin Foster one question, what would it be?

Enver Solomon: Given the fact that we have Ukrainians in the UK who came here after the horrors of the second world war as refugees—they were treated as refugees and welcomed as refugees—I would ask why, a bit more than seven decades on, we are not taking the same approach, and why, as a country that was a founding father of the UN convention on refugees, which is designed purposefully to deal with a humanitarian crisis like this, we are not upholding our commitment to that convention today to welcome Ukrainian refugees.

Q43 **Ms Abbott:** Thank you. And the other witnesses? Let’s start with a Ukrainian lady. If you could ask Kevin Foster one question, what would it be?

Iryna Terlecky: It would be a very similar question. Ukrainians here after the second world war have become an integral part of many local communities up and down the country. There are hundreds of Ukrainian volunteers doing absolutely everything they can to help Ukraine, and they are ready to do everything they can to welcome refugees, because they are descendants of refugees themselves and understand what it is like to leave your family behind and end up in a country where you may not know the language and where you have to start again. That is a really important point to remember.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

The other question I would ask him, particularly on this issue of security and safety, is: how are they balancing that against the risk that vulnerable women with their children, in Europe, trying to get here, will fall into the hands of people who will seek to exploit them? That would be an absolutely horrific outcome.

Thirdly, does he really understand the extent to which the British public want to reach out and help, whether that is through sponsorship or offering accommodation? What are they going to do to make that as easy as possible for people?

Q44 Ms Abbott: To our lawyer friends, what is your most important question?

Helen Manis: I would ask, why have you created an unworkable visa scheme that has the sole effect of turning people away from the UK? It is not representative of the feelings of a single person in Britain who I have spoken to towards Ukrainians. Just look at the numbers—750 people have been granted access under the scheme. It is not good enough. We have to change things immediately.

Q45 Ms Abbott: Thank you. Finally, Zoe Bantleman, what is your most important question?

Zoe Bantleman: I would echo what has already been said. I would ask, what is the reason for throwing in these administrative hurdles, for announcing unopened schemes and getting up the hopes of people in Ukraine that they can come over? We are showing less generosity and humanity and compassion than we did for those in Hong Kong and Afghanistan. In relation to the statements that the Minister made, I would say that we were in the crosshairs, in Hong Kong, of the People's Republic of China. The frontier countries are in the crosshairs with Russia—more so than we are. Border officers are experts in examining false documents. As for people traffickers in Calais, I have already raised the issue of smugglers and exploitation of those trying to travel to application centres.

Q46 Adam Holloway: I think virtually every MP, myself included, has had lovely emails from constituents offering to accommodate refugees from Ukraine. Are any of you aware of any sort of central hub for matching these kind people to refugees?

Enver Solomon: There is not a central hub yet that I am aware of. There are organisations—Refugees At Home, for example, is an organisation that matches people with people in the asylum system—but they have been inundated. We had the same after the situation in Afghanistan, and the Government struggled to create a central mechanism to facilitate that.

I would just add a note of caution that these are vulnerable women and children, mainly, who will come here. Tim Loughton knows, having been Children's Minister, the issues around safeguarding that are so important in this case. We need to make sure that it is a system that operates effectively and ensures there are effective safeguarding procedures in place. We would not want an horrendous situation where a child or a family are housed by someone and then inappropriate behaviour takes



place. There need to be proper mechanisms in place, because they will be very vulnerable people.

Q47 Chair: May I ask the lawyers a question? We have heard about the face behind the case—the idea of decision makers being very conscious that they are dealing with the lives of individuals and families. Helen, you already gave an example about an elderly widow you are dealing with. Could you give us some examples of the kind of cases that you are assisting with at the moment?

Helen Manis: I've actually made a list of examples. First, as I said, there is a 68-year-old widow who lost her husband last year and lives alone in Ukraine. Her daughter is a Ukrainian-British citizen. We have been helping her since the scheme was launched. She wasn't able to book an appointment; she was rerouted from Lviv and is now on her way to Poland. The first appointment I can get her is in two weeks' time. Secondly, there is a 98-year-old man who, again, was on his way to Lviv. He had to turn away to Poland—*[Interruption.]*

Chair: Could you just hang on a minute—we are struggling to hear you because the bell is going off. Please, carry on. Sorry about the bell.

Helen Manis: That 98-year-old man has mental health issues. For me, the worst example is two unaccompanied children who have given up trying to come to the UK because of the problems with the visa application centres.

I could go on and on: there are young children, women, elderly people who are confused. They left their home with just a bag in their hand. These are people who have lawyers who are speaking to them and trying to direct them, but there are thousands who don't have lawyers, who are just trying to make their way to somewhere on what someone else is telling them. It is heartbreaking. There is no other way to say it. It's heartbreaking. I really hope that today's session is going to change things for these people.

Q48 Chair: Just to be clear, the group of lawyers that you're part of is doing this pro bono.

Helen Manis: Yes. Everyone is working pro bono. Everyone has been working pro bono through the night to try to get in contact with these people and help them. We are struggling to help even those with lawyers, because we don't know what to say to them about what they should be doing half the time. We're all relying on press reports, misinformation, Government websites that are not being updated and guidance that isn't clear. Those are the people with lawyers—I don't know what those without lawyers are doing.

Zoe Bantleman: First, can I say something about the Ukraine Advice Project? It was set up by John Vassiliou, Simon Cox, Miranda Butler, Alex Piletska and Jennifer Blair. They have been helping people fleeing Ukraine to get basic legal advice. Yesterday evening, they told me they had an army of 385 immigration practitioners across the UK who have been



HOUSE OF COMMONS

burning the midnight oil to provide pro bono advice to those in need. They have been inundated with inquiries. They distributed 648 cases, and 541 have been actioned in just over a week. There's a huge number of these cases for which they are providing pro bono advice.

I will just give one atrocious example that I heard last week in a working group. It was about an unaccompanied child who wanted to apply under appendix FM to the rules, which is where someone is a family member of someone who is British, settled, has status under the European settlement scheme or is a refugee in the UK. That child had travelled unaccompanied to Poland. At the application centre, they were promised that their visa would be processed in one day. When they came back, they were told it would take 12 weeks, which is the standard processing time for such a visa.

The Home Secretary must ask herself whether she wants to be the architect of a world in which unaccompanied children are left to languish alone for weeks on end in foreign countries, waiting for their visas to be approved in order to join their family in the UK. That is just one example that I have to hand.

Q49 Chair: Thank you for those examples. I think we all want to say a huge thank you to the lawyers who have stepped up and provided pro bono advice. The scheme is supposed to be accessible without a lawyer—is that correct? Perhaps you could say, Enver. The Government's view is that you don't need a lawyer to apply under the scheme.

Enver Solomon: The Government aren't saying that you need a lawyer to apply for the scheme, but it's a complicated nine-step process and lots of people don't understand complex immigration rules because they are not straightforward or simple. Of course people are seeking legal advice.

I want to pick up on the point about unaccompanied children. This will be of interest to Tim, given his former ministerial brief. My organisation is hearing that there could be tens of thousands of unaccompanied children who have been taken to the border by their parents or carers and left there alone, and they will be in need of particular protection.

I was talking to a member of the Ukrainian community in London last week, who was saying that they are hearing this. They said it is imperative that the Government create some kind of specific scheme—some safe passage—for those unaccompanied children, particularly those who may have some kind of family connection to someone in the UK, so that they can come here safely. It is also critical that we work with our EU partners, so if they have a connection to someone in an EU country—a family or relative—they are able to do that. I think we are going to be seeing a significant number of very vulnerable unaccompanied children in desperate need of protection.

Tim Loughton: What Enver just said is deeply worrying. Can I suggest, Chair, that you write to the Home Secretary and the Education Secretary straightaway asking specifically what measures we can do to help those



HOUSE OF COMMONS

children? They need a specific and urgent intervention of which we need to be part.

Chair: Absolutely—we will do that this afternoon.

Ms Abbott: They are unlikely to be Russian spies.

Tim Loughton: I would hope not.

Q50 **Chair:** Can I just ask, Enver, about Ireland and what has happened there? We keep hearing about the numbers of people arriving in Ireland, and that it is much higher than in the United Kingdom. Could you say anything about that and how they are approaching this?

Enver Solomon: The numbers, as I understand it, are in their thousands, and it does not have a visa regime that is as restrictive. I am sure my legal colleagues will know the details better than I do. Ireland appears to have taken a less restrictive approach, and it does not appear to be sticking to a managed migration route to try to deal with what is a humanitarian catastrophe, but I am sure Zoe or Helen may know more detail than me about the specifics of the scheme.

Zoe Bantleman: I don't know about the specifics of Ireland other than I believe it has taken the same approach as the rest of Europe. One colleague yesterday said quite aptly that rather than criticising the security concerns that might be emanating from Ireland because we are in the common travel area with Ireland, we should be instead levelling up—as is the name of Mr Gove's Department—to the standard of Ireland and the rest of Europe. That would be firmly our position in relation to it. I do not have any information about statistics, I'm afraid.

Q51 **Chair:** Can I ask another question about the humanitarian sponsorship pathway? At the moment, there seems to be no information about this. It has been announced, but there is no—I am assuming that we will have an announcement shortly, and a new Minister has been appointed. Enver, have you had any dealings with the planning or preparation for that scheme?

Enver Solomon: Yes. Zoe and I were at a meeting yesterday with senior Home Office officials. They were not able to share any information about the scheme, but they did say it would be forthcoming soon. I have also had conversations with officials in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. Again, they are rapidly trying to do some design work, as I understand it, on how the scheme will operate.

We do not know the eligibility criteria or how it will operate. It has been described as a designated safe route. That is what it was described to me as yesterday by a Home Office official. Our concern around that is that the eligibility for the scheme could be quite restrictive. Any matching process could take time. The Minister said in the House yesterday that it is going to be weeks before it is operational.



The need, and the crisis unfolding, is in the here and now, and there are mechanisms, as we have explained today, that can be easily put in place to enable any Ukrainian who wants to come to the UK as a refugee to be granted entry to the UK and supported here as a refugee. The Government need to just take those measures. They could do them straightaway. They do not need to wait to create a designated sponsorship pathway.

Q52 Chair: Thank you. I am just going to give you all the opportunity to say anything you have not been able to say and you feel we need to know. Next week we are seeing the Minister, as Diane Abbott was saying. If there is anything in particular you want to tell us now, I am going to give you that opportunity. We will start outside the room with Helen.

Helen Manis: What I want to say is if we are continuing with the scheme as it is, we need more clarity from the Home Office about how it is going to operate at the practical level—the visa application centres, translating documents and getting birth certificates. We need a greater line of communication with the Home Office to be able to help those people.

Also, on the humanitarian scheme, we have got people waiting—hundreds and hundreds of clients—who we have told, “This might be the way for you to get in.” Every day, we are being asked, “Where are the details?” I have just found out for the first time that it could be weeks away, but we have people sitting in hotels and temporary accommodation waiting for the scheme to open—and now it is weeks off. We did not even know it was weeks until just now. It is really, really tough.

Zoe Bantleman: I would add to what Zoe said by saying that, yes, we are also very concerned about the rhetoric in that it gives people false hope when there is no immediate hope for them because none of the schemes accommodate them.

The second thing I would raise, which we have not had any chance to talk about in detail today, is safeguards. We are concerned about the sponsorship route, as well as the automatic extension of certain visas, such as the seasonal worker visa. Until the automatic extension at the end of the year, there need to be safeguards to make sure that people are not subject to human slavery and labour exploitation, so we would like to hear from the Government on those issues in due course.

We agree with Enver that there needs to be an immediate solution. If the humanitarian is not that solution, there needs to be a different solution.

Iryna Terlecky: I absolutely agree with what everyone has said. The processes need to be made as simple as possible. People did not choose to be put in this situation, and they need to be helped out of it as quickly and as compassionately as possible. As others have said, we are hearing some of the right words, but there really needs to be a significant ramping up—not only of resource, but of simplicity and compassion.

Q53 Chair: Thank you. Enver, you have the last word.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Enver Solomon: Two things. I think it is really important that the Government work closely with local authorities, health agencies, organisations such as my own and those who have expertise, to really ensure that we can all work together to welcome those from Ukraine. We missed that opportunity with Afghanistan, and we must not repeat the mistakes made then. There was not sufficient contingency planning, partnership working, co-production and collaboration.

Finally, going forward, this crisis is going to be protracted. It is not going to go away in a matter of weeks or months. We are looking at a situation in which potentially millions of people have fled their homes and are refugees in Europe. We probably need to look at a longer-term solution. I would argue that that would be a permanent humanitarian visa pathway, which would allow people to come quickly to the UK through a safe and regular route.

You create a quick and efficient system whereby any refugee can apply for that visa to travel to the UK for the purposes of being granted refugee protection. We need to think not just short term but long term, because this crisis is not going to go away. I think it is only going to get worse and will likely play out for months and years in the way that the crisis in the Balkans did in the last horrendous war in Europe just a few decades ago.

Chair: May I thank all our panellists? I think this has been incredibly informative for Members of Parliament. We have the Minister before us next week, and we will put directly to him a number of the points that you have raised. We are really pleased to have had this opportunity to hear directly from you, so thank you. I know that it was short notice, but we are really grateful.