

# Home Affairs Committee

## Oral evidence: Policy on Ukrainian refugees, HC 1193

Wednesday 16 March 2022

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 16 March 2022.

[Watch the meeting](#)

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

Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee Member present: Mr Clive Betts, Chair.

Questions 54-184

### Witnesses

**I:** Emma Haddad, Director General, Asylum and Protection, Home Office, Lord Harrington of Watford, Minister for Refugees, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Kevin Foster MP, Minister for Safe and Legal Migration, Home Office, and Abi Tierney, Director General, Her Majesty's Passport Office, Registrar General for England and Wales and Director General, UK Visas and Immigration.

## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Emma Haddad, Kevin Foster, Lord Harrington and Abi Tierney.

**Chair:** Good morning, everybody. Welcome to the Home Affairs Select Committee. We are particularly pleased that we have the Ministers with us today. We have Kevin Foster, the Minister for Immigration at the Home Office; Richard Harrington, the Minister for Refugees jointly in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and the Home Office; and two officials with the Ministers: Abi Tierney, director general of Her Majesty's Passport Office, and Emma Haddad—this is quite a long title—registrar general for England and Wales and director general for visas and immigration.

**Emma Haddad:** That is Abi, actually. I am director general for asylum and protection.

**Chair:** Sorry. We got things the wrong way round.

**Lord Harrington:** Her title is simpler.

**Chair:** Okay. Can I particularly welcome Lord Harrington back to Parliament? We very much forward to working with you in the weeks and months to come.

**Lord Harrington:** Thank you.

Q54 **Chair:** I also ought to explain that we have Clive Betts, Chair of the Select Committee on Levelling Up, Housing and Communities with us today, making a guest appearance. We are very much looking forward to you bringing your expertise to the questions today. There are lots of questions we would like to ask, so I would ask people to be short and focused in their responses to Members' questions.

I am going to start us off, looking at the approach the Government have taken so far to dealing with the humanitarian crisis that has developed in Ukraine, with people fleeing for their lives. First of all, could I ask Kevin Foster when the Home Office started to plan for what was likely to happen, in terms of the large numbers of people who would want to flee Ukraine when the invasion happened?

**Kevin Foster:** Okay, and perhaps I will bring Abi and Emma in as well. We started back in January, when it became clear—like to many others—that Russia was starting to build up forces. We started to look at what we would do about Ukrainian nationals here in the UK. We started to prepare for the fact that, for example, bringing people into detention for potential removal operations would no longer be appropriate if a Russian invasion went ahead, and to be clear on what we would say to Ukrainian nationals in the country.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

As you will have noticed, the day almost immediately after Russia attacked, we extended a number of visas. We looked to those groups that we knew would be very close to the expiration of their visa and would want certainty about what they were going to do—for example, there is a cohort of truck drivers whose visas were due to expire at the end of February who would want certainty. We also then started to plan around family routes, starting to make modifications for UK nationals leaving, and started work on whether we could activate our AUK2 system—which is the online applications system that is used, for example, by EEA nationals—for Ukrainians.

**Q55 Chair:** Can I just stop you there? So a decision was made to not look at a wider refugee policy. You decided at that stage that you were going to use an existing migration route. Why was that?

**Kevin Foster:** Well, let me perhaps look at “why not a potential resettlement route?” It was partly inspired by our experience with Afghanistan, where we removed a very large number of people—the biggest evacuation since Dunkirk—within a couple of weeks, but then people had not had homes or places. We struggled to get offers from communities. For example, while great work was done in other resettlement schemes such as community sponsorship and the Syrian scheme, those were circumstances where the numbers were, for example, 20,000 over a number of years. That was not going to be suitable.

We compared that with the Hong Kong BNO route that we created, where 100,000 people have applied and tens of thousands have arrived in the UK in the last year. That was perhaps closer to the types of numbers we would expect. No one knew exactly the level of attack Vladimir Putin would launch against Ukraine—that was still a debate at the time. That is why we would look at something that could be expanded rapidly and that was not reliant on, for example, identifying via NGOs the people to be resettled, which is how our resettlement usually works. As I say, it is very much inspired by the BNO route and that type of approach, which has seen tens of thousands arrive within a year of its launch.

**Q56 Chair:** That was a specific route for people to come from Hong Kong. You are just using a more general immigration-migration control mechanism to control the flow from Ukraine, aren't you?

**Kevin Foster:** Well, ultimately, that route is not capped; this one is not capped. We looked at how we could do basic security checks and ensure that our country is protected, and at how certain safeguarding issues are delivered. Certainly, there are strong issues with children being brought out of particular areas, potentially with adults who might be relatives but whom they have rarely met or have never even met at all. We believe that this was an appropriate way of providing the capacity and capability quite quickly, with events then moving on, and of course, adapting following that.

That is where our inspiration was on the numbers. We are going to need to be within the tens of thousands of resettlements, not within the low



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

thousands—for example, working with NGOs and going through a nomination process would clearly take too long.

Q57 **Chair:** Just so I am clear, you are saying that it was about controlling numbers, then?

**Kevin Foster:** No, it was about controlling flow. As I have just touched on, our resettlement schemes have traditionally been for far lower numbers than the numbers that we have welcomed. We have welcomed tens of thousands via the BNO route quickly and within one year. That far exceeds any another resettlement scheme we have offered in recent times.

Q58 **Chair:** I think the problem that we have come across with the scheme you are operating—Enver Solomon from the Refugee Council said this to us last week—is that the Government were not adopting a “refugees first” approach, but a “paperwork over people” approach. What is your response to that?

**Kevin Foster:** Perhaps I can bring in Lord Harrington in a moment. First, I would note that some of our key allies—Canada and the United States—have not opened their routes yet. We have got our route open. Again, our motivations were based very much on balancing the security of our country and safeguarding the interests of others, but also on having a system that could stand up quickly to welcome tens of thousands, not the low thousands that we would have expected had we gone for our traditional refugee resettlement paths.

Q59 **Chair:** Right. Of course, this has been fraught with difficulty. Welcoming tens of thousands is not where we’re at, is it? I think the latest figure is 4,600—

**Kevin Foster:** It is 5,500—

**Chair:** So still relatively low.

**Kevin Foster:** —with 1,000 outstanding applications.

Q60 **Chair:** And how many applications have been made in total?

**Kevin Foster:** Twenty thousand have been submitted. Some of those are from people who will now want to go into the permission to travel scheme. But as I say, 5,500 have been issued—I am not just talking about waiting; they have now been issued.

Q61 **Chair:** So 5,500 have been issued, and 20,000 have applied.

**Kevin Foster:** So far, yes.

Q62 **Chair:** So far, okay.

I want to ask you about a couple of other issues that were raised in evidence last week. The first is the Refugee Council’s view, and that of the lawyers who we met last week, about the requirement for a visa—the problems, the bureaucracy, the need for people to travel large distances to get to a visa application centre and the queues at the centres. It was



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

put to us that the biometric checks and security checks could all be done either at the port before someone left France or Belgium, or wherever they are travelling from, or when they arrive in the United Kingdom. We do that with many other countries that do not require a visa to travel. Take Mexico, for instance: you can come from Mexico and all those checks are done at the border. Why can that not happen for people from Ukraine?

**Kevin Foster:** As I say, the visa regime protects our borders and facilitates millions of visits to the UK each year—alongside those who apply for longer-term visas to come and make the UK their home. We followed the advice of our security services. Last week, for example, they advised that we could remove the biometric check element in the visa application centres and make it fully online. We have now implemented that, as of yesterday.

We feel that the process we have provides an opportunity to do key safeguarding checks, particularly for children, when we consider them as a family. I am happy to bring in Ms Tierney in a moment on how those are considered. We felt that we could deliver a system that balanced the fact that most people will almost certainly want to stay in the region. The evidence we are seeing is that, perhaps surprisingly, smaller numbers are moving into western Europe from Poland. The vast majority want to stay near their family and return home in due course. Therefore, our approach would balance the need to check those coming into our country and keep clear records, against the need to quickly facilitate people coming into the UK in large numbers. But I am certainly happy to defer to officials on the speed and what processing we are achieving.

Q63 **Chair:** Before we come to that, I want to understand—I am not quite clear—why it is not possible to do those checks at the border.

**Kevin Foster:** First, people will already have travelled. If people fail certain checks, the option normally would be to return them to the region. Secondly, the level of capacity at the border to do certain checks—for example, biometrics and finger printing—is relatively limited. The example of Afghanistan, which was given in the evidence, was a fairly poor one, because we did actually have processing and checks done on people before they boarded flights in Kabul. The idea that they just got on a flight in Kabul and then we did checks here was not correct.

Q64 **Chair:** Sorry, but why can't we do that? Why can't we check before they get on the flight?

**Kevin Foster:** That is what we are doing, and we will outline to you what we are doing.

Q65 **Chair:** The visa application centre is still where people who do not have a Ukrainian passport have to attend. They have to fill in the application form, do biometrics and do the security checks—that is my understanding. Is that correct?

**Kevin Foster:** If you haven't got a valid Ukrainian passport, yes. But we do the application online for those who have valid Ukrainian passports and



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

those without any documents at all. There is a process to identify them and then issue them paperwork suitable for flight, because those without passports would struggle to get on a plane, for reasons other than immigration ones. The route allows us to do checks on an individual before they arrive at the airport. To be honest, carriers overseas would not be able to perform checks at airports on people presenting themselves. Simply inviting people to make a very long journey all over the land of Europe to get to juxtaposed controls for that would, similarly, not be a practical position to adopt.

Q66 **Chair:** But that is what has happened, isn't it? If we are blunt, people are being asked to travel long distances to go to a visa application centre.

**Kevin Foster:** It would be slightly different if we invited them to travel all the way to Calais. The system we now have in place allows people to apply. Actually, we are clear that people can apply. They do not need to specify dates of travel, so if people feel that they may need to move to the UK in the coming weeks, depending on the Russian advance, they can apply before they leave home. They can have it with them. They can apply on someone else's phone, so if there is one phone among the family, they can show all the relevant permissions to travel to the carrier.

Q67 **Chair:** But they all have to make individual applications, don't they?

**Kevin Foster:** There is an individual application.

Q68 **Chair:** Is it 50 pages?

**Kevin Foster:** One of those pages is the confirmation page.

Q69 **Chair:** It's 49 pages long.

**Kevin Foster:** Not everyone would see it all. If you ticked "no" to "Have you got a criminal record?", you will not see the page that asks you for details about criminal record. If you tick "no" to the page about war crimes, it will not show you that page. Ditto, if you are over 18, you will not see the page about your parents' details. It is about to be cut, and a simplified form is imminent for Friday as well.

Q70 **Chair:** It is a 49-page document that people have to complete.

**Kevin Foster:** No one would see all 49 pages.

Q71 **Chair:** Can you explain to me why you did not feel it was appropriate to use the UK ID check app? Why could that not be used?

**Kevin Foster:** We are standing that up, and Ms Tierney will talk to you about the AUK2 app being stood up.

Q72 **Chair:** What does "it is being stood up" mean?

**Kevin Foster:** For the Hong Kong BNO route, it took eight months of development to get it to work with a HKSAR passport—that is one of the other examples of a non-EEA passport or UK-issued document that it works with. It will take a similar number of weeks to get it working for



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

biometric passports from Ukraine. I have to say it works only with biometric passports; it does not work with other documents.

Q73 **Chair:** Sorry, you said that you were planning from January for how you would process Ukrainians.

**Kevin Foster:** It is literally under development. Perhaps I can bring in officials to discuss where we are with the technical development of this particular app.

Q74 **Chair:** Just before you do that, I want to ask you one other thing, which is about reusing biometrics. Why can you not reuse the biometrics that the Home Office holds on people who have travelled from Ukraine before and had visas?

**Kevin Foster:** Again, that is partly where technical developments are in place. We are expanding biometric reuse across the immigration system. There are a number of applications in-country that a Ukrainian could make where they have applied before. It is certainly something that there is no policy objection to doing. The reality is getting the technical system set up to be able to do it confidently and securely and ensure that it works. But from a policy perspective, we have no objection to looking at reusing biometrics.

Q75 **Chair:** So no objection. You have been planning since January, but it has still not been—

**Kevin Foster:** Again, if you would like to hear about the technical side of things—

**Chair:** I am just interested. As a Minister, you are responsible for this, and these are measures—

**Kevin Foster:** As I was saying, Dame Diana—

**Chair:** Let me just finish. These are measures that were put to us last week, which could make a difference—they could simplify, speed up and make the lives of those people fleeing from Ukraine a little bit easier—so I am just trying to understand why it is you have not done it.

**Kevin Foster:** From a policy perspective, we are happy to use them. We have looked at their use. We have worked successfully with the BNO route, which was our first deployment of it for non-EEA nationals. We have deployed it to other immigration routes in the UK and, as the situation began to develop in the UK, we began development of it to be used. Again, there is no policy objection, but I think you might want to hear the technical reasons why.

Q76 **Ms Abbott:** Before we get to the civil servant, if there is no policy objection to using biometrics, if you have been thinking about this since January, is it possible for you to tell the Committee when you might be able to reuse biometrics? As the Minister, do you have any idea?

**Kevin Foster:** I understand that in the next four to five weeks, we will have the UK ID check running.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Ms Abbott:** Thank you. Sorry to interrupt, Chair.

**Kevin Foster:** Hence, as I say, we are standing it up in a quicker period than we have for use of it in any other role, again based on our experience of getting it to work with Hong Kong Special Administrative Region passports.

**Abi Tierney:** May I come in on a couple of points?

**Chair:** Please do.

**Abi Tierney:** I want to talk first about the form and the 49 pages. One of the things that we had to make sure that we do—we have real experts in this—is that it is usable on a mobile phone. Having long pages with lots of information on does not make it very usable on a very small device. So each page often only has one question on it, and it is just one press “yes” click and then you move on to the next page. I would not want the Committee to think that it is a very complex long form with lots of information on each page; each page is very short, in order to be able to see it on a mobile phone. That is based on experts and user research of how that works. I wanted to make that point.

On the visa application centre locations and the challenges with airports and ports, we have a visa application centre near all the major European hubs. If someone has travelled to Poland, to Bucharest, to Budapest or to Moldova, we have made sure that the visa applications that we have stood up are very close to where people have been travelling to and where they are potentially going to fly from. We have capacity in all those visa application centres.

On top of that, based on analysis over the past few days of those people who have already applied, 90% of people have passports, so that will significantly reduce the numbers who will have to go through the visa application—

Q77 **Chair:** Sorry, 90% have passports? In the House of Commons last week, the Home Secretary said 90% of Ukrainians did not have passports that could be used to bypass the visa application centres.

**Abi Tierney:** These are those that have applied, so the percentage of those who have applied, as opposed to those in the overall Ukrainian population.

Q78 **Chair:** The vast majority of the Ukrainian people do not have passports—that is your understanding of what the Home Secretary told Parliament.

**Abi Tierney:** I am commenting—

**Chair:** I know you are, but is it correct that the vast majority of Ukrainians do not have passports?

**Abi Tierney:** I do not have that data item to hand.

Q79 **Chair:** Okay. I know other people now wish to come in, but I want to



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

raise one last thing, which is about your contract with TLScontact, who provide the visa application centre staff, I understand. Will you say something, Minister, about whether you are satisfied with the way in which the visa application centres have been operating? They have very limited opening hours. Last week, we heard that Warsaw was only open Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, 9 am to 1.50 pm, and in Moldova the visa application centre is only open for eight days in March and eight days in April. We know that the chief inspector of borders and immigration has made comments about TLS in the past, about their selling enhanced services to people. Will you say something about whether it is acceptable, Minister, that people are being offered quicker appointments if they pay up? Is that really what we want to see happen to these people?

**Kevin Foster:** No. In this scenario, people should not be offered—

**Chair:** But are they?

**Kevin Foster:** Our understanding is no. We have sought assurances. We have also suspended a number of our super priority and priority visa services across UKVI, not just in this region, but across its operations, for example on work and study, to release staff to surge into this area. In some sections, only compelling and compassionate cases are now being considered as urgent, not the normal premium service that we apply for visas. But no, certainly in this scenario, premium appointments should not be being offered.

Ultimately, am I satisfied with how visa centres operate abroad? I have some sympathy with the ambassador of Ukraine's comments. We are looking to move away from an immigration system where everyone heads off to a VAC if they are making a visa application, and looking to move to a system where increasingly biometrics are collected remotely and people can apply without going through that process and do not need to collect vignettes, because their status is confirmed to carriers via the ETA system. Most of that development is a year away. It is unfortunate we have not, perhaps, had more chances to outline to the Committee our plans to reform the immigration system over the last year. But do I think this is a model for the future? No.

Q80 **Chair:** Okay. Are you having to pay extra money to TLS now for opening for more hours and for more staff? Are you paying more money for this service?

**Abi Tierney:** Previously, our visa application centre footprint in Europe was very small, because the majority of people in Europe didn't have—so TLS had approximately three, the equivalent of three full-time—

Q81 **Chair:** So you are paying more money?

**Abi Tierney:** They now have 23 full-time equivalent staff to expand it, so yes, that will cost us more money.

Q82 **Chair:** It is going to cost you more money now to get them to open—

**Abi Tierney:** Yes.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Kevin Foster:** Very few people need a visa in Europe normally.

**Chair:** Okay, I am going to move to Diane Abbott.

Q83 **Ms Abbott:** The Ministers are boasting about how they have issued 5,000 visas, but you must be aware there are tens of thousands of Ukrainian families who live here—some of them, many of them, have British passports—and who are struggling to get family members in. Let me just tell you about a case. This is a family. The father is here; he is a British citizen of Ukrainian heritage. He is trying to get his wife, Oksana Voloshchuk, and his daughter, Veronika Voloshchuk, in. They have been twice detained by the UK Border Force officials in Calais. They have made eight trips—eight trips—to the UK visa processing centre in Paris, two trips to the British consulate there and one trip to the British embassy. Of course, they are still not in the country. Do you think that is acceptable?

**Kevin Foster:** No, and certainly I am very happy to pick up the particular case individually. It would not be right for me to start speculating on individual—

Q84 **Ms Abbott:** This was in *The Guardian*. You don't read *The Guardian*?

**Kevin Foster:** As most people would probably expect, at the moment there are plenty of things I am reading each morning. But in terms of where we are, as I say, the system we have implemented now would mean no trip to a VAC and, by the way, no trip back to collect a vignette, unless it is someone who needs to be documented, and in most cases those would be people who would not be able to board a plane anyway unless—until—they have got something that would allow them to travel, for aviation security as well as immigration reasons.

Q85 **Ms Abbott:** You are telling the Committee that we shouldn't hear about any of these cases where people are having to go up and down to three or four different places—

**Kevin Foster:** Your question was, "Do I think that's right?" No, and certainly we are very happy to look into what has happened there—what has gone wrong. Certainly now, there should be no requirement for someone to go to a visa application centre. As we touched on, with the application for permission to travel, you can do that and there is no time limit to it. For example, we are conscious there are people in western Ukraine who are considering whether they will need to leave, depending on what happens with the military situation on the ground. They are welcome to apply for this whilst they are still at home, have it, print it out or keep it on their phone; and then if they do need to leave home, they can then proceed to travel to the UK using it.

Q86 **Ms Abbott:** The Committee understands that you are insisting on this visa requirement because of concerns about security.

**Kevin Foster:** And safeguarding.

Q87 **Ms Abbott:** We know that countries like France and Germany have reached a different conclusion regarding the security risk posed by



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

Ukrainian refugees. How have you come to your conclusion?

**Kevin Foster:** In terms of France and Germany, they are in a very different position, because ultimately they are part of the Schengen zone. Their border is the external border of the Schengen area. So, effectively, once people—

**Ms Abbott:** Yes, but either there is a security risk or there isn't.

**Kevin Foster:** Hang on. Once people cross into Poland from Ukraine, there is no infrastructure to actually implement any visa or border restrictions throughout the Schengen zone; that is how the Schengen zone operates. I would perhaps point to what was happening a couple of months ago on the Poland-Belarusian border, or on the Greek border in terms of the sea, in the Aegean, as an example of the fact that that is where the border is for the Schengen zone. Therefore there is a very different consideration for them. There is an obvious geography difference between us and France and Germany in relation to Poland. Therefore the assessment is different. I notice our Five Eyes partners have come to similar conclusions—the United States has not yet even opened its route for applications, and neither has Canada, given the assessments they have potentially made. The European Union Schengen zone innately operates in a very different way to the way the UK's border operates.

Q88 **Ms Abbott:** The Committee understands that. Where the physical borders are was not my question. I am asking you about your assessment of the security risk. Do you think that Ukrainian children pose a risk to the UK?

**Kevin Foster:** Our visa system is often not only a way to protect our borders but also of safeguarding children, through details of how they are travelling, who they are travelling with, quite crucially, particularly in the circumstances of leaving a warzone, and who they are going to stay with—who is sponsoring them here in the United Kingdom. It can help identify crucial information that will help to protect them on the journey and afterwards. Again, I am happy to bring in officials. The UFS applications are normally considered as a family group, with the focus on the adults who the children are travelling with, to ensure this is a journey where children will find refuge. That allows us to intervene if we uncover information that suggests to us that will not be the case.

Q89 **Ms Abbott:** Before you bring in the official, I am not asking about safeguarding children. I am asking you, how do you come to think that Ukrainian children are a risk to UK security?

**Kevin Foster:** As I say, the visa system overall is a system of border security, but it also gives some clear safeguarding benefits as well. With the UFS scheme, people list which adult they are travelling and which adult they are going to stay with. I will not get into the exact things we do when we check the security side of things, but we are looking at UFS as a family group. Our focus from a security perspective will be on the adults, and from a safeguarding perspective for the children and information that might lead us to believe this would not be an appropriate journey to authorise to the UK.



Q90 **Ms Abbott:** You do not seem sure whether children pose a risk to UK national security. Do Ukrainians over the age of 70 pose a risk to national security?

**Kevin Foster:** The advice we have received allowed for the removal of biometric appointments across the piece where there is a valid Ukrainian passport. It did not distinguish between age. In terms of those adults, we have examples of those who are older who also, sadly, continue to pose threats either to national security or to individual children. Sadly, it is probably worth noting that the man behind all this misery, suffering and death will be 70 himself in October. He is showing that increasing age does not necessarily bring with it more humanity.

Q91 **Ms Abbott:** May I ask one more question, on the community sponsorship scheme? You know that the community sponsorship scheme was used to respond to the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis. You will also know that by 2017, there were just 12 of these schemes across the whole country: six in London, four of which were faith-based. Can you explain to the Committee how this community sponsorship scheme will work better than the way it worked in relation to Syria?

**Kevin Foster:** I will bring in Lord Harrington in a moment to talk about the scheme. Where we may have an element of agreement with Ms Abbott is the fact that I do not think our current community sponsorship schemes work quickly or effectively. That is one of the reasons why, as I touched on earlier, we have not looked to deploy in this instance. I think there is undue bureaucracy in it—things like you have to get the permission of your council, and one council did not respond for nearly two years to a request, blocking a placement. That is why our current system needs reform and why it was not suitable to deploy in this instance. Now, I think it is best for Lord Harrington to explain the benefits of this particular approach.

**Chair:** We are going to have a big session on this at the end.

**Lord Harrington:** I will just try to answer Ms Abbott's question shortly. Could I please say something about the visa situation? I have listened very carefully. I have only met Kevin Foster properly this week, but I have noticed a real attitude in the Home Office that they want to deal with this problem and speed things up.

This is all very new to me. I was doing my best to pursue an alternative career, having left here in 2019. I was asked to do this by the Prime Minister, and my instructions were on that visa and Home Office thing. The only concern he gave me was security. I will come on to that in a minute, because I think Ms Abbott made some good points. There is not a limit on numbers at all. This is part of an integrated policy that the Government have been doing, which the Government get little praise for. It is on-the-ground humanitarian. Money is money, but as far as I know we are the biggest single donor, with more than £400 million. We are helping NGOs. It is not particularly the business of this Committee, because I know it is home affairs, but it is part of an integrated process.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

As far as the visas are concerned, my instructions were to simplify the process as much as we possibly can. For two nights running, the Home Secretary and I sat with officials going through the forms, page by page, and cutting down everything we possibly can.

Q92 **Chair:** So, it is not 49 pages any more?

**Lord Harrington:** It had been cut down a lot by Friday, but a lot of them aren't really pages, Dame Diana. If you click the right thing, you do not even see them. Listen, they are too long; I accept they are too long. I am looking, with the full assistance of the Home Office and DLUHC, for that matter, at every single stage, not just the visa process, so that for the vast majority of people with passports, it will be a seamless process. Ms Abbott made a good point about who has passports and who doesn't, but I'm afraid I do not have knowledge on that. Those with passports will not have to wait for visa, but will simply get an email back with a PDF saying they have permission to travel. I want to get that down to hours. Am I going into too much detail?

Q93 **Chair:** I am just conscious that we have lots of people who want to ask questions.

**Lord Harrington:** With respect to Ms Abbott, if she is happy, I will happily talk about the community sponsorship later.

**Chair:** Yes. Let's deal with that, and just focus on this issue. Adam Holloway has a quick question.

Q94 **Adam Holloway:** It strikes me that the Government have been doing brilliantly overall, and this thing, certainly in reputational terms, has been really very bad. On the question of war crimes, security and criminal records, we are already in a position where Russian agents have released a dirty bomb in the United Kingdom that could have killed many thousands of people.

I was in Ukraine three weeks ago, and I was struck by the many thousands of women and children trying to get out, because men of military age are not allowed to. I do not know how many people crossed the channel yesterday, but I wonder what criminal record checks or checks for war crimes were carried out on them.

Are we having a bit of a double standard? We are completely failing to stop what are essentially economic migrants, mostly fit young men, yet we are making it incredibly difficult for women and children to come here, with enormous reputational damage to a Government that are doing really well overall. Are you supporting the Ukrainian Government by not letting in able-bodied men of military age?

**Kevin Foster:** First, all of those who cross the channel are detained on arrival, biometric checks are done, and they can be detained while we perform some of the checks you talked about.

Q95 **Adam Holloway:** Can be?



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Kevin Foster:** They are, those who arrive, with the exception of unaccompanied children and some families when we will take biometrics and perform checks, but it would not be appropriate to place younger children into immigration detention, for reasons I think we would all accept and recognise. Certainly, those who arrive are subject to the checks you just talked about.

Regarding what is happening on the border, we are working with the Ukrainian Government. The Ukrainian Government, by the way, have a strong view on children being moved.

Q96 **Adam Holloway:** Sorry, but don't you accept there is something absurd that we have hundreds of fit young men, from heaven knows where, in my view mostly economic migrants, crossing? Yet you have very large numbers of women and children, most of whom want to stay in the region—fair enough—but some of whom want to join relatives, and we are making it extraordinarily difficult. It is so bad for the Government's reputation.

**Kevin Foster:** As we both touched on, one, there is the simplification of the process and, two, we would not ask now for biometrics for those who have passports.

Q97 **Adam Holloway:** No, Kevin, on the wide point, doesn't it look ridiculous?

**Lord Harrington:** If we can just accept the fact, and it is perfectly right for this Committee or anyone else to say we don't need security checks—

Q98 **Chair:** I don't think anybody is saying that, Lord Harrington.

**Lord Harrington:** If we just accept that for the moment, provided they can be done instantaneously—very quickly—and that everything else is as quick as it possibly can be, not waiting three weeks for a criminal record check or something like that, in my view it is perfectly acceptable for the security of this country. The reality is, what is a security check? It is looking online at a register, isn't it? I am no expert and don't know what MI5 and those people have, but it cannot be more complex than that. It is our job to get that done, if possible instantaneously, certainly within hours. That is what we are focusing on.

Q99 **Adam Holloway:** The GRU have already set off a dirty bomb in this country. Stopping women and children in this way is utterly farcical, in my view.

**Lord Harrington:** But you are a very security-conscious person, as well.

Q100 **Chair:** I think you have made your point. Just to be clear, nobody on this Committee has ever argued there should not be proper security checks of people coming into our country.

**Lord Harrington:** I was not suggesting anybody was.

**Chair:** No. I am going to take Stuart McDonald next.

Q101 **Stuart C. McDonald:** To turn to a slightly different subject, this is a real-



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

life case. A young Ukrainian man at a farm in the UK on the seasonal agricultural workers' scheme—his mum, 18-year-old brother and 12-year-old sister are all in Odesa, which is likely to be under attack by the Russians very soon, if not already. They are thinking about fleeing to the west, to seek access to the United Kingdom, but, as far as I can see, there is no safe route for them to get here. What would you advise them? This young man on the seasonal agricultural workers scheme—how does he get his family here?

**Kevin Foster:** That will be the sponsorship route.

Q102 **Stuart C. McDonald:** How are they going to qualify?

**Kevin Foster:** He will have leave to the end of this year—that is more than the minimum six-month period, so he can sponsor his family. They just need to identify accommodation, which I think would be a pretty obvious thing to do anyway.

Q103 **Stuart C. McDonald:** But is that not the huge challenge? First, why are they not allowed to use the family route? Secondly, the average person on the seasonal agricultural workers scheme is probably living in shared accommodation, in a caravan or whatever else. They do not have the accommodation available themselves.

**Kevin Foster:** Perhaps if Lord Harrington comes in. If it is in Scotland, we are of course talking closely with the devolved Administration, where housing is a devolved matter.

**Lord Harrington:** I am afraid, Kevin, that I don't know the answer to Stuart McDonald's question. It is a perfectly legitimate question. I don't know the answer. I am very happy to seek that.

I shouldn't really speak off the cuff, because you get flayed alive, but there are pages of briefing—frankly, I have not read it, because I am new to the job and I will tell you what has happened in the last few days.

Just because that particular person does not have accommodation to hand, with the caravan and everything that you said, there are many authorities; there are people registering today who will have accommodation. It will be our job. If it is not the Government direct, if it is not local government, it is for all of the very active NGOs, many of which Dame Diana mentioned in her initial questioning, to identify the accommodation and to organise this. As far as the Government are concerned, with the sponsorship scheme, I wouldn't say it is easy—nothing is easy—but it is a comparatively seamless way of dealing with it.

**Stuart C. McDonald:** Okay. I will hold you to the word "seamless".

**Lord Harrington:** Please do.

Q104 **Stuart C. McDonald:** I want to stress why I think this is particularly significant. I do not know if any of the officials can tell me how many Ukrainians are currently here on the seasonal agricultural workers scheme. I would think a rough and ready estimate would be somewhere



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

around maybe 5,000, 6,000, 7,000 or 8,000. It could be much higher than that.

**Abi Tierney:** The total number is difficult, because they can leave the country. We imagine quite a few of the seasonal agricultural workers, based on our conversations with local Ukrainian groups, have actually gone back to Ukraine to potentially support the efforts over there, so it is difficult to know the exact numbers.

Q105 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Absolutely, and that is extrapolated from something like double that number getting those visas in the course of the last year. You are therefore talking about 10% or 20% of the Ukrainian diaspora. Something a little bit more structured than, “We will try and work out and find them accommodation” would be appreciated. Is that something you can look at, Lord Harrington?

**Lord Harrington:** Absolutely, given the number of people coming forward. Please give me a couple of days on that and I can communicate with you directly or via the Committee, if you prefer.

Q106 **Stuart C. McDonald:** The other thing about the seasonal agricultural workers scheme is that these folk are largely out of sight, out of mind. Sometimes, the seasonal agricultural scheme works well and people come back year in, year out, but there are other examples where people are perhaps not treated particularly well and they feel compelled to stay with employers who are perhaps not treating them particularly well at all.

On that point, Mr Foster, so far, all the Home Office has done is extend their visas by a couple of visas. Is that not exacerbating the risk of exploitation? Given that, generally speaking until now, the only route of escaping exploitation would be to return to Ukraine, which is obviously not an option now, surely the Home Office has to go much further and transfer them into one of the other routes.

**Kevin Foster:** Those are valid points. The first thing was to give people certainty by extending the visas to the end of the year—normally they are six-month visas—and we did that in late February and almost certainly added at least five or six months. We did that to give people certainty.

Of course, they can move between the different locations that are covered by the seasonal workers scheme. It is not helpful to go into it today, but there are a range of protections and systems in place because we are conscious of the enhanced potential for abuse in that route. We intend to make further announcements on what the position is for Ukrainians who are in the country, with a view to doing something in the autumn immigration rules. We felt it best to give people certainty that there was no prospect of their needing to return to Ukraine. There were some seasonal workers with placements that were due to end at the end of February, along with their visa. Truck drivers and a small number of pork butchers had a visa that would expire in about April/May and it was sensible to give them certainty of employment. In those sectors it is a very different position from the one that you outlined.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

We will allow people, unrestricted, to swap to other routes if they are able to qualify for them. If not, we will look to implement a system that allows them to regularise their stay here, as we did with Syrians 11 years ago. You will recall there were people here as students, workers, holidaymakers, family visitors and for various other reasons when the Syrian civil war broke out, and it clearly became impossible for them to return home.

**Q107 Stuart C. McDonald:** Just to pick you up on what you said there, you said that for students, for example, who might struggle to meet the criteria to switch to a skilled worker visa or whatever, there will be a broader approach.

**Kevin Foster:** Broadly, our approach will be that no one will need to return to Ukraine for immigration reasons. They will return only if they choose to return. Particularly among the seasonal worker cohort, although they are not required to declare this as the reason they have gone home, we have seen quite a number of fit men aged between 18 and 40 return home since the Russian invasion, almost certainly because they wish to join the Ukrainian Army or the defence forces. But, to be clear, there is no requirement for them to return for immigration purposes, and no returns are being undertaken at the moment. Those have been completely suspended.

If anyone is without status in the UK, we encourage them to come forward and get in contact with the Home Office. We have looked at how many people's visas are due to expire in the coming weeks. The numbers are relatively low, including those that belong to people who are already here lawfully that are due to expire in the coming weeks. If people's visas are due to expire in the coming weeks, we will either extend them or potentially use periods of exceptional assurance, pending a longer-term solution being brought forward in the immigration rules.

**Q108 Stuart C. McDonald:** The earlier that can happen, the better, because the other alternative open to people is to seek asylum. I see absolutely no problem with that if there is an expedited asylum process that just says, "You are from Ukraine. You are fleeing invasion and we therefore recognise you as a refugee". But, as I understand it, there is no such expedited process. In fact, you would be waiting until July even to be able to have a call back to register your claim.

**Kevin Foster:** That is not quite the case. I can bring Ms Haddad in, but it is worth noting that, yes, people can claim asylum if they are here without status and cannot return to Ukraine. That, by the way, does not just apply to Ukrainian nationals. It applies to someone who is ordinarily resident in Ukraine, because, as you know, there are third-country nationals who were there. Actually, Ukraine was itself a country that provided asylum. It was a safe and democratic country that stood behind its international obligations to provide asylum.

If someone has claimed asylum, it is always open to them, if they qualify for a new immigration route, to withdraw an asylum claim on the basis



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

that they are eligible for another route and have received permission under that route. For example, there are people from Hong Kong who might look to withdraw an asylum claim and apply for an extension of the BN(O) route that we will make available later this year.

**Q109 Stuart C. McDonald:** This almost comes across as if the Home Office has made a policy decision that it wants to discourage folk from using the asylum system. We saw this even in the case of Afghans when people were advocating for an expedited asylum process for Afghans—essentially you just need to prove you are an Afghan and you are recognised as a refugee. Why is there such resistance to people making asylum claims and, in particular, to the idea of an expedited asylum process?

**Kevin Foster:** Asylum should be the safety net; it should not be our core plan for people. In terms of Ukrainians, it makes no sense, particularly for those who are close to settlement. There are skilled workers who have been here for four or four and a half years who will qualify for ILR in the very near future. It makes sense that our immigration rules provide options and plans for people to be able to access regularisation of their status. I don't think any of us would see that as a negative thing.

**Q110 Stuart C. McDonald:** I have absolutely no problem with folk having options, but the problem just now is that people effectively don't have the option of asylum. Being recognised as a refugee gives you a whole host of rights; it can lead to settlement after five years, which some of the options that the Government are offering Ukrainians do not lead to. The problem is that the sheer inefficiency and delay in the asylum system is putting folk off accessing what would perhaps be something good to do.

**Kevin Foster:** If we were focusing purely on the asylum system in today's session, I would outline that one of the things you and I agree on is that we are taking too long to make too many decisions in the asylum process. We need to transform it. We are looking to double the number of decision makers and to streamline processes. The actual processing of asylum applications has been a bit of a Cinderella service over the years. It has not seen the type of investment that the wider immigration system has seen.

For example, A2, which we talked about earlier, is something we developed at the backend of 2020 and implemented in 2021. There is a need to speed up and reform that system. You and I will probably disagree on the exact nature of some of the reforms we are looking to make. However, in the first instance, our priority is to make sure that people have a route to getting status and, if they are here, to continue their life. The second part of that will then be looking at our position around settlement. I would gently say that I suspect that if you are a Ukrainian who has just arrived in the country, your position in relation to IRL applications in 2027 is probably not at the top of your list at the moment. However, it is certainly something that we will look to confirm as we move towards the autumn immigration rule changes.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q111 **Paula Barker:** My understanding is that the family visa scheme application form is only available in English. Do you think that is acceptable?

**Kevin Foster:** At this stage, it was the quickest way to get it set up. The fact is that our base software is in English. Guidance leaflets will be available—in detail—in Ukrainian, plus teams in the region do speak local languages as well. We are setting up a military help hub in south-east Poland, which will have the ability to support people with applications. Certainly, we are looking to provide guidance that literally says in Ukrainian, “This is the form. This is what you do. This is what you click.” Again, with the simplification of the form, some of the questions are things such as, “Name, Date of Birth, Passport number.” It is fairly basic things that we are asking for.

Q112 **Paula Barker:** How soon will the hub be set up?

**Kevin Foster:** We expect the hub in south-east Poland to be set up this week.

**Abi Tierney:** Yes. We have identified the space and the furniture. It hasn’t got anything in it at the moment, so we are working with MOD colleagues to put things in there. One of the things that we recognise is that the 10% of people who applied who don’t have passports and still need to access the visa application centres, plus those who are coming through the sponsorship route, are likely to be more elderly and potentially more vulnerable. Therefore, we needed to create a help centre where they can go and we can provide them with digital technology to help them go through the form, and where we can also provide translation.

**Kevin Foster:** There are those who have absolutely nothing, who we may need to go through the process of documenting because they have no ID at all on them.

Q113 **Paula Barker:** So there will be accredited documentation services available?

**Abi Tierney:** Can you describe what you mean by that?

**Paula Barker:** I am wondering whether the Home Office is going to set up a service with accredited staff to translate all of the required documents.

**Kevin Foster:** We are not requiring people to translate documents. If they happen to have translated documents from previous immigration applications, we will of course receive them. However, people can submit birth certificates and other documents in Ukrainian, given the circumstances in the region. Our decision makers have appropriate flexibilities to accept them. What would be appropriate in normal times—asking people to get a translation of a birth certificate—is clearly not appropriate at this stage. If people need to submit, for example, a birth certificate in Ukrainian, they can do so.



Q114 **Paula Barker:** Going back to unaccompanied children—other colleagues may wish to come in on this—is there going to be any commitment from the Home Office to work with EU partners to create a visa-free pathway for unaccompanied children?

**Kevin Foster:** We stand ready to work with our partners in Europe. Lord Harrington will look to work with local authorities in the devolved Administrations in the UK to create capacity in places to receive unaccompanied children. Clearly, that is a different category. We need to make sure that people are ready and able. We are certainly prepared, and we are certainly ready if we get a request from authorities in eastern Europe to relieve pressures on child welfare. You can see what we, the UK Government, have done this week in relation to children needing cancer treatment. The NHS has taken them in. There is no block or objection to that from the Home Office.

What I would say at the moment, though, is that the position of the Ukrainian Government is quite clear and has been communicated to the UK Government formally by its ambassador. I am happy to share this documentation with the Committee Chair. It says that at the moment any Ukrainian child who is currently outside Ukraine may not be adopted or placed in the care of foreigners—those are the exact words—without the consent of Ukraine. At the moment, those consents are not being given.

A lot of children have parents or family still in Ukraine and, understandably, what the families want to do is move them into Poland under the shield of NATO, because an attack on a facility in Poland, regardless of who is there, is an attack on NATO and the whole alliance. It would bring significant consequences for the Russian Federation. Many there are not looking for children to be moved out of the whole region. In principle, we are happy to look at and talk about it, but I do not feel it would be sensible for me to commit to creating a route that at the moment the Ukrainian Government are asking us not to create.

Q115 **Paula Barker:** We heard evidence last week from Zoe Bantleman, the legal director at the Immigration Law Practitioners' Association. She spoke to us about one particular case of an unaccompanied child who had travelled all the way to Poland alone. When they went to the UK visa application centre to apply under the family rules, they were initially promised that their visa would take 24 hours and be processed in a day. When they returned, they were told it would be 12 weeks. Surely that cannot be right.

**Kevin Foster:** As I say, there is a slight difference with unaccompanied children, given the clear statements that have been made by the Ukrainian Government to us. Again, I am happy to share the documentation with the Committee. Their preference is that unaccompanied Ukrainian children are basically cared for by Polish authorities in the region and that any move to place them in the care of someone else is not approved. If they have close relatives here in the UK, they would certainly be eligible for the family scheme. Even if they have no documents or papers, we could certainly go through the process of documenting them. It should not be taking 12



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

weeks. I hope the Committee will appreciate why we would look to make sure that we could confirm the relationship and do appropriate checks on the adults they would be living with if they are travelling alone.

Q116 **Paula Barker:** There have been allegations that children in care have been left at the border unaccompanied and that potentially thousands have already been trafficked. Do you have any comment on that?

**Kevin Foster:** The situation on the border is desperate. We will offer whatever support the Polish authorities need on the ground. That includes via our safeguarding and policing teams and the Home Office. I appreciate the desire of colleagues here to create a Dubs-style route from eastern Europe. We have not been asked for that. In fact, we have been asked quite the opposite: not to create that type of route. If there is a request for us to provide assistance, including the relocation of unaccompanied children to the United Kingdom, I have no objection to that. From a Home Office perspective, we will look to facilitate it and work with our colleagues in the devolved Administrations and local government, via Lord Harrington's brief, to try to facilitate that where we can. However, we have not received any request for it—quite the opposite, in fact.

Q117 **Chair:** I am going to bring Tim Loughton in, but before I do I just want to be clear: you are saying that birth certificates and documents do not have to be translated?

**Kevin Foster:** No.

Q118 **Chair:** One of the issues that was raised with us last week was that requirement. When did that stop being a requirement?

**Abi Tierney:** As far as I am aware, it has not been a requirement all along, but I will confirm that.

Q119 **Chair:** Lawyers came last week to give evidence and said that that was a problem.

**Abi Tierney:** Can I come back to you on exactly what the process was there?

Q120 **Chair:** You can, but it is a bit concerning that we were told one thing last week and you are now saying that there is no requirement.

**Abi Tierney:** There is no requirement.

**Kevin Foster:** We cannot speak for other lawyers.

Q121 **Chair:** The lawyers are obviously dealing with the applications day in, day out, and that was their evidence to us as a Committee.

**Kevin Foster:** I have been very clear as the Minister, and you have heard it from the official. You can submit those documents. If you have a translation, great, but we accept that that is unlikely, and our decision makers can therefore exercise flexibility and accept a document in Ukrainian.

Q122 **Chair:** There is obviously confusion about what is being communicated



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

from the Home Office.

**Kevin Foster:** Hopefully we have now cleared that up.

Q123 **Paula Barker:** So there has never been a requirement?

**Abi Tierney:** As I said, I will come back to you on that.

**Kevin Foster:** In the past there would have been—in normal times, clearly—but not now. If the only document you have is in Ukrainian, please submit it.

Q124 **Tim Loughton:** I think we all understand that we would prefer to have Ukrainians coming here in an orderly manner, and we understand that there are checks that need to be done. Our frustration is the speed and the location of where those checks need to be done. I just want to understand it, and apologies if I missed this because I was not here for the first 10 minutes. The immediate urgency, surely, must be to take the pressure off the Polish authorities in particular. They are faced with 1.5 million people, and the Mayor of Warsaw has said that Warsaw is full.

As we have heard, most of those people are women and young children, who are low risk. They are low-hanging fruit. We have military planes dispatching large quantities of aid that are coming back empty. We have airlines offering free flights from Polish airports and other border airports. Our priority, surely, must be to take as many of those obvious cases with passports—women, children and some elderly—and bring them to the UK. What are the checks that have to be made at the border and could not be made in the UK?

We can all quote cases. I have a case of a brother of a constituent. They are a very articulate family. They have travelled hundreds of miles, being pushed from pillar to post, and the constant attitude is, "Computer says no. One of the children has the wrong photo. You've got to go back to Warsaw." That has been the approach so far. It is deeply frustrating and, frankly, deeply embarrassing and undermining to the Government's otherwise magnificent effort. What exactly are those checks that are so necessary that they must be done before people touch down at Gatwick airport?

**Kevin Foster:** First, on the checks that we do, and with the permission to travel, for the example you gave they will not need to go anywhere. They can do it all online, and you can borrow someone's phone or someone else can assist you to do it. It does not need to be individual smartphones for each individual passport, for example. We are conscious of that situation. They consist of basic warning index checks, some criminality checks and some other intelligence checks.

I am not going to go through a detailed list of them here in a public forum. I don't think that is appropriate because it allows potential for them to be gamed. Our focus has been taking the time to get them down. Once people have the permission to travel, biometric checks and other checks are not then done at the UK border. People will have six months to submit biometrics, for example, if they need to do so after arrival here in the UK.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q125 **Tim Loughton:** But if I were a Polish tourist coming to the UK, I would not have to do those checks. I can just arrive at Gatwick airport and automatically be given a visitor's visa without those checks.

**Kevin Foster:** Certainly with Poland, when we were in the EEA we had advanced information-sharing arrangements with a number of countries, particularly EEA nations, and with our Five Eyes partners around certain checks we can do at the border. Of course, there are notifications and information we share regularly with them that facilitate a different approach.

In the long run, we will have our ETA system, which will allow us to do a very large number of checks automatically. If this was in a year's time, we would probably look to deploy ETA in this scenario in relation to Ukrainian passport holders, which is similar to the US ESTA system, which allows certain security checks and other things to be done quite rapidly. Sadly, it is on the test bed at the moment. It cannot be brought into action now.

Q126 **Tim Loughton:** That situation was made easier because of recourse to SIS and Europol. Do we not have the same recourse to Europol to check on Ukrainians now?

**Kevin Foster:** We have recourse to certain information databases but, again, Ukraine is not part of the EEA. To be fair, the Ukrainian people and the Ukrainian Government are expected to join the EU. We wish them all the best with that, if that is their sovereign-declared wish. It is no business of Vladimir Putin to say no. In that instance, they would come under a number of the information-sharing arrangements and other arrangements that we have with the EU.

Q127 **Tim Loughton:** What access to information would the Polish authorities have, because they are full members of Europol, that currently we do not have, which may be causing the delay in these checks? I understand you are not going to go into detail about those checks.

**Kevin Foster:** My understanding is there are very limited checks at the Polish border, for obvious reasons. They want to get people over the border and not leave a tail into Ukraine, given Russia's propensity to strike at gatherings of civilians. In terms of us looking to perform checks, our focus—as touched on by Lord Harrington—is on the fact that there are essential checks to be done, so we need to get them done quickly, get them done en masse and get people moving, as we are doing now.

Q128 **Tim Loughton:** Minister, you are missing my question. If we are disadvantaged in doing checks on those Ukrainians at the moment because we don't have access to Europol records that we might have had before, my question is whether we have asked Europol, in this emergency situation, to give us the same access to those records as we had before. That may facilitate us not having to do more time-consuming, extensive checks, because we can simply say, "That person doesn't appear on that database of wrong'uns, therefore they can come straight in."



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Kevin Foster:** Fine. Perhaps it might be helpful if I bring in Ms Tierney to say how long it is actually taking to do each case. That might give you a picture of how quickly we are now turning cases around.

**Abi Tierney:** As I am not part of the homeland security group, I would need to come back to you on your very specific question. That is beyond my technical expertise on the Europol—

Q129 **Tim Loughton:** It's a really important question, because there is a suspicion that we are not getting information that other countries have access to, and there is no excuse, in this emergency situation, for not getting access. If it's simply because we haven't asked Europol, why haven't we asked? If we have asked Europol and it has said, "Get lost," then we should make a fuss about that. We need to know why. I am not the first person to ask this question; it has been around for the last couple of weeks.

**Abi Tierney:** We will absolutely come back to the Committee on that specific question. On how long it is taking us to do all the checks on the databases that the Minister has described, from the moment we get the online application, the applications are now coming back within 24 hours.

Q130 **Ms Abbott:** My colleague was asking something quite specific. Have you asked Europol for access to this information?

**Kevin Foster:** We have very detailed information-sharing arrangements with Europol as part of the withdrawal agreements and the agreements we have had since leaving the EU. Personally, I am not aware of any information Europol has withheld or that it does not share. Of course, we have access to intel through our Five Eyes partners and everything else. However, Mr Loughton, I expect you would be surprised if I now sat here and gave a detailed list of exactly which databases and everything else.

Q131 **Tim Loughton:** I don't want that. I think you know what I want: could you please write to the Committee to say exactly whether there is a problem with Europol and how that might be addressed, because that is a political issue.

**Kevin Foster:** I am not aware of one.

Q132 **Tim Loughton:** I want to address one more issue. I am concerned because when I went through the application forms online, when the system opened yesterday, my head hurt quite a lot. Those online forms have got to be simplified hugely by next Friday. Why they weren't simplified when they went online yesterday, I don't know. It is the uploading or downloading or whatever of documents, some of which many people will not have—even for those who have a passport that is completely legit, it is a real problem.

I want to come back to the unaccompanied children, which is a serious worry. Last week, Enver Solomon mentioned that there are at least 10,000 children, many of whom were taken there to safety by parents who then returned to Ukraine. I entirely understand the point that the Ukrainians don't want them dispersed around everywhere. The last thing



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

that we want is them turning up at Calais—the point of trying to deal with these people close to the border is to avoid them getting across Europe and then getting mixed up with all the others at Calais, which will cause even more of a security headache. However, there are a lot of kids there. The Polish authorities are under pressure taking them in. They need some serious safeguarding resource.

SSAFA, which is the Army social services, is effectively the largest employer of social workers—and very experienced—that we have. I would like to see a lot of military personnel, who are quite good at dealing with this, deployed to the border. Other countries have their military there to help. Why are we not sending some of our military there—in particular the SSAFA professionals—to help with the safeguarding issue? I should disclose an interest, as I chair a safeguarding board for a children's company, just to put that on the record. Why wasn't that thought of? If it has been thought of, why has it not happened yet?

**Kevin Foster:** First, we have actually got military on the ground in south-east Poland. I won't repeat what I said about the Ukrainian Government's clear steer; I understand that that is one that the Polish Government are taking as well.

Q133 **Tim Loughton:** I understand that; that is not my question.

**Kevin Foster:** We will be there. We are more than happy to provide support for safeguarding. We have had requests to assist with matters relating to border security and other aspects of the flows from both Moldova and Poland. We have been pleased to accept those and provide resource. Again, if they wish to make requests, we are more than happy to look at how we could provide further support. We do have military on the ground.

Q134 **Tim Loughton:** But Minister, why are we not more proactive in that? I actually raised it last week with the Defence Secretary—I think you were on the Front Bench at the time. There is a clear safeguarding issue, which could become a real safeguarding crisis. We have the resources potential with the people who deal with these sorts of emergency issues. It is not a question of waiting around until someone asks us; why haven't we offered?

**Kevin Foster:** We have offered, Mr Loughton. We are very clear that if the Polish authorities need support and assistance, we have military on the ground. If they need support or assistance, they can ask us, and we are happy to provide the support we can. We gave an example this week of 20 children being brought into UK hospitals, as they have asked us to.

Q135 **Tim Loughton:** For specialist health issues. There are 10,000, and probably a lot more by now. Are you saying that the Secretary of State for Defence has rung up the Secretary of State for Defence in Poland or wherever, to say, "We potentially have these people; can you use them?"

**Kevin Foster:** There is constant contact between the UK Government and counterparts in the region, between UK Departments and embassies here.



**Tim Loughton** *indicated dissent.*

**Kevin Foster:** You are shaking your head, but we are very clear. If there are requests for help, if they want our help, we are here, happy to help. They are not going to run into objections from us. They are going to run into help and support, both financially in the large contributions we have made, and we are prepared to go further, including relocating people to the UK when needed.

Q136 **Chair:** We have heard what you have got to say on that, Minister, and we are obviously not getting an answer to the specific question that Mr Loughton raised. I want to move on, because I am conscious, Lord Harrington, that you probably have quite a lot you want to say to us, and we have a number of questions.

Just before we do that, I want to be clear, because it would be helpful to the Committee. Under the new humanitarian sponsorship scheme, someone coming from Ukraine still has to complete a visa application form—the same form as they would for the family reunion visa scheme. Is that correct?

**Kevin Foster:** Yes. Rather than fill in, for example, the basic details of the family member, it would be the detail of their sponsor. It will be the new simplified form, picking up on points earlier.

**Chair:** Right, so we are all clear. There is still a visa that has to be completed. I'm going to pass over now to Clive Betts.

Q137 **Mr Betts:** I think we all recognise that getting people here is one thing. Making sure they are welcomed and looked after is really important, as well. I know discussions have been going on with the local authority association. I declare my interest as a vice-president of the Local Government Association. I want to explore how far you've got. There may be issues that you have not quite finalised. Just tell us, if that is the case.

How much are local authorities going to get paid? Has a figure been agreed for each refugee who comes over? Is that agreement for refugees who come under both the family scheme and the community sponsorship scheme?

**Lord Harrington:** Yes. Over the last few days, I've spent a lot of time with your colleagues on the Local Government Association, NGOs and other organisations, and people such as Enver Solomon and others who have spoken to this Committee. A quick answer to a quick question: £10,500 per refugee.

Q138 **Mr Betts:** That's per year?

**Lord Harrington:** Yes. To deal with the wraparound service.

Q139 **Mr Betts:** How long will it last?

**Lord Harrington:** For the moment, it is three years.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Emma Haddad:** One year, for the first year.

**Lord Harrington:** I am sorry. I beg your pardon, I inadvertently misadvised the Committee. It is for one year at the moment. In terms of the general work with the local authorities, if I might expand on that, please. You may remember, Mr Betts, because I remember discussing it at length with you at the time, when we did the Syrian refugee programme, the local authorities were the main conduit for the resettlement of people.

We had, I wouldn't like to call it a luxury, but the refugees were predominantly in camps, in Jordan for example, or otherwise in accommodation that we knew. It was a lot easier for us to assess vulnerability criteria and things with UNHCR.

By the time they came through the process, you may remember we chartered aircraft for different airports. The first one was in Glasgow, and I was there when it arrived. The local authorities were responsible for the—I don't know a better word—distribution and the settlement side of it.

In this case, we are clearly not controlling. There is not time or the ability to assess people in Poland and places like that. I don't want to go back, because Mr Foster and others have mentioned at length the visa process. Suffice it to say that we are trying to expedite that as quickly as possible. The question is, how do we deal with it when people arrive? We don't exactly know where they will arrive. We can guess: the majority will be, for example, Manchester, Luton, Glasgow, Victoria coach station, etc.

We need to ensure that they have the same kind of welcome centres that we had for the Syrian programme. The reason I say that, with relevance to your question about local authorities, is because they will be a key part of that.

At the moment our appeal to local authorities is based not on primarily providing accommodation, because our current plan—it will not be exclusive or exhaustive—is to rely on the more than 120,000 who up to now have registered for the scheme. Some of them will come through and some of them won't, because people are only expressing interest, and we will be going into more detail by the end of this week.

The primary responsibility of the local authorities that we have discussed this with is all of the—this is the trendy expression—wraparound services that go with, which include the things local authorities are normally involved in: education, social care, safeguarding, facilitating English language training and other things that we have done for previous refugees—

Q140 **Mr Betts:** So the £10,000 is to cover all those sorts of services.

**Lord Harrington:** Yes, and they have been extremely co-operative.

Q141 **Mr Betts:** I think people want to help, but you just described that where refugees arrive will be a bit dictated by where the offers of accommodation are through the two schemes. Is there not a potential



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

problem there? If there is a concentration of refugees coming to certain areas, where there may already be enormous pressure on things like child mental health and school places, it will simply not be possible to give them the sorts of services they actually need. Will there be any involvement from Government with the local authorities to try to address that sort of issue before it becomes a real problem?

**Lord Harrington:** I am not turning my mind to that yet, Clive. It is a very valid point, and please don't think I'm fobbing you off. For the moment, we just have to get these people in. In an ideal world, yes, I would have flights preorganised to different airports, with individually named people to meet them and everything like that, but it is impossible to do that given the time constraints.

As for sophistication and being more targeted, people are going where we know we have accommodation, like we did with the Syrians. Remember that the Syrian programme—I am very proud of it—was only 20,000 people. This is much, much more, and it will be difficult. In the end—you will accept this because of your experience—the local authorities will be a huge part of this. In the end, there will be people to whom we have to say, "We don't have accommodation in the Manchester area. We have accommodation in Glasgow or wherever it is"—

**Kevin Foster:** Torbay.

**Lord Harrington:** Yes, even Torbay. That is what we did with the Syrians, and that is what we'll have to do. For the moment, we just want to get people over here and for them to know that they have a safe place to sleep.

Q142 **Mr Betts:** I am just particularly worried about children who are obviously going to be traumatised. Let us say they come over here and there is no school place for them. Some authorities are saying, "We want them to come, but we simply cannot find school places or mental health support." I worry about that, beyond the accommodation.

**Lord Harrington:** I do, but we are going to have to find school places and extra social workers and whatever it takes—

Q143 **Mr Betts:** I think that is probably easier said than done.

**Lord Harrington:** I know, but I cannot give you a better answer than that. We're going to have to—

Q144 **Mr Betts:** Maybe this is something we need to follow through.

On accommodation, it will be available under the community sponsorship scheme and, for many people, under the family scheme, but for some people coming over to join their families, the family will not have enough accommodation to provide homes for those refugees. It could be a pair of elderly grandparents or a mother with children, and they cannot be accommodated in the flat—that sort of situation. There will have to be some provision of accommodation, so is that down to local authorities?



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Lord Harrington:** It will have to be. Or it could be similar organisations, such as housing associations, but it will be under the responsibility of the local authorities.

Q145 **Mr Betts:** Can I ask about one or two details of the provision under the community sponsorship scheme? There are going to have to be DBS checks, aren't there? There will have to be checks on the satisfactory nature of the accommodation, particularly if children are going in there. Emma Haddad will be very well aware of the tragedy in a hotel in Sheffield that we communicated about. Will local authorities have to do those checks, both on the DBS and on the accommodation? Will all the accommodation that will be provided under the community sponsorship scheme have to be checked?

**Lord Harrington:** In the end, they will be paid to do that; you are absolutely right.

Q146 **Mr Betts:** But the checks will have to be done before people come to be housed.

**Lord Harrington:** It may not be possible—I am talking next week when we are expecting thousands of people to come—but it will be their responsibility. Particularly where there is the possibility of vulnerability—children and that sort of thing—that will take priority, but if we are starting to say, “We will pre-do it,” that just isn't possible.

Q147 **Mr Betts:** I am just trying to establish the facts.

**Lord Harrington:** We will have people coming here and being held in temporary accommodation while a load of bureaucratic but very important checks are done.

Q148 **Mr Betts:** In the arrangement under the community sponsorship scheme, will the people coming have tenancy rights, or will they be in the property as a guest? Will a notice period have to be given before the arrangement terminates? People need some security, but once you get into tenancies, you are into another complicated area.

**Lord Harrington:** It is an agreement that the accommodation will be offered for six months. Will it be a tenancy right under the Landlord and Tenant Act? I cannot answer that question.

Q149 **Mr Betts:** You need to explore the problem so that we can get an answer.

**Lord Harrington:** Yes, but there are implications. For example, anyone who has a mortgage might be in breach of its conditions because they are receiving money for this. We have spoken at length to the AIB on the insurance front and to the finance trade body—I think it is called Finance UK—to make sure that that is properly waived and people will not be affected.

Q150 **Mr Betts:** So you have those assurances from all the members of those organisations?



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Lord Harrington:** They are doing that, but we have the assurance from the trade body in both cases.

Q151 **Mr Betts:** So you won't get any complaints from someone saying, "My mortgage company has just been in touch to say I can't do this"?

**Lord Harrington:** It will not be deemed to be a rental payment. I understand that that is the technical reason it does not apply, and that they will make that clear to all their members.

Q152 **Mr Betts:** Again, if you have insurance covering a certain number of people in the house and you suddenly increase the numbers, you might be affected. Will all that be waived as well?

**Lord Harrington:** We have been assured that it will be. I have not seen the details, but we spoke to them over the weekend.

Q153 **Mr Betts:** Not all relationships that start well end well; some will break down. If that happens, will the local authority be responsible for coming in and resolving the matter?

**Lord Harrington:** If a sponsorship did not work out, we hope that we would be able to put them into other sponsorship.

Q154 **Mr Betts:** That is a local authority job, is it?

**Lord Harrington:** It would have to be, but using accommodation that was offered in the same way by individual members of the public or organisations such as housing associations.

Q155 **Mr Betts:** I just think it is helpful to ascertain in advance who is responsible if something happens, so that rather than lots of questions having to be asked, we can just say, "Over to you."

Finally, you made an important point about people not having their finances adversely affected by this, so their insurance or mortgage or whatever will not be affected, and it has been made clear that this is tax-free and will not affect benefits or council tax. Can we have an assurance that individuals will not in any way be affected in anything they can get from government? I am thinking of something that probably has not been covered strictly speaking, which is where people have a child going to university whose entitlement to a grant may depend on family income. This will not appear as part of the family income, will it?

**Lord Harrington:** I have been assured that that is absolutely the case: it is not treated as family income and it will not affect rights to universal credit or council tax single person discount—that sort of thing. That is our intention and what all our negotiations have been aimed at. It is not additional income.

Q156 **Carolyn Harris:** What are the visa requirements for Ukrainians seeking to come under Homes for Ukraine, as opposed to the Ukraine family visa? What are the differences?

**Kevin Foster:** For UFS, you have a—pretty extended—family link here. For Homes for Ukraine, you have a sponsor identified. Although at some



point that will be businesses and business groups, for the most part it will be individuals who own accommodation—it can be a business owner of a holiday cottage, for example. As for visa requirements, they will be minimised and very similar. As you would expect, we will seek to ensure that the appropriate safeguarding checks are done if children are involved; I think our approach will be enhanced a bit in that respect. The baseline requirements are very similar, though, and you will be able to use the fully online system.

**Q157 Carolyn Harris:** How long has the scheme that Homes for Ukraine will be built on been designed? How long has that kind of scheme, or the model for Homes for Ukraine, been in existence?

**Lord Harrington:** Not long at all. Can I just give you a bit of background? This is not to fob you off, but to explain. When I was doing the Syrian job, which you and I have spoken about, the model for community sponsorship was Canada. The day I was due to go to Canada to look at it was the day I was reshuffled into DWP—that is the way, unfortunately, that Government works. But the officials did go, and the scheme that we are offering now is, yes, new to us, but it is very much based on the Canadian scheme, which works. This matching of sponsors to individuals, which has received a lot of comment and criticism, is operated in volume in Canada. It did not work—well, I say it did not work, but it worked for the 600 families it worked for—at anything like the right speed here previously, because there was too much bureaucracy, but there isn't in this case. I don't wish to be one of those politicians who are about a bonfire of red tape, but we are trying to speed things up. So the Homes for Ukraine scheme is new, but it is based on things that have worked elsewhere.

**Q158 Carolyn Harris:** How are we going to protect vulnerable people from exploitation? What checks and safeguards are going to be put in place?

**Lord Harrington:** That is part of what we are paying local authorities for, using the mechanisms they have. They will probably need to hire extra social workers and people to do inspections. Remember that school education is part of the normal—I do not know what the word is—“antennae” for this kind of thing. We will be using the kind of bodies that would normally be the case with safeguarding and vulnerability issues for people who are not refugees. We are paying the money partly to apply exactly the same kind of thing.

**Kevin Foster:** As part of the application process, the Home Office would check some of our police records, the sex offenders register and details of domestic violence abuse—what you would expect us to do as standard. Obviously, if there was an unaccompanied children process, we would almost certainly have to move towards DBS with that as well.

Under the visa process, some of the checks would be done, which we have touched on already. Then, as Lord Harrington pointed out, there would be a role for local authorities in ongoing monitoring of certain individuals.

**Q159 Carolyn Harris:** But we all know that there are businesses and individuals out there who will not be on anyone's radar, so how will this



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

be policed, post somebody arriving?

**Lord Harrington:** That is what I was saying; that is done by the local authority system, with all the things that would normally happen.

The reality is that we are having to do this very quickly. Luckily, the vast majority of people are caught in the different electronic mechanisms. This is not the full DBS checks, which are why, now, things take weeks or months. When I left Parliament and wanted to be a governor of a primary school, the process was held up—I hope members of the Committee will accept that I had not done anything wrong; that was just the time it took. If we started doing all of that and waiting for those checks, the whole thing would not work. I am assured that the electronic checks, which can be done really quickly, will take place, and I am talking about nearly 100% of people being caught. Then the local authorities will be responsible for the full DBS checks. They will inspect properties and inspect situations. Schools will be briefed in the way they normally would be, but in an expanded way.

Q160 **Carolyn Harris:** What are the requirements for people applying to offer homes? What are the criteria for those people?

**Lord Harrington:** In terms of?

**Carolyn Harris:** Taking refugees in.

**Lord Harrington:** You mean in terms of DBS and all that kind of thing?

**Carolyn Harris:** Is there any financial requirement? What do they need in order to be able to offer a home?

**Lord Harrington:** They need to be able to offer the property.

**Kevin Foster:** For six months. And if people ask what their immigration status is, as long as they have more than six months' permission here in the UK—

**Lord Harrington:** —they are fine. So we have really, really, really cut it down as much as we possibly can.

Q161 **Chair:** I am going to bring Simon Fell in next, but I just want to ask a question. If someone is not eligible under the family visa route but can bring someone under the community sponsorship, but that family member is not covered—for example, I think, stepchildren still are not covered—

**Kevin Foster:** They are covered.

**Chair:** They are covered. Well, it may be another family member, who is not covered. They would be able to come in under the community sponsorship and they would get the £350 as long as they have the accommodation.

**Lord Harrington:** Yes.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q162 **Simon Fell:** I think most of my questions have been asked already, so I will be brief. In terms of numbers, I think you mentioned that 120,000 people have registered on the website to be potential sponsors. Do you have an estimate for how many Ukrainians we might get through the system?

**Lord Harrington:** I don't. It is impossible to know, but we will know quite quickly.

**Kevin Foster:** As I touched on earlier in the session, I think that we, in terms of looking at visa applications initially, looked towards the BNO-style volume of applications, which has seen 100,000 in its first year of operation, but we planned to go much higher if needed because of the situation in China. What exactly China would do was not known, as in this scenario. We have planned, so the system can take a very large number of applications if needed.

**Lord Harrington:** But there is no limit. We are not placing a limit.

Q163 **Simon Fell:** You mentioned welcome centres when people enter the UK. When they move to a local authority area, do you have a model for what a local welcome centre might look like for engaging with local public services?

**Lord Harrington:** There are so many initials that I have had to learn in the last week, but the partnerships that we did for the Syrians—

**Emma Haddad:** Strategic migration partnerships.

**Lord Harrington:** I should have a translator. They will be used as the conduit to do it and they have done it very successfully in the past. Having said that, we do not know the volume. It is all speculative, but we are trying to use systems that we have but expanding them, rather than trying completely new things. Everyone is stepping up to the plate—all the authorities, World Jewish Relief, the Refugee Council, Refugees at Home—and engaging on this. I am hopeful, but I cannot promise—I would like to say, “Here is the blueprint, this is how it is going to work”—because the volumes will be really high. I hope they will be really high, that our system works and criticism from this Committee and others, much of which has been justified, does not happen. I hope you say it works seamlessly and great. It will not be 100%, but I hope we are dealing with each of the objections as it comes up.

Q164 **Simon Fell:** We have talked about the options if a relationship breaks down between a sponsor and the family or individual who is staying with them. Have you put any thought into whether there might be scope for periodic checks on the individuals who are being sponsored, just to make sure that they are being looked after and not abused—



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Kevin Foster:** Obviously, from a Home Office perspective, if people came to the attention of the police, clearly we would want to check quite rapidly what was going on.

**Lord Harrington:** It is part of the local authorities' remit.

**Kevin Foster:** Yes, it would be part of the local authorities' remit, but if information came to our attention that brought concern about a sponsor, or a relationship, we would liaise with the local authority.

Q165 **Simon Fell:** I am just thinking that a number of these individuals will be incredibly vulnerable. They might not have English as a language at all, let alone as their first language, and obviously they will be in unusual circumstances. Having that reach into those families to make sure that they are safe would be important.

**Lord Harrington:** Absolutely right.

Q166 **Simon Fell:** My last point is about notification for councils. How much awareness will councils have that an individual or a family is moving into their area ahead of it actually happening?

**Lord Harrington:** We hope it will be simultaneous. We cannot quite control it in the way that we did with the Syrian programme, but we hope it will be instantaneous. They have people ready and willing to do this. There is a process in place, if we get the money for it. Again I cannot quite promise that because we have not seen things of this volume in our history.

**Emma Haddad:** Just to add that, as and when the visa applications come in to me in the Home Office and we are processing those visa applications, the data will be shared immediately with the Department for Levelling Up, and we will share with local authorities and whoever else needs them. Those data-sharing agreements will be in place, so that everything happens at the same time.

**Lord Harrington:** If I may add another point, one thing we are really trying to do this time: as part of the initial application form, the Government have the right to access their contact details and data, which means email and mobile. So we are going to try to use those tools as a means of communication. Whether that will be WhatsApp or whatever, we will have a way of communicating. The thing we have learned about refugees in the past, and it is perfectly understandable, is that they communicate a lot between themselves, but there are a lot of rumours and half-truths, because they do not know what is happening. We hope that by having a system of communication to them all, we can deal with those as soon as they are brought to us, and we can tell people what the rules are, what they can do and what they cannot do.

**Kevin Foster:** It is modelled on the fact that, with the EUSS, we have a database of about 5 million email addresses, which allows us to, every so often, put out messages to virtually the vast majority of people who have status under it. For example, that could be if the guidance has been



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

updated or there has been a change to something or just a general information point about uptake of passports, not just communicating to people when there is something they need to do or that must happen. It is about keeping up regular information. I know that part of the process that we go through is collecting that data that can then be used.

Q167 **Simon Fell:** This is my final question. Recognising your point that we just want to get people in the door and into the system, is there going to be any profiling done of local authority areas to understand what capacity they do have, perhaps for schooling or other services, and whether an application would actually be suitable for a particular area or might be better placed elsewhere?

**Lord Harrington:** I suggest that those things will evolve. If I could give you a narrative example, when we started the Syrian programme, I was so desperate to get people in and away from there that—I say this against myself—we found that there were people in the Isle of Bute who had a chain of shops near Aleppo, and then agricultural workers were put in cities. We developed a level of sophistication quite quickly. At first I was just delighted to get them here. The answer is yes, but I cannot promise it straight away.

Q168 **Paula Barker:** Lord Harrington, you have said a lot about local authorities and what they will be doing, one of which is potentially providing additional social workers and additional checks. Has any discussion taken place about additional funding for local authorities? For example, my local authority in Liverpool has had half a billion pounds-worth of cuts over the past decade, and those cuts continue. Surely we cannot expect local authorities to do all this without requisite funding going in?

**Lord Harrington:** That is correct. That is why they are getting £10,500 per person.

Q169 **Paula Barker:** Sorry. I misunderstood what you said. So each local authority will have £10,500 per refugee.

**Lord Harrington:** Yes.

**Emma Haddad:** Plus money for school places.

**Lord Harrington:** Yes. I should have explained that that did not include education. It is a per-head basis, the same as for any other children.

Q170 **Paula Barker:** Thank you. Can you give any assurances that we will not see refugees housed in hotels in the way that we have with the Afghan refugees? We have heard some terrible horror stories.

**Lord Harrington:** Ms Barker, I honestly cannot give you that undertaking. I would like to, because it is not our intention, but if all else fails, it is our duty to ensure they have a roof over their heads and are fed properly. It is not our plan or our strategy. We have thousands of people from Afghanistan still in hotels, and we have thousands of asylum seekers. It is not the plan, but I cannot give you a 100% assurance, because I just do not know.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q171 **Paula Barker:** If that happens, we have heard, as I said, horror stories of Afghan refugees who are staying in utterly appalling conditions. What checks will be done to ensure that that is not replicated for Ukrainian refugees?

**Kevin Foster:** I can bring Ms Tierney in on what checks we do but, first, I don't want to be accommodating people in hotels long term; I want to move away from that. I thank Liverpool for its contribution, because it is a dispersal area which means that we can reduce the numbers we have in hotels. It is not where we want to be. We call them contingency for a reason, to touch on exactly what Lord Harrington just said. That happens where we need to meet our statutory duty, and that is the option we have to deliver that. There are checks and things, and I am certainly happy to look at particularly poor examples, but our long-term goal is to move away from hotels.

That is why, actually, I am in many ways delighted, with Lord Harrington, to get people with homes to sign up, because the core lesson learned from Afghanistan is that we had to bring a lot of people out very quickly. Hotels were an option, and then offers have not then come forward from communities in the way that we would have liked them to, so this is why we need to start by asking: where are people going to be housed? It is all very well me granting people a visa, but if we don't know where they are going to spend their first night here, that is not the welcome we should be offering.

Q172 **Tim Loughton:** Just two things for information. When the scheme was announced for people who do not have family connections, some people have said, "I want to offer a home, but I don't know a Ukrainian," so how does that work? I understand, with the Canadian system, why it working it is the way it is. Can you explain? I have filled in all the forms, I have registered my interest, I have said I have got two bedrooms and answered all the other questions that go with it, and I have got the email back saying thank you for registering with the scheme. What happens next?

**Lord Harrington:** There are NGOs on the ground. Effectively, most of them, in the end, will be done by people registering with them, and then matching it up. They don't have to know people, because you or any of us wouldn't know people when we were doing it. They are the kind of bodies that get involved with refugees. Repeating for Syria—sorry to keep going back to it—that was UNHCR. Here there are lots of other different organisations that we have spoken to on the ground: churches, faith groups, non-faith groups. They will have tablets and laptops and will be able to help people with the matching.

Q173 **Tim Loughton:** I understand. So, I have registered. Will I get an email, in one week, two weeks, 10 days or whatever, from the Red Cross, Worthing Council, West Sussex County Council, Refugees at Home? It could be any one of those. I am just asking, for my constituents who have done this. If in a week or so, they have heard nothing, they will say that was a waste of time and want to know if it is going to happen or not.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

What is the expectation? That is what I am really trying to ask.

If you don't know now, we do need to keep people abreast, to say, "Okay, we've been able to match X thousand. We don't seem to have many in Sussex at the moment. We are working on that, so it is going to take a bit longer." I do think we need to have that news management to manage expectations. Otherwise, people get very frustrated, as they did in some of the volunteering schemes in the pandemic, where they signed up and then never got called on to do anything, which was really frustrating for some people.

**Lord Harrington:** I am doing my best to ensure that does not happen. That is all I am prepared to say at the moment. Three or four days ago, I had not heard of this, and I am dealing with every aspect of it.

Q174 **Tim Loughton:** I am not blaming you at all.

**Lord Harrington:** I know you're not. I want it to work; I believe that, when it works through, the real conduit for this will be those NGOs on the ground, and they will become expert at it. They have certainly said they will. If Government do it on our own, we would quite properly get criticism.

Q175 **Tim Loughton:** It is not a criticism. We just need to have a good flow of information to people, to know what to expect. Otherwise, they come back to MPs and say, "Why is it not working? It is all rubbish...blah, blah, blah."

**Kevin Foster:** I would say that, from Friday, if you have an identified person in Ukraine you wish to sponsor, you will be able to start applying. There are lots of informal networks. I am an alumnus of the Royal College of Defence Studies. Most of us have offered our Ukrainian counterparts the opportunities for their families to be brought to the UK under the sponsorship route; those of us who are able to do so.

There have been lots of informal networks—churches and others—who, as we speak, are starting to identify people who can be brought over. As Lord Harrington has pointed out, there will almost certainly be further schemes and I agree with you that there need to be. If someone is involved in a group or knows someone and wants to sponsor them, let's be clear that from Friday, they could start applying via the Home Office to do that.

Q176 **Chair:** It might be helpful to have a "Dear Colleague" letter, because MPs will be asked the questions that Mr Loughton has raised.

**Lord Harrington:** That is a really good idea.

Q177 **Chair:** Once you have worked out how the system is going to operate, that would be very helpful.

**Lord Harrington:** If I may briefly come in on that, it is my intention, hopefully by the end of the week, to have a meeting—virtual or not—with all MPs, where there will be officials, and we can go into this kind of detail. That would obviously be on a cross-party basis. Although I am a bit out of



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

it, I am advised that these days it is best to do it on Zoom, rather than in a room, as I would have traditionally done.

Q178 **Tim Loughton:** Did Ms Tierney want to come in?

**Abi Tierney:** The Ministers have covered most of it, but Emma and I are seeing examples each day of NGOs who have got their contacts of people who are looking to come over, who are reaching out to sponsors, to say, "If you don't already know somebody, here is our list." That is a combination of NGOs and faith groups. I think that will work well. As Minister Harrington says, an all-colleague approach would be really helpful, too. We are seeing examples. I saw one from Positive Housing this morning, where they have a list.

Q179 **Tim Loughton:** The ask is just to keep everybody informed. Another quick thing on sponsorship for jobs. Again, because half of this is being done through central hubs and partly locally, my concern is that I have got hospitality industry in Worthing, who are very keen to offer jobs to cooks and people like that, but how do they match up, with ensuring that somebody is placed locally, so they have not got a job in a restaurant in Worthing for a family that has just been placed in Sunderland for accommodation, for example?

**Lord Harrington:** It is all being thought through.

Q180 **Tim Loughton:** As long as it is, that's all right.

**Kevin Foster:** I know one hotel in Torquay that owns accommodation and can supply jobs, so the owner of the hotel will be the sponsor of the accommodation, and because everyone over 18 arriving under the scheme has the right to work, there will be no issue if they want to employ those people.

Q181 **Mr Betts:** You need to make sure that people in that situation are not exploited.

**Kevin Foster:** We agree. There is a bit of work to be done there, Clive, but it is not an uncommon model.

**Lord Harrington:** Some of the employers coming nicely out of the woodwork are national, so now we have to try to match it up.

Q182 **Adam Holloway:** Neither of my questions needs a particularly long answer. You mentioned the difference between Ukrainian refugees and Afghans. I wonder whether a factor in that is the public perception that people seeking asylum from Afghanistan or almost everywhere else will almost certainly be able to stay in the UK, and there is a degree of public weariness with that? Could this model of time-limited, but extendable while the need is there, stays be extended to other countries, rather than it being assumed that people stay here forever? Secondly—I asked this question earlier—the Ukrainian Government want able-bodied men to remain in Ukraine, so are we planning to use British taxpayers' money to fund the stay in the UK of people the Ukrainian Government expect to stay in Ukraine and help to defend the country?



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Lord Harrington:** Those are both difficult questions, Mr Holloway. I expect nothing less of you.

We cannot run a humanitarian rescue scheme and say to able-bodied men, "You can't come." We cannot do that. We do not have the finesse and sophistication. This is a mass movement of people. The Ukrainian Government will advise us on what they want to do, but the fact that people are there in Poland does not mean that they are deserters. There could be all sorts of reason. It is not a satisfactory answer, I'm afraid, but we cannot start being the police officer for the Ukrainian Government, and they have enough on their mind.

**Kevin Foster:** Regarding temporary status, until Vladimir Putin attacked, Ukraine was a safe and democratic country. We hope that the Ukrainians will push back the invaders and return to being a safe and democratic country. The same cannot be said of other parts of the world. I would love to sit here and say that at some point Afghanistan will go back to being a safe and democratic country.

Q183 **Adam Holloway:** Kurdistan is a safe and democratic place.

**Kevin Foster:** Yes, our asylum system needs reforms, but there are always places where such a thing cannot be predicted to happen within a reasonable period of time. However, this model will certainly deliver a lot more than some of our traditional community sponsorship and resettlement routes, and that is exactly why it needs to be deployed in these circumstances.

**Lord Harrington:** If I could just make a final—

**Adam Holloway:** Schools are full, we cannot get GP appointments, and we are short of houses. We have got to have a more sensible approach.

Q184 **Chair:** Okay. Lord Harrington, did you want to make a point?

**Lord Harrington:** I just wanted to say to Mr Holloway that I interviewed a lot of the arriving Syrian refugees, and most of them wanted to go back. I am sure the same is true of the Ukrainians. Of course, if things remain terrible there for years and years, it will be different. Your main question is whether we can take in refugees on a temporary basis for humanitarian reasons. It is very difficult if they have nowhere to go back to.

**Adam Holloway:** What about those who do?

**Chair:** May I thank the Ministers and officials for attending today? It has been a very useful opportunity to talk through the Government's approach. I know the Minister did not want to come quite as soon as I would have liked him to because this has been developing and there have been changes in the last couple of weeks, but we are very grateful for his attendance and his officials' attendance. We want this to be a constructive dialogue. We are asking difficult questions because we—the whole country—want to get this right and we are trying to make sure this works. Thank you again. Hopefully, we will have you back in a few months to see



# HOUSE OF COMMONS

how things are progressing.