



Home Office

Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
Home Secretary

2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF
www.gov.uk/home-office



Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi MP
Secretary of State

Sanctuary Buildings Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT
tel: 0370 000 2288 www.education.gov.uk/contactus/dfe

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Dame Diana Johnson MP
Chair, Home Affairs Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Dame Diana,

Thank you for your letter of 10 March concerning unaccompanied children fleeing Ukraine, and the Government's response to ensure their safety.

We recognise the deeply troubling circumstances faced by all Ukrainians who are caught up in this conflict, including unaccompanied children, and the role that many countries will need to play to safeguard those children. We share your concerns about children who do not have a family connection to the UK and these concerns were made clear in Parliament when I, The Home Secretary said there are a number of issues around safeguarding children, particularly those travelling through Europe, and even at the border, a number of safeguarding and trafficking cases are now materialising. The evidence put forward by your witnesses at last week's hearing demonstrates the seriousness of the situation.

You are right that we need to recognise that it will generally be in the best interests of a child to reunite with family members in EU countries. You will be aware that a child can apply under the Ukraine Family Scheme to join extended family who are already in the UK on which I provide more details below. That includes unaccompanied and accompanied children who have families in the UK with whom they can reunite. Under the Ukraine Family Scheme, British nationals and people of any nationality settled in the UK can bring to the UK immediate family members (spouses, civil partners, partners, children under 18 and parents of children under 18), plus Ukrainian parents, grandparents, grandchildren, adult children, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, nephews and in-laws and their immediate family members, and foster children. Unaccompanied children are not able to be accommodated through the Homes for Ukraine scheme. The Ukrainian authorities have

been clear that children should not be taken into care without their agreement. We continue to work with them and across government to ensure that we are able to respond should there be a need to do more in this area.

We are confident the policy changes the UK government have already introduced will enable many children who have been separated from their families to be able to come here and be reunited with family members who are in the UK.

As recently announced in the House, since Tuesday 15 March, holders of valid Ukrainian passports who are outside of the UK are no longer required to provide their biometric information when making applications under the Ukraine Family Scheme. Applicants who hold identity cards and do not have a valid passport will still need to attend a VAC in person and provide their biometric information. Applicants who hold identity cards and do not have a valid passport will still need to attend a VAC in person and provide their biometric information. All applicants will still need to complete an online application form. There will be no requirements for salary or language tests. Those granted status under the scheme will be able to come to the UK for three years with a right to work and access to benefits.

We are conscious of the need to ensure that all children arriving from the Ukraine receive the right type of care and support whatever their circumstances. We are committed to working with local government to ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place, particularly for any unaccompanied children that may arrive and for whom there is no option of being reunited with extended family and would therefore need more direct support, including potentially becoming looked after.

Hotels accommodating unaccompanied children relating to small boat arrivals have only been used as a last resort when local authorities have been unable to provide immediate placements. You will be aware that we have mandated the National Transfer Scheme to increase the amount of care placements available to children as our objective is to stop using hotels for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

Yours,

Rt Hon Priti Patel MP

with our good wishes


Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
Home Secretary



Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi MP
Education Secretary