



Home Affairs Committee

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From the Committee Chair

Home Office
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Dear Lord Harrington,

Members of the Committee today met with a delegation of MPs from Ukraine. The MPs told us, in no uncertain terms, that the Ukraine visa schemes do not work and that extreme dysfunction and bureaucracy associated with the schemes is causing serious distress to applicants who feel they are ‘stuck in limbo’.

The MPs told us that they had personally encountered great difficulty getting their own visas to come on their diplomatic visit to the UK. We heard that one of the MPs had to drive 11 hours to Poland, twice, in order to get her visa. We also heard further worrying accounts of staff at Visa Application Centres selling expedited visa services to desperate people for an additional 300 Euros. **What is your response to these accounts?**

The MPs also drew to our attention the issues they are facing getting “accompanied unaccompanied” minors out of the country. Where both Ukrainian parents are unable to leave Ukraine because they are serving their country, they have been attempting to send their children to safety with relatives such as grandparents or older siblings. We heard that the UK Government will not grant visas for these children because they are deemed to be ‘unaccompanied’. This is despite the parents providing notarised consent forms for the children to travel with the nominated adult. We heard that the forms are an established legal document in Ukraine and that the Ambassador has written directly to the Home Office on this point. The MPs also told us that they have been repeatedly told by you, directly, that this policy would be changed. **Can you clarify whether it is the Government’s intention to change the policy in these cases and when we might expect this change to take effect?**

The MPs told us they could provide hundreds of examples where poor communication with the applicants had resulted in entirely unnecessary delays and serious distress. Examples such as visas having been granted but, because the families were not notified, they waited for weeks unnecessarily. In another case, an applicant waited weeks to finally find the delay was due to a picture upload error which, once resolved, meant her visa was granted almost instantly. **What is the Home Office doing to improve its communication with applicants so that problems can be resolved quickly?**

The accounts we heard today paint a very worrying picture of the Home Office's management and delivery of these vital schemes. I would appreciate a response on the points set out above and a wider update on any actions the Home Office is undertaking to address the widely reported failings of the schemes.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Diana Johnson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'D' and a long, sweeping underline.

Dame Diana Johnson MP