

# Home Secretary's topical statement on Ukraine

Mr Speaker, Putin's war on Ukraine is monstrous and unjustified. I am in regular contact with the Ukrainian Minister of the Interior and the Ambassador to London.

The United Kingdom stands firmly with the people of Ukraine and as this House would expect, Britain is stepping up its role and playing its part in responding to the terrible situation on the ground in Ukraine.

Mr Speaker, the government has already announced the first phase of a bespoke humanitarian route for the people of Ukraine and the new Ukrainian humanitarian route responds directly to the needs and asks of the Ukrainian government.

Every conflict and threat situation is unique and requires a tailored response.

Our new route will continue to keep pace with the developing situation on the ground and so far has already:

- supported hundreds of British nationals and their families resident in Ukraine to leave – UK Visas and Immigration staff continue to work around the clock to assist them
- enabled dependants of British nationals resident in Ukraine who need a UK visa to apply through the temporary location in Lviv or through visa application centres in Poland, Moldova, Romania, and Hungary

Teams have over recent weeks been surged to these areas and applications have been completed within hours. We are in direct contact with individuals and we have also lowered language requirements and salary thresholds so that people can be supported.

Where family members of British nationals do not meet the usual eligibility criteria – but pass security checks – UK Visas and Immigration will give them permission to enter the UK outside the rules for 12 months and is prioritising all applications.

We are giving British nationals and any person settled in the UK the ability to bring over their immediate Ukrainian family members. Through this extension alone, I can confirm that an additional 100,000 Ukrainians will be able to seek sanctuary in the UK with access to work and public services.

We are enabling Ukrainian nationals already in the UK the ability to switch, free of charge, into a points-based immigration route or a family visa route.

We are extending visas for Ukrainian temporary workers in some sectors who can now stay until at least December 2022, primarily because people cannot return to Ukraine.

Anyone in Ukraine intending to apply under the family migration route should call the dedicated 24-hour Home Office helpline for assistance before making an application.

Mr Speaker, Britain continues to lead and is doing its fair share in every aspect of this Ukraine conflict. I would urge colleagues not to attempt casework themselves, but directly refer people to the helpline number. Duplication of effort would waste precious time and cause confusion. This is the best and most efficient way to help people.

Mr Speaker, over the weekend I have seen members of this House calling for full visa waivers for all Ukrainians.

Security and biometrics checks are a fundamental part of our visa approval process worldwide and will continue, as they did for the evacuation of Afghanistan.

That is vital to keep British citizens safe and to ensure that we are helping those in genuine need, particularly as Russian troops are now infiltrating Ukraine and merging into Ukrainian forces. Intelligence reports also state the presence of extremist groups and organisations who threaten the region, but also our domestic homeland.

We know all too well what Putin's Russia is willing to do, even on our soil as we saw through the Salisbury attack and the use of a nerve agent used on the streets of the UK. The approach we are taking is based on the strongest security advice, Mr Speaker.

The Prime Minister has set out the myriad of other ways we are supporting Ukraine. There will be other statements in the House today.

But Mr Speaker, there are 2 other points I would like to add. The Nationality and Borders Bill is currently at report stage in the other place.

The bill contains provisions to allow visa penalties to be applied to specific countries that don't cooperate with the return of their nationals.

I am now seeking to extend these provisions so that a country can be specified if it has taken significant steps which:

- threaten international peace and security
- have led, or are likely to lead, to armed conflict, or
- breach international humanitarian law

This extension would draw on precedent from the Sanctions and Money Laundering Act 2018.

These powers would be available as soon as the bill receives royal assent. The sooner that happens, the sooner this House and all members can collectively act.

Mr Speaker, we are ever-mindful of cyberattacks and disinformation emanating from Russia.

These would be met with very robust responses indeed. And we have stepped up our international coordination on this.

Mr Speaker, what is happening in Ukraine is utterly heartbreaking and profoundly wrong. But together with our international partners, we stand with the heroic Ukrainian people.

With that, Mr Speaker, there is further work taking place on diplomatic channels and also the Ukrainian government has today requested that the Russian government be suspended from its membership of Interpol and we will be leading all international efforts to that effect.