

New measures to support Ukrainians

Home Secretary Priti Patel has today announced changes to the Ukraine Family Scheme to make the process quicker and simpler for those fleeing Putin's barbaric invasion of Ukraine.

From Tuesday, Ukraine passport holders will no longer need to attend in-person appointments to submit fingerprints or facial verification before they come to the UK, after the Home Secretary received assurances that the necessary national security checks could be maintained while not requiring biometrics for the initial application.

The remaining checks continue to ensure we provide the robust scrutiny required for all applicants.

Confirmation of permission to travel to the UK will also be provided, meaning the majority of applications can be completed entirely online without ever attending a visa appointment centre, speeding up the process and allowing people to come to the UK faster.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

The Ukraine Family Scheme provides an immediate pathway for those Ukrainians with family already settled in the UK to come to our country. It is designed to allow as many people as possible to come to Britain and gives them immediate access to the support they need to not just survive but to thrive.

The scheme was developed in close consultation with Ukrainian leaders and the diaspora community and we continue to work with them to make changes as necessary. That is why we are now making the process quicker and simpler by removing the need to physically visit Visa Application Centres for many of those who are making the perilous journey across Europe. This will mean we can welcome more families here more swiftly.

Given the real and varied threats we face, we must consider national security alongside our humanitarian instinct and desire to help as many people as possible in the shortest possible timeframe. I can reassure the British people that the changes announced today have been made in close consultation with relevant officials and agencies so as to ensure our national security is not compromised.

Under the new application process passport holders will apply online and be granted 6 months' leave to enter the UK outside of the rules, enabling them to work, study and claim benefits immediately. Once they have submitted biometric data in the UK they will have their leave extended to 36 months.

This applies only to passports – not ID Cards – however this will be kept

under review, in line with security advice.

The changes are designed to get as many people their visas as quickly as possible, while reducing pressure on visa application centres and ensuring those who pose a threat to the UK are prevented from entering.

The Home Office has already ramped up visa application capacity in other countries bordering Ukraine, including Hungary, Romania, Poland and Moldova. A new pop-up Visa Application Centre in Rzeszow, Poland, has been opened, while the combined total number of appointments across Europe has increased from 2,000 to 13,000 appointments.

The Ukraine Family Scheme allows people settled in the UK to bring immediate and extended family members from Ukraine to the UK. This week the eligibility was increased to include aunts, uncles and in-laws.

The Ukraine Family Scheme is part of a series of measures that have already been announced:

- Last month the Home Secretary confirmed that flexibility would be available to support Ukrainians who are on work, study or visit visas to switch to different visa routes extending their stay and those on seasonal work visas would have their leave temporarily extended.
- The Prime Minister also announced that we are working at pace to establish the Local Sponsorship Scheme for Ukrainians with no ties to the UK to come here. The uncapped route will allow sponsors, such as communities or local authorities, to bring people to the UK. Sponsored individuals will be able to work and the sponsor would provide housing and integration support.

The routes and changes to visas come alongside the UK's ongoing efforts to tackle the emerging humanitarian crisis, which were bolstered this week by additional funding, with total emergency and aid support for Ukraine now at £400m, alongside the 1,000 troops who are on standby to help those forced to flee.