

# Emergency airlifts for Ukrainian refugees in Poland

On Wednesday, I returned from the Ukraine-Poland border. When I was there, I met **refugees who have been forced to flee Putin's assault on their homes, including people who are desperate to come to the UK – often to join family members.** I was proud to see many British aid workers and volunteers providing support and the generosity of the British public who are offering their homes.

The Conservatives' heartlessly inadequate response to countless Ukrainian women and children fleeing Putin's bombs is shameful.

However, **I was appalled by the lack of any organised UK Government-sponsored or supported welcome and the absence of UK Government personnel on the ground at the border.** This stood in stark contrast to 19 other nations who were present on the ground.

It is very frustrating that, despite the many recent U-turns on visas, **the Government still refuses to act on resettlement and to facilitate safe and quick passage to the UK.** The Conservatives' heartlessly inadequate response to countless Ukrainian women and children fleeing Putin's bombs is shameful.

**Since the very start of this war, the Liberal Democrats have been calling for a resettlement programme,** working with the UNHCR and other refugee agencies to bring Ukrainian refugees to the UK, as we did for those fleeing Assad's war in Syria.

I have written to Liz Truss, the Foreign Secretary and Priti Patel, the Home Secretary, urging the Government to **launch an immediate emergency airlift operation to resettle Ukrainian refugees currently arriving in Poland who want to come to the UK.** Given the scale of the Ukrainian refugee crisis, it is only right that our country plays its part. You can read my letter below.

Britain has a long and proud tradition of giving sanctuary to those fleeing violence and persecution. It is clear that the British people are prepared to honour that tradition and welcome Ukrainian refugees with open arms. The Conservative Government's actions have let down the British people.

Without some sort of resettlement scheme, ideally far more open and flexible than past schemes, many refugees will never be able to get to the UK to take up the incredible offers of help from people in our country. There is also a very **real danger that some refugees will fall into the hands of human traffickers and people smugglers.**

Surely these families have been through enough? It's urgent that people are now transported to safety and help so they can start

rebuilding their lives.

We must prevent that, by **providing safe and fast transportation for Ukrainian refugees seeking to come to the UK**. The Government should send personnel to the Ukrainian border now, ideally working with the UK's own specialist refugee and aid charities, to form new welcome groups with the charities already on the ground.

We must also provide free flights to the UK, with coaches to the nearest Polish airports from key border crossing points and establish welcoming reception centres for the refugees here on arrival at the UK.

The queues of **refugees are exhausted and traumatised**. Surely these families have been through enough? It's urgent that people are now transported to safety and help so they can start rebuilding their lives.

**Emergency airlifts are now the best guarantee for these refugees to get to the UK safely and swiftly, to the kindness and compassion of the British public waiting for them.**

[Go to Source](#)

Author:

---

## [Meet the Technology Blog](#)

**Over the weekend, we unveiled a new Liberal Democrat Website.**

It's the Technology Blog, which you can see here: <https://tech.libdems.org.uk>

**This blog is hugely exciting – because it's been built on our brand new website platform, Fleet.**

Fleet is intended to replace both Nationbuilder and Prater Raines FOCI for the party.

We're building Fleet in collaboration with the team at Prater Raines and it's based on the open source Typo3 framework – which is widely used by organisations with a federated structure (like us!).

We're building Fleet in collaboration with the team at Prater Raines

[Go to Source](#)

Author:

---

## Reforming the Criminal Records System

Stopping criminals from reoffending is crucial for cutting crime and making our communities safer. The Conservative Government is failing badly on that score: rehabilitation is poor and reoffending rates are far too high.

We know that **stable employment is a key factor that reduces the risk of reoffending**, helping people to build lives free from crime. But the current rules around criminal records can negatively affect people's job prospects, as well as their ability to travel, adopt, access domestic violence shelters, and many other parts of civil life.

There are over 11 million people residing in the United Kingdom who have a criminal record. **Currently, no criminal record information is deleted, including crimes committed by those under 18.** Criminal record information remains on both the Disclosure and Barring Service system and the Police National Database.

A significant number of high-profile companies offer employment to large numbers of prisoners, with very successful results. However, many employers are reluctant to hire ex-offenders. Some fear that doing so would damage the image of their business.

The Lammy Review in 2017 concluded "the records disclosure regime hampers people with convictions from starting lives" and recommended "a system which involves looking favourably on those who committed crimes as children or young adults, and can demonstrate that they have changed since their conviction".

**The rules around criminal records need to be reformed, so that people do not need to declare old or minor convictions.**

In new policy passed by members today, Liberal Democrats are calling for:

- **an end to the blanket policy of retention of all criminal records.**
- **police not to retain any personal information or criminal record if the offender is given an absolute discharge by the court** – meaning that no further action is taken, because either the offence was very minor, or the court considers that the experience has been enough of a deterrent.
- **police to delete all criminal cautions, conditional discharges, and associated personal information after 6 years if the person does not reoffend in that time.**
- **the government to develop guidance on how long criminal records should be retained for sentenced crimes and cases where the person reoffends.**
- **criminal records to only be permanent in cases of serious crimes and**

**matters of national security.**

- judges to set how long a crime should stay on the offender's record at the point of sentencing.
- police to only hold records for any other dealings with the police if the police determine it is in the public interest.

[Read the full motion](#)

A more flexible system will lead to more effective policing, by focusing on those who commit serious crimes and pose the greatest risk.

**The police would still retain records of serious criminals and anyone who is identified as a threat to national security.** They would also be able to keep the records of suspects where it is in the public interest.

Liberal Democrats understand that the key to building communities that are free from crime is to make sure that ex-offenders go on to lead lives free from crime. That means putting rehabilitation at the heart of our criminal justice system. This motion builds on our existing policies to do just that.

[Go to Source](#)

Author:

---

## [Ed Davey Speech to Spring Conference](#)

[Go to Source](#)

Author:

---

## [Swift justice for victims and offenders](#)

A robust and well-functioning justice system is a foundation stone of society.

**But in England and Wales we are facing a soaring backlog of court cases.**

The backlog of outstanding criminal cases in the Crown Court stood at 59,928 at the end of September. 13,202 cases in the backlog are more than a year old.

**A Crown Court case now takes an average of 23 months from offence to completion.**

Court backlogs have caused the number of people being held in prison on remand to rise by 48% since 2018.

The independent Chief Inspectors of Constabulary, the Crown Prosecution Service, Prisons, and Probation have identified the “unprecedented and very serious court backlogs” as **“the greatest threat to the proper operation of the criminal justice system”**.

Long delays increase the number of people held in prison on remand, putting even more strain on overcrowded prisons. It can also lead to victims and witnesses withdrawing, making it more likely that the case collapses.

The Government aims to reduce the Crown Court backlog to 53,000 by March 2025, but this would still leave it 59% larger than at the end of 2018.

It's a mystery how they plan to achieve even this unambitious target when they are failing to recruit enough judges in the face of the criminal justice system workforce crisis. The number of full-practice criminal barristers fell by 11% between 2016-17 and 2019-20, and the permanent courts staff has shrunk by 10% since 2015.

72 'Nightingale' courtrooms were opened between July 2020 and July 2021 to increase capacity, 38 of them serving the Crown Court, but the Chancellor has refused to fund the 33 extra Nightingale courtrooms requested by the Ministry of Justice.

**The court backlog has grown massively during the pandemic, but was already a growing problem before Covid hit.** The Conservative Government cut the number of court sitting days, leading to a 23% rise in the number of outstanding cases in the Crown Court in 2019-20.

Some people have proposed tackling the backlog by **reducing the number of jurors, and removing the right to a jury trial in certain cases.**

This is a ridiculous suggestion – **trial by jury has been a fundamental part of the British justice system for more than 800 years**, and is integral to upholding an individual's right to a fair trial.

Police officers, court staff, judges and lawyers have worked tirelessly to keep our criminal justice system going through the Covid pandemic, but they have been let down by the Government's failure to provide adequate support and resources.

A truly sickening consequence of this situation is that more than 1,300 rape cases are waiting to be brought before the Crown Court.

**The backlog adds insult to injury.** Survivors of sexual violence constantly relive their trauma while their court cases are pending. They desperately need closure and they deserve that perpetrators are swiftly brought to justice.

We cannot keep failing survivors of sexual violence. We need urgent improvements across our whole justice system to ensure survivors are not left waiting whilst their attackers walk free.

**Today Liberal Democrat members called for a new target of halving the time from offence to sentencing for all criminals.**

To achieve this, we are calling for:

- Extra Nightingale courtrooms to increase capacity.
- A workforce strategy to ensure there are enough criminal barristers.
- A new data strategy across the criminal justice system, to ensure that capacity meets demand, and to understand the needs of all users, especially victims, vulnerable people and those from ethnic minority backgrounds.
- The rejection of any proposals to weaken the right to trial by jury
- Extra funding for victims' services.

We are also fighting to:

- Restore community court buildings where still available, and invest in new user-friendly premises where required and justified.
- Reduce the number of people in prison on remand.
- Make the legal aid system simpler and more generous for both criminal and civil cases, with everyone in receipt of means-tested benefits automatically eligible.
- Establish a new right to affordable, reasonable legal assistance with a new, independent Justice Commission to monitor and enforce it.

[Read the full motion](#)

Even before the pandemic, Conservatives let this backlog soar out of control. They need to now get a grip and ensure that justice is served.

**Justice delayed is justice denied. The Conservative Government's failure to get to grips with the backlog in the criminal courts is letting down victims and their families, witnesses, and defendants.**

[Go to Source](#)

Author: