

The Rt. Hon. Priti Patel, M.P.
Secretary of State for the Home
Department
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Councillor Emily Smith
Leader of the Council

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Dear Ms Patel,

As you know, this country has a proud history of providing sanctuary for those fleeing war and persecution. When we see the horrendous footage from Ukraine of the death, destruction and millions of women, children and vulnerable people trying to reach safety, our natural response is to want to help.

I've personally been humbled by the overwhelming response Vale residents and businesses have shown in wanting to support the humanitarian efforts, but there's a feeling of helplessness as we wait for more details on how the council and our communities can do this. I am pleased your colleague Mr Gove has announced there will be a sponsorship scheme, but I urge the government to get the guidance and resources the council needs to deliver it, to us at speed.

Nevertheless, the scheme's success depends on refugees being able to reach the UK as quickly and painlessly as possible. I therefore urge you to do everything in your power to remove the red tape that's preventing this from happening and to make it simpler for refugees to get a visa to come to the UK – or better still remove the need for visas all together.

I have heard numerous stories of local residents trying to bring their family members to safety, only to find they are left in shelters and hotels in Romania or Poland waiting for visa applications to be processed. These are traumatised people fleeing a war zone and the delays, additional costs and complicated bureaucracy are causing further, unnecessary distress for them and their family members in the UK.

If EU countries including the Republic of Ireland can manage the situation without insisting on visas, I cannot see any reason why the UK government needs to make the process for refugees to reach their loved ones more difficult.

The need for safe, simple routes to sanctuary for those fleeing war in Ukraine also raises concerns with the Nationality and Borders Bill currently going through the legislative process. I therefore ask you to reflect on the content of that bill in light of Putin's invasion of Ukraine and the difficulties it has highlighted to ensure that people in the UK are not prevented from supporting those in need, because they have been forced to travel through another country on their way to ours.

Please suspend the need for Ukrainian people to have a visa before travelling to the UK while their country is being attacked and they are fleeing for their lives. And if you are not willing to do this, at the very least simplify the application process and urgently increase the resources available to ensure these traumatised people are not left stranded waiting for papers to be issued.

My council and our communities are ready and anxious to help.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Emily Smith
Leader of the Council