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The Rt. Hon. Priti Patel M.P.

Secretary of State
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
LONDON
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24th March 2022

Dear Priti

Fast-Track Visa Scheme for Ukrainian Students and Academics

We are writing to you today to request an extension to the Government's visa programme for Ukrainian refugees to academics and students.

We have welcomed the Government's decision to adapt and expand the visa scheme, to offer sanctuary for those with family members in the United Kingdom and a humanitarian sponsorship programme.

The 150,000 applications to house Ukrainian refugees demonstrates the will and determination of the British people to support those most in need. As a country, we have always stood up on the side of freedom and for what is right, and we must do so again today. Where we can help the most, we should.

The Education Secretary has created the provision for the arrival of 100,000 Ukrainian refugees for places of schools in England, which shows the extent of our collective resolve to provide a safe haven and offer British services.

However, there is one area where we feel that the Government can do more to provide targeted support for Ukrainians in the U.K. One absolutely critical area in which the current programme can be expanded is that of academia. Thousands of Ukrainian academics and students have been displaced and disrupted by Russia's illegal invasion and occupation. They need Western institutions to continue to study and produce independent research.

It is important that President Putin's narrative that Ukraine is not a country, is challenged collectively in academic discourse. Ukrainian academia should be enabled to document and record collective struggle and the bravery shown by a united people. They are uniquely positioned to challenge the narrative of the Putin regime, maintaining the continuity of Ukrainian civil society and civic identity. We should be welcoming them into our academic sphere.

Our European partners and bordering nations have done remarkable work in bringing in over two million refugees. The vast majority of them will want to go back to their country when the war is over. Academia is one area where all European countries need to share the responsibility and one area where Britain should take the lead.

We should be offering a platform for scholars, journalists and activists at risk to continue their work – which is so critical to counter Russian disinformation. These academics can be matched with suitable British institutions to give them the best opportunity to continue their work, where there are mechanisms in place to support them.

Student visas should be issued in conjunction with education providers, to bring in a sustainable number of students, where places can be made available. Advances in hybrid learning will provide the continuation of studies during the transition into university in the U.K. Those with English language skills would be the most suitable for placement in British institutions.

The Government should also offer financial support to displaced academics and students, as well as financial support to universities to accommodate Ukrainian staff and students.

Adopting this process may be subject to quotas but should be implemented in co-operation with our European partners to ensure the greatest opportunity for Ukrainian academic life to continue. Already individual universities and institutions are offering positions to Ukrainian academics, but this should be extended to state programmes and to students as well, with the necessary financial support to universities to implement this.

This fast-track visa scheme will enable the continuance of Ukrainian civic identity and civil institutions. These are people of high social and human capital, all or most of whom will want to return to Ukraine to help rebuild Ukrainian civic institutions, politics, culture and economy. This scheme would be an expression of British values of tolerance, freedom of expression and democracy, a re-assertion of Britain as a historical and global centre of learning, and of academic openness and diversity.

It is vital that at this critical juncture, we make the necessary expansions to the scheme to provide the greatest impact. We will support Ukraine and assure that those who stay to fight will, along with their families, be safe and secure, until such a time that they will return home to rebuild their country.

Thank you very much for taking the time to consider this proposal, and I look forward to your timely response.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Rosindell M.P.