

The Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
Home Secretary
2 Marsham Street
SW1P 4DF
Sent by email

11th March 2022

Dear Ms Patel,

Re: Ukrainian Refugee Crisis

The British Association of Social Workers (BASW) represents over 22,000 social workers across the four countries of the UK. As you will know, social workers have specific legal duties (enshrined in a variety of laws both UK-wide and nation specific) which address a range of responsibilities relating to both adults and children.

Social workers have considerable experience with working with refugees. For example, social workers have legal duties towards unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and many social workers also have experience of supporting first generation migrants, for example, families who have No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). Many of the Ukrainian refugees who come to the UK will face additional challenges, they may have a disability, they may be traumatised by war and will need to access mental health services, and social workers, alongside other professionals, will be responsible for providing services and support.

As you know, the unfolding catastrophe in Ukraine is creating an unprecedented refugee challenge. We at BASW welcome the first steps outlined by yourself on 11th March to streamline the visa application process. We recognise some improvements in easing safe passage to enable the UK to play its proper part in this European refugee effort, but it is not enough and remains discriminatory and not in keeping with what is needed in this unprecedented crisis. We also look forward to the announcement scheduled for Monday 14th March on how individuals, groups and organisations can sponsor Ukrainian refugees. We also acknowledge that the situation is complex and fast-moving.

The Government, through law and policy, is responsible for who can and cannot enter the country. In relation to Ukrainian refugees, the Government needs to go much further, and much faster, in scaling up effective responses to meet this huge need. At the time of writing Poland alone has accepted 1.3 million refugees, in contrast to the reported 1305 Ukrainian refugees currently accepted by the UK.

We have grave concerns about the practicalities of the schemes being developed. For example, the on-line visa scheme announced on 11th March assumes that applicants have a smartphone, it

is charged, that they have a roaming contract and they have documentation with them, all big assumptions after individuals and families have been fleeing a war zone. As in any European country there will be individuals who have never had a passport, and many families fleeing the war are likely never to have been documented in the first place for example, the Roma community.

To date the Government's response to refugees from Ukraine has fallen far short of what can be expected. As the invasion of Ukraine extends west the number of refugees will continue to grow.

The Government must move much further and much faster in scaling up its responses to the refugee crisis. Our members will be proactive in working to ameliorate the humanitarian catastrophe, both as social workers and as citizens, but the UK must have the framework in place to respond effectively to the refugee crisis and only you as Home Secretary can deliver this.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ruth Allen', followed by a horizontal line extending to the right.

Dr Ruth Allen, CEO, BASW

Contact Officer: Kerri.Prince@basw.co.uk