

Refugees need solidarity, not a hostile environment

Millions of refugees are now leaving Ukraine because of the Russian invasion. Many of them are women and children. This is a tragedy of unprecedented proportions for Europe in recent history.

This tragedy is bringing out the best in humanitarian responses, as ordinary people and most governments respond positively. But it is also bringing out the worst, in the form of racism and xenophobia by a minority by right-wing and neo-fascist groups. The Westminster government is the only one in Europe not to offer visa-free entry for refugees from Ukraine, even for those with close family ties.

This refugee crisis has highlighted the hypocrisy, double standards and racism/Islamophobia at the heart of Fortress Europe. Refugees from Ukraine are being treated much more favourably – but in ways that ALL refugees seeking sanctuary from war and persecution should be treated, but are not. The treatment of refugees from Ukraine demonstrates that all the arguments to justify the harsh treatment of refugees are bogus and based on bigotry and racism.

The Westminster government maintains its hostile environment. Unlike all other European governments who have suspended visa requirements, Boris Johnson and Priti Patel insist that all refugees must apply for a visa. Bureaucratic manoeuvres are used to halt, delay or prevent applications for visas. These delays are causing pain and suffering to many people, including children.

This contrasts sharply with the generalised and vacuous statements by the Westminster government in support of the cause and plight of the people of Ukraine. Johnson's and Patel's position is outrageous and nasty

In response to the refugee crises, A*CR calls for:

- All visa requirements for refugees fleeing war and repression around the world should be immediately suspended.
- Offices to register refugees entering the UK should be established at all ports of entry. All steps should be taken to facilitate refugees arriving at ports of entry safely and at no cost.
- The carriers liability requirements should be suspended for airlines and other transport companies to help the entry of refugees without fear of penalty to the carrier.
- Emergency aid and a guaranteed package of support for all refugees arriving in the UK should be established including:
 - education provision for children;
 - support for living costs; provision of accommodation, if necessary by compulsory seizure of buildings;
 - counselling and other social services support;
 - English language and free legal support.
 - All refugees should be automatically granted leave to remain in the UK with the same right as residents to work and access to all public service.

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