



# LET THEM COME

## How the UK Can Help Ukrainians

By Ben Ramanaukas

BRIEFING PAPER

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Russia's invasion of Ukraine is causing immense suffering for the people of Ukraine. The majority of Russian and Belarusian citizens are also victims of their own governments.
- The UK Government should temporarily waive visa requirements for all Ukrainians and allow them to live, work, and study in the UK. This temporary protection should last for at least five years (more generous than the EU and current UK policies), accompanied by existing paths for asylum, longer term visas and citizenships.
- The visa system should be reformed to make it far easier for highly skilled people and their close relatives (properly vetted) from Russia and Belarus to move to the UK. A new characteristic should be added to our points-based system, granting 20 points for "Target Nation Status".
- A "Liberty Pass" should be created to attract the most highly skilled to the UK from countries suffering from conflict or oppressive regimes, including Ukraine, Russia and Belarus. This would both provide a fast tracked £1,875 payment for three months for those set to take advantage of the Global Talent Visa or under the Ukrainian visa waiver (who meet the same talent criteria), as well as waive visa fees.
- There is a strong moral case to be made for offering refuge to people fleeing war and persecution.
- An influx of workers, especially those who are highly skilled, will bring huge economic benefits to the UK.
- An exodus of highly skilled workers from Russia and Belarus will damage their economies and credibility, rightly punishing their leaders, helping to undermine their grip on power and reducing their capacity to develop military capabilities.
- It will be a boost to the UK's international reputation as the country will be seen as welcoming to refugees and standing up for freedom.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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The invasion of Ukraine by Russian and Belarusian forces is bringing death and destruction, with many facing a choice between fleeing their homes or living in a warzone and potentially under a repressive Russian controlled regime. Ordinary Russian and Belarusian people are also experiencing oppression from their leaders and are set to experience increased hardship as a result of the invasion and subsequent economic collapse caused by our sanctions.

The Government of the United Kingdom should waive all visa requirements for people leaving Ukraine and allow them to live, work, and study with a path to citizenship. The UK government should also make it far easier to allow talented Russians and Belarusians such as those working in STEM to move to the UK, and in some cases actively incentivising the most skilled.

## THE MORAL CASE

There is a strong case for welcoming refugees and this has been recognised in numerous international treaties.<sup>1</sup> The people of Ukraine are suffering intolerable levels of hardship with many of them facing death on a daily basis and have had their homes destroyed and relatives killed. This suffering is set to continue and increase as the war continues. There is also a strong possibility that parts or even the entirety of Ukraine will come under Russian control. As such, many fundamental freedoms will be eroded and human rights undermined. This will obviously be an issue for all Ukrainian people, but especially for those deemed ‘undesirable’ by the Putin regime such as political activists and sexual minorities.<sup>2</sup>

The majority of Ukrainian refugees are women and children.<sup>3</sup> Many of these will have lost their husbands, brothers, and fathers who would have been killed or captured while defending their country. These refugees will therefore be particularly traumatised and vulnerable. Moreover, female and child refugees often face particular dangers and difficulties, especially when they are travelling or in refugee camps.<sup>4</sup>

We also need to address the notion of the first safe country. There is no requirement for refugees to remain in the first safe country they reach.<sup>5</sup> As such, it is important to push back against calls for most Ukrainians to remain in Eastern European countries. What is more, although the welcome and support given to Ukrainians

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholson, F., Kumin, J., ‘A guide to international refugee protection and building state asylum systems’, UNHCR, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Sabbagh, D., ‘Russia is creating lists of Ukrainians to be killed or sent to camps, US claims’, The Guardian, 21 February 2022.

<sup>3</sup> BBC News, ‘How many refugees have fled Ukraine and where are they going?’, 14 March 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Obradovic, M., ‘Protecting female refugees against sexual and gender-based violence in camps’, UNU, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Yeo, C., ‘Are refugees obliged to claim asylum in the first safe country they reach?’, FreeMovement, 2019.

in Poland has been admirable, this might not be a safe country for certain groups such as sexual minorities.<sup>6</sup>

There is also a strong moral case for allowing those not in immediate danger to move to a different country to improve their lives. Many Russian and Belarusian citizens are also victims of their respective governments. For example, political dissent is not allowed and those who protest against their governments are often subjected to arrest, torture, and imprisonment.<sup>7</sup> Religious and sexual minorities also face persecution in Russia and Belarus.

Moreover, it is the people of Russia and Belarus will experience increased suffering as a result of the invasion of Ukraine. Economic sanctions imposed on their countries will drastically increase the cost of living and will likely lead to job losses and poverty for many. Furthermore, international businesses withdrawing from Russia and Russian airlines being barred from most of Europe's airspace means that opportunities and life chances for young people in Russia and Belarus look set to decrease.

The UK has a long and proud history of welcoming refugees and those who want to start a new life in this country. But successive governments have often taken a less liberal approach to immigration, making it difficult for people to move to the UK. This has also been the case with refugees, who are forced to live in unsuitable environments. What is more, those claiming asylum are not allowed to work meaning that they experience further hardship. This is currently the situation faced by people coming from Ukraine who have to navigate time-consuming and complicated procedures if they wish to move to the UK. This is particularly the case for religious and sexual minorities who have to prove that they are a member of such a group.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, there is a strong moral case for waiving visa requirements for all Ukrainians who wish to move to the UK. They should be allowed to work and study in the country. We should also make it easier for talented people from Russia and Belarus to move to the UK.

## THE ECONOMIC CASE

There is a very strong case for increased immigration in general. The consensus among economists is that immigration brings numerous benefits to the welcoming nation while the potential downsides are exaggerated or non-existent.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Carlisle, M., 'After fleeing Ukraine, LGBTQ refugees search for safety in countries hostile to their rights', *Time*, 10 March 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Human Rights Watch, 'Belarus: systematic beatings, torture of protestors', 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Powell, A., "'Sexuality" through the kaleidoscope: sexual orientation, identity, and behaviour in asylum claims in the United Kingdom', *Laws* 10 (4), 90-110.

<sup>9</sup> Portes, J., 'The economics of migration', *Contexts*, 2019;18(2):12-17.

There have been numerous studies which demonstrate that immigration does not lead to lower wages or job opportunities, including for low-skilled natives. For example, Nobel Laureate David Card conducted research into the impact of the Mariel Boatlift which saw an influx of Cuban immigrants enter the Miami labour market. His study revealed that immigration has virtually no negative impact on wages or job opportunities.<sup>10</sup> Further studies have reached similar conclusions.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, some studies have shown that immigration can actually lead to increased job opportunities and higher wages for the existing population. Although immigration does increase the supply of workers it also increases the demand for new goods and services and so job opportunities and wages increase as a result. Furthermore, immigration can lead to firms becoming more productive which can lead to higher wages for workers.<sup>12</sup>

There is also evidence which suggests that immigration leads to more innovation.<sup>13</sup> Increased innovation means exciting new products and services which have the ability to dramatically improve all our lives.

Increased immigration can also lead to better health outcomes for workers in destination countries. This has been most beneficial for lower skilled native workers who are often pushed into less dangerous jobs and roles with better schedules and lower risk of injury.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, many immigrants, especially in the UK, work in roles in health and social care, and as there are labour shortages in this sector, positive health outcomes could increase as a result.

Several nations and companies can serve as helpful case studies for the positive impact of immigration for welcoming nations. For example, the economic development of Israel in the 1990s was largely driven by immigration from the former USSR. Immigration led to increased innovation and entrepreneurship and helped transform Israel into a technology powerhouse.<sup>15</sup> There are also a huge number of highly successful companies which were founded by immigrants or their progeny.<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, we should expect similar positive impacts for the UK as a result of immigrants from Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus. However, it is reasonable to assume that a policy which actively encourages highly skilled workers, especially in STEM, would magnify these benefits for the UK.

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<sup>10</sup> Card, D., 'The impact of the Mariel Boatlift on the Miami labor market', *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, Vol. 43, No. 2. (Jan., 1990), pp. 245-257.

<sup>11</sup> Clemens, M., Hunt, J., 'Research on the wage and employment impact of refugees shows modest or no harmful effects on native workers', CEPR, 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Peri, G., 'Do immigrant workers depress the wages of native workers?' IZA, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Burchardi, K., Chaney, T., Hassan, T., Tarquinio, L., Terry, S., 'Immigration, innovation, and growth', NBER, 2020.

<sup>14</sup> Alacevich, C., Nicodemo, C., 'Immigration and work related injuries: evidence from Italian administrative data', IZA, 2019.

<sup>15</sup> Razin, A., 'Israel's immigration story: globalization lessons', NBER, 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Dumitriu, S., Stewart, A., 'Job creators: the immigrant founders of Britain's fastest growing businesses', The Entrepreneurs Network.

The UK has a comparative advantage in sectors such as technology, artificial intelligence, engineering, computing, and advanced manufacturing. Breakthroughs in these industries have the potential to bring economic growth, higher wages, and more job opportunities to the different regions of the country. Some of the most innovative companies in the world, producing cutting-edge, exciting, and innovative products, are based in the UK. Moreover, the UK is home to many of the world's greatest universities, conducting research which can lead to innovations and developments which could dramatically improve all of our lives.

Despite these advantages, the UK has a shortage of people studying and working in STEM, with a shortfall of approximately 173,000 workers.<sup>17</sup> This shortage of workers in STEM means that innovation is not as high as it could be and so the UK economy is not meeting its potential. As such, reforming the visa system to make it easier for highly skilled workers to come here will help to plug this gap.

A related benefit could potentially be an increase in the number of women working in STEM. Russia has been effective at encouraging women into STEM<sup>18</sup>, and so a significant proportion of the highly skilled workers who could move to the UK would be women. There are currently far fewer women than men working in STEM in the UK. There are numerous factors which help to explain this, one being a lack of female role models. Therefore, an influx of highly skilled women could encourage younger women to study STEM subjects at university.

## **IMPACT ON RUSSIA AND BELARUS**

As discussed in the above section, allowing highly skilled workers to move to the UK would be hugely beneficial to the UK. This gain to the UK would come at the expense of Russia and Belarus.

Russia and Belarus would be losing some of their most productive and highly skilled workers, potentially causing a short term shock to their economies and further pressure on the regime to end the conflict. They would face a shortage of people working in vital industries in health, science, technology, and engineering. This would potentially lead to a decline in competitiveness with firms being forced to increase wages despite productivity decreasing. It could also lead to a decline in innovation and entrepreneurship as entrepreneurs would have a higher chance of success in the UK.

Furthermore, it would have a negative impact on tax revenue for the Russian and Belarusian governments. An outflow of young and highly skilled workers will reduce the Russian and Belarusian tax bases and so damage their government's ability to finance the invasion.

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<sup>17</sup> University of Manchester, 'An open letter to the government to help tackle the UK's engineering skills shortage', 17 November 2021.

<sup>18</sup> Bullock, C., 'Why is Russia so good at encouraging women into tech?', BBC, 21 April 2017.

Moreover, waiving visa requirements for Ukrainian nationals will prevent the Ukrainian labour force from being exploited by the Russian and Belarusian governments. An invasion may allow these governments to gain some benefits from the resources they have stolen from Ukraine, but they should not be able to benefit from the labour of the Ukrainian people.

The impact of this outflow could, coupled with sanctions, bring economic hardship to Russia and Belarus. In the short term this may increase the difficulty of financing the invasion and subjugation of Ukraine. In the longer term it could lead to growing unrest among the populations and elites of Russia and Belarus which will hopefully lead to liberal political reform or even regime change.

It is worth noting that in normal circumstances net emigration can also be positive for a nation. Young workers, for example, learn more skills which they then use on their return to their home country.<sup>19</sup> Migrant workers also send remittances home which have numerous economic benefits such as poverty alleviation, increased investment, and higher economic growth.<sup>20</sup> Greater freedom of movement also tends to lead to increased economic ties between the two countries, leading to greater economic growth and improved living standards in the sending nation.<sup>21</sup> Given the ongoing situation and the proposals outlined below, these are not normal circumstances.

## **FUTURE CONFLICT**

A further consequence of enabling highly skilled STEM workers from Russia and Belarus to move to the UK would be on the ability of these countries to wage war in the future. In order to effectively wage war, a nation needs high tech weapons and vehicles which can at least compete with the equipment of the enemy.

Designing and creating new military equipment is a research-intensive activity. An outflow of scientists, engineers, and AI specialists would mean that Russia and Belarus would have less people with the necessary skills to undertake the necessary research, thereby significantly weakening the Russian and Belarussian militaries and their ability to fight conflicts in the future.

It would also give the UK an advantage against hostile states. Making it easier for highly skilled STEM workers to move to the UK will give us access to highly intelligent people working in science, technology, and engineering including in the defence sector. These people, and those they train, would be able to design new weapons and defences in order to better protect the UK and its allies.

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<sup>19</sup> Wahba, J., 'Who benefits from return migration to developing countries?', IZA, 2021.

<sup>20</sup> Harrison, G., Barton, L., 'The remittance effect: a lifeline for developing economies through the pandemic and into recovery', Oxford Economics, 2021.

<sup>21</sup> Grossmann, V., 'How immigration affects investment and productivity in host and home countries', IZA, 2016.

The UK should also allow all Russian and Belarusian military personnel to defect as long as they have not committed war crimes. This would further hamper the ability of Russia and Belarus to wage war.

There are memorable historical examples of immigrants making significant contributions to their welcoming nations' war efforts. For example, many Polish pilots helped to defend the UK during the Battle of Britain<sup>22</sup>, while a significant proportion of the scientists working on the Manhattan Project were immigrants.<sup>23</sup>

## **BRITAIN'S REPUTATION**

Waiving visa requirements for all Ukrainians and making it easier for highly skilled Russians and Belarusians to move here will also boost the UK's international reputation in a number of ways.

It will help to counter the propaganda propagated by the Kremlin that the UK and the West hates Russia and Belarus. By taking a more liberal approach to immigrants from these countries and in many cases investing in them and training them, we will demonstrate that the UK does care about the people of these countries, even though it is not on good terms with their respective ruling regimes. This could potentially garner support for the UK in Russia and Belarus and further undermine the leadership of those countries.

It should hopefully lead to stronger ties in the future if there is regime change in Russia and Belarus. When Ukraine regains its freedom many people in that country will no doubt be extremely grateful for the UK's support during the invasion and will want to work closely with the UK.

It will also signal to the world that the UK is a place which is welcoming to refugees and open to immigration. Moreover, it will show that the UK is still willing to take important decisions and play a role in European and global affairs.

## **POLICY PROPOSALS**

### **VISA WAIVERS**

The UK Government should temporarily waive visa requirements for all Ukrainians and allow them to live, work, and study in the UK. This temporary protection should last for at least five years, which would be more generous than the EU's policy and the one currently proposed by the UK Government. It should be accompanied by existing paths for asylum, longer term visas and citizenships. Although it

<sup>22</sup> Gaisor, M., 'The Polish pilots who flew in the Battle of Britain', Imperial War Museum, August 2015.

<sup>23</sup> Atomic Heritage Foundation, 'Scientist Refugees and the Manhattan Project', January 2019.



is important that security checks do take place, these should only happen once the person has safely reached the UK.

### **TARGET NATION STATUS**

Under the Government’s current visa system, those wishing to be accepted need at least 70 points, with points being given for salary, education, and English language skills.<sup>24</sup>

The visa system should be reformed to make it far easier for highly skilled people and their close relatives from Russia and Belarus to move to the UK. A new characteristic should be added to our points-based system, granting 20 points for “Target Nation Status”. This Status can be extended to citizens of other countries who are facing oppression or whose regimes are hostile to the West. In order to undermine the economies of these countries, remittances should be banned.

### **LIBERTY PASSES**

A “Liberty Pass” should be created to attract the most highly skilled and their families to the UK from countries suffering from conflict or oppressive regimes, including Ukraine, Russia and Belarus. This would both provide a fast tracked £1,875 payment for three months for those set to take advantage of the Global Talent Visa.

Similar criteria should apply for the Liberty Pass as the Global Talent Visa<sup>25</sup>, in that they must be at least 18 years old and a leader or a potential leader in academia or research, arts and culture, or digital technology. The application process should be streamlined in order to ensure people are accepted more quickly. The application fee and healthcare surcharge should be waived. Holders of the Liberty Pass should be able to apply for indefinite leave to remain after one year, rather than after three years under the Global Talent Visa.

### **OPTIMISTIC FUTURE**

Hopefully, the proposals set out in this paper—alongside the broad package of sanctions and the resistance of Ukraine—will mean that Russia and Belarus will withdraw from Ukraine. If this happens Ukraine will need a huge amount of help to rebuild.

The UK could work with the US, EU and other allies on a new Marshall Plan. This could involve investment so that war damaged cities in Ukraine can be rebuilt. Ukraine might join the EU and the UK could start negotiations for free trade agreements with Russia and Belarus if they liberalise (potentially under new leadership)

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<sup>24</sup> UK Government, ‘The UK’s points-based immigration system’, February 2022.

<sup>25</sup> UK Government, ‘Apply for the global talent visa’.

The UK should enable the people who came here to return to their homes so that they can play a part in rebuilding their countries. Their expertise and the skills they have gained in the UK will be invaluable for helping their countries. Many of them will no doubt have developed strong attachments to the UK and so they should be able to remain if they wish or work and travel freely in the UK after they have returned home. As discussed above, this will hopefully improve the UK's reputation in Russia and Belarus and allow us to encourage them to finally play a leading role in the world as part of the liberal international rules-based order.

## **CONCLUSION**

The UK should waive all visa requirements for Ukrainian nationals and allow them to live, work, and study here. It should also reform the visa system to make it far easier for highly skilled Russian and Belarusians working in STEM to move to the UK. In some cases the most highly skilled workers should be incentivised to work or study in the UK.

This is the right thing to do morally, it will bring huge benefits to the UK, it will help to cripple Putin's economy and war machine, and it will boost Britain's international standing.