

**“THE WELCOME TO UKRAINIAN REFUGEES
IS UNIQUELY COMPASSIONATE”**

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Since mankind first developed settled communities, violations of human rights by torture, inhuman or degrading punishment, and many other deprivations and sufferings have forced peoples to flee from their own homelands to take refuge elsewhere. In modern times they are classed as refugees until granted citizenship in their country of refuge. Millions of people sought sanctuary after World War I (1914-1918), and a series of international agreements were drafted to deal with this wave of refugees. “The number of refugees expanded dramatically during and after World War II (1939-1945) because millions more were forcibly displaced, exiled and shifted.”¹ UNHCR estimated that by mid-2021, for the first time in recorded history, there were as many as 89.3 million persons forcibly displaced and over 27.1 million refugees.²

The ongoing conflict between Ukraine and Russia (along with pro-Russian rebel groups) is known as the Russo-Ukrainian War. As a response to the Ukrainian “Revolution for Dignity” in February 2014, Russia launched a conflict with Ukraine over the status of Crimea and the Donbas, two regions that are

¹ Goodwin-Gill, G.S. and McAdam, J., 2021. *The refugee in international law*. Oxford University Press.

² www.refugeecouncil.org.au. (n.d.). *How many refugees are there in the world? - Refugee Council of Australia*. [online] Available at: <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/how-many-refugees/#:~:text=UNHCR%20most%20recently%20estimated%20that>.

internationally recognised as being a part of Ukraine.³ Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea, Ukraine's struggle with rebels backed by Russia in Donbas (2014-present), maritime events, cyberwarfare, and political challenges all occurred within the first eight years of the conflict. Russia launched a military build-up on the Russia-Ukraine border in late 2021, and on February 24, 2022, invaded Ukraine in full force.

The contemporary political unrest erupted between Russia and Ukraine impacting various sectors of the world economy, by obstructing the flow of goods, leading to dramatic price increases and product shortages, and causing worldwide food shortages.⁴ According to the World Food Programme, extreme food insecurity doubled in two years, from 135 million to 276 million. The Ukraine conflict might increase this to 323 million by 2022. A senior UN official is concerned that rising food, gasoline, and fertiliser prices due to the Ukraine crisis could cause global destabilisation, starvation, and unprecedented migration.⁵ Indeed, the exodus of

³ Wynnyckyj, M. (2019). *Ukraine's Maidan, Russia's War: A Chronicle and Analysis of the Revolution of Dignity*. Germany: Columbia University Press.

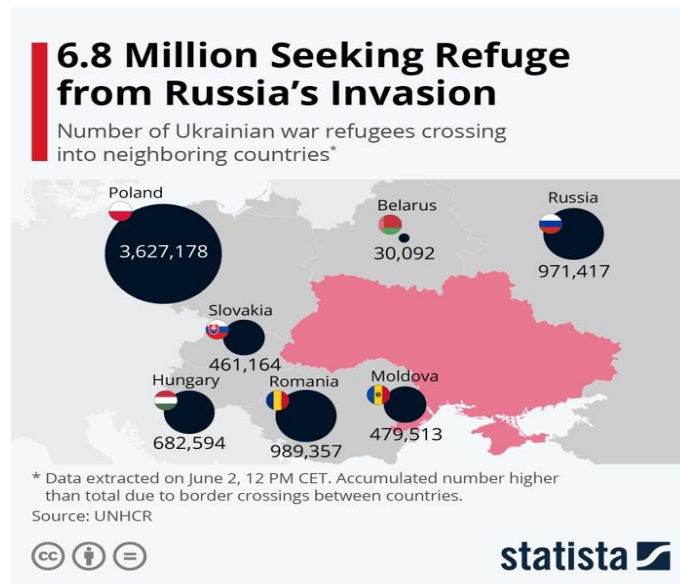
⁴ Stackpole, B. (2022). *Ripple effects from Russia-Ukraine war test global economies*. [online] MIT Sloan. Available at: <https://mitsloan.mit.edu/ideas-made-to-matter/ripple-effects-russia-ukraine-war-test-global-economies#:~:text=The%20Russia%2DUkraine%20war%20is>.

⁵ Press, T.A. (2022). Record number of people worldwide are moving toward starvation, U.N. warns. *NPR*. [online] 7 Jul. Available at: <https://www.npr.org/2022/07/07/1110219180/record-number-of-people-worldwide-are-moving-toward-starvation-u-n-warns> [Accessed 25 Jul. 2022].

citizens fleeing the deadly conflict was triggered immediately and quickly numbered in millions. Different organizations have been recording the data. According to the United Nations, more than 5.2 million Ukrainian migrants were registered in various European countries as of July 4th. More than 3.5 million people have applied for temporary residency in other countries.⁶

- Russia: (estimated) 1,412,425 Ukrainian refugees recorded,
- Poland: 1,194,642,
- Moldova: 82,700,
- Romania: 83,321,
- Slovakia: 79,770,
- Hungary: 25,800,
- Belarus: 9,820,

⁶ BBC (2022). Ukraine crisis: How many refugees and where might they go? *BBC News*. [online] 26 May. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-60555472>.



Statistics Ref: <https://www.statista.com/chart/26960/number-of-ukrainian-refugees-by-target-country/>

Others, especially those who went to Poland, Hungary, or Slovakia, have left for other countries. These countries share open borders with all other EU members. There are about 867,000 Ukrainians in Germany, over 382,768 in the Czech Republic, and 141,562 in Italy, according to the United Nations. Many thousands of Ukrainians have crossed into Russia from the rebel-controlled provinces of Luhansk and Donetsk.⁷

⁷ BBC (2022). Ukraine crisis: How many refugees and where might they go? *BBC News*. [online] 26 May. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-60555472>.

Though these migration statistics are concerning, the positive aspect is that they clearly demonstrate a ray of hope, namely the humanitarian approaches of the shelter-granting states. That the accommodation of refugees across Europe has been associated with a positive welcome from states and their peoples should be recognised. This has been manifested by the individual policies of major European countries to the refugee crisis.

Approach of the EU

Ukrainians now have an automatic right to reside and work in any of the EU's 27 members for up to three years allowing them to pursue active and useful roles within their host communities. Provision of homes to those with no existing family links along with essential information food and medical support provides security and goes some way towards replacing the quality of life which has been impacted.

Approach of the UK

Refugees are issued social welfare payments and access to schools, thus protecting educational opportunities and assisting their assimilation within UK society and the communities amongst whom they are settled.

Ukrainian citizens with immediate family members already residing in the United Kingdom (UK) are eligible for a new family-visa programme set up by the UK government. The government's initial strategy came under fire for not going far enough, so it launched the 'Homes for Ukraine' initiative to help Ukrainians without family in the United Kingdom to find permanent housing. This offers free housing for a minimum of six months to anyone in the United Kingdom. Online submissions are accepted, and British householders are granted £350 each month in exchange for taking Ukrainian refugees into their home. Lord Richard Harrington, the minister for refugees, has recently been pressurising the Treasury to improve the scheme by doubling the current £350 a month payment, in response to the hike in energy bills, mortgage costs and inflation. ⁸

Of some of the more imaginative schemes to provide emergency accommodation for the initial reception of refugees in the UK, has been the chartering of cruise ships by the Scottish Government. The MS Victoria, already docked in Edinburgh, was complemented in September 2022 By the MS Ambition, capable of housing 1,750 people and now docked in Glasgow. These vessels provide 'access to restaurants, child play facilities, shops, cleaning and communal

⁸ The Guardian, 'Double Ukraine refugee host payments to aid cost of living, says minister', 23 August 2022.

spaces,' and allow residents access to healthcare and benefits support services as well as the wider surroundings freely. ⁹

As of the 28th of June, the government had granted visas to 142,500 Ukrainians out of a total of 161,500 applications. As of the 27th of June, 86,600 people had entered the UK on a valid visa.

Approach of Poland:

On February 15, Poland started preparing for the possibility of a Russian invasion on Ukraine. Polish municipalities were instructed to prepare for as many as one million incoming refugees. More than 1,194,642 Ukrainian refugees were registered in Poland as of July 4. The Polish Government opened the borders to Ukrainian refugees and minimised the proceedings that are to be completed through the immigration process. ¹⁰

⁹ BBC News, 'Second cruise ship for Ukrainian refugees arrives in Glasgow', 1 September 2022.

¹⁰ BBC News (Russia- Ukraine war) 'How many Ukrainian refugees are there and where have they gone?' Published on 4 July, 2022.

Refugees are supplied essential commodities such as food, accommodation, and access to community services by the government as well as local communities. Assembly points were established for them which ensure safe passage without discrimination- work permit visas are also provided.

Approach of Moldova:

Moldova was one of the first countries to accept Odessa and Vinnytsia refugees.¹¹ Moldovan authorities have opened a crisis management centre to house and aid refugees. As of July 26, 549,333 Ukrainians had reached Moldova.¹² Natalia Gavrilița, Moldova's prime minister, announced on April 5 that 100,000 refugees, half of them children, live in Moldova. UN estimated 95,000 Ukrainians in Moldova on April 11.¹³

¹¹ Lami, G. and Sahota, S.K. (2022). The Russian invasion of Ukraine: some readings from Italian newspapers (20 February–5 March 2022). *Modern Italy*, 27(3), pp.199–206. doi:10.1017/mit.2022.21.

¹² "Refugees fleeing Ukraine (since 24 February 2022)". UNHCR. 2022. Archived from the original on 10 March 2022. Retrieved 3 June 2022.

¹³ "Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General". United Nations. 11 April 2022. Retrieved 11 April 2022.

Despite being one of Europe's poorest countries, it is home to proportionally more refugees than any other European nation. It has requested financial assistance to help deal with the current crisis and resultant pressure on services. Germany and other partners, notably France, Romania, and the European Union, agreed to deliver €659.5 million in aid to Moldova at a summit in Berlin on April 5.¹⁴ Along with provision for essential needs, bus travel is also given.

Approach of the Czech Republic

The Czech Republic is providing Ukrainian refugees with financial and educational help along with accommodation within the state. It was reported on March 7 that over 100,000 Ukrainians have found refuge in the Czech Republic.¹⁵ As the state neared the limit of its capacity, construction of refugee camps commenced allowing for the reception of further arrivals.

¹⁴ Escritt, Thomas (6 April 2022). "Donors give 659.5 mln euros in aid to Moldova". Reuters. Retrieved 6 April 2022.

¹⁵ Radio Prague International, "100 days since start of Russian invasion: how much has Czechia helped Ukraine?" [Online] Available at: <https://english.radio.cz/100-days-start-russian-invasion-how-much-has-czechia-helped-ukraine-8752216>

Approach of France

According to Gérard Darmanin, minister of the interior, 7,500 refugees were allowed to enter the country. 100 000 people can be accommodated, according to France.

Local town governments are setting up temporary housing, including for people arriving in Calais in search of UK visas. While Paris is building up a unique program to integrate Ukrainian refugee children into the French school system, the French government has also established a website to assist in connecting families offering accommodation with NGOs. Refugees have found a warm welcome at the Gare de l'Est station in Paris, where volunteers have provided food and assistance.¹⁶

The global response:

Beside these states, Finland, Denmark, Georgia, Estonia, Cyprus, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Austria and many other countries are assisting Ukraine by standing beside them and assisting throughout the trauma. Global solidarity with the people of Ukraine was illustrated by the words of Australian premier:

¹⁶ Lowery, T. (2022). 'What Different Countries Are Doing (Or Not) to Help Ukraine's Refugees.' [online] Global Citizen. Available at:

<https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/ukraine-refugees-how-countries-globally-helping/>.

“We might be separated by half an Earth but Australia stands with Ukraine”

These nations also guarantee legal rights of the refugees; the rights and obligations granted under international conventions and protocols.

International organizations are working to ensure support and protect displaced persons in their hosting countries as well as within Ukraine. UNICEF has set up national, municipal, and local support networks that provide crucial services and protection, particularly for vulnerable children, including play and learning hubs that provide them with a feeling of normality and safety. Initiatives include educating border guards in anti-trafficking measures, improving educational access and integrating refugee children into schools, also the provision of immunisations and medications.¹⁷ Approximately 90% of the Ukrainian refugees are women and children. Most of them have escaped to nearby nations.¹⁸

International Law and The Protection of Refugees:

Clearly humanitarian concerns have been a primary motivation in the urgency of the global response to the crisis based by the Ukrainian people. Many international

¹⁷ www.unicef.org. (n.d.). War in Ukraine poses immediate threat to children. [online]

Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/emergencies/war-ukraine-pose-immediate-threat-children>.

¹⁸ NDTV India ‘Over 6 Million People Flee Ukraine, 90% Of Them Are Women, Children: UN’ [Online] Available at: <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/over-6-million-people-flee-ukraine-90-of-them-are-women-children-un-2971271>

treaties have codified the rights of refugees: The ‘Geneva Convention’ and ‘1951 Refugee Convention’ most significantly. Under the aegis of the League of Nations, the first significant effort was made to offer legal protection on a global scale. The treaty pertaining to the International Status of Refugees was adopted in 1933 and put into effect in 1935 with the concept of refugees in mind. Vast movements of refugees after the Second World War led to the establishment of the International Refugee Organization (IRO) in 1946. Victims of Nazi persecution were resettled by this non-permanent organization. The UNHCR was created by the General Assembly on December 14th, 1950. The UN convention was adopted in 1951 and went into effect in April 1954 with the addition of the 1967 Protocol. The Refugee Convention is recognized as the founding document of international law governing refugees. Sometimes known as the Magna Carta of refugee rights in recognition of its establishment of hitherto unrecognised rights. The non-discrimination concept is outlined in the Geneva Convention.¹⁹

Sikh Jurisprudence and Human Rights:

Human rights are not a uniquely modern concept; they are the outcome of religious, civil and moral philosophical thought which has accompanied the growth and integration of human civilizations worldwide. Of the great world religions,

¹⁹ Article 3 of Geneva Convention

Sikhism is a comparatively modern arrival, established by Guru Nanak in the 15th century.

At its core Sikhism sees all people as equal under one God. Hence men and women are afforded equal respect. This respect and co-humanity extend beyond those who identify as Sikh. Love for everyone, selfless service, humility, compassion, equality, and justice for all are some of the key values held by Sikhs.

From a Sikh perspective, providing support and refuge for those fleeing war is an obligation so deeply rooted in fundamental Sikh religious principles as to make it automatic.

In the context of Ukrainians fleeing into countries such as Poland and Hungary, which over the last decade have spectacularly repelled earlier waves of refugees, especially those originating from Syria, the welcome provided to Ukrainians could not offer a greater contrast. This contrast has to be examined.

The response to refugees entering Europe, especially in the wake of the Syrian civil war, has been a reluctance of some European nations to open their borders, sometimes reinforced by heavy-handed border policing. In others, an initial welcome has been replaced by concern at the overwhelming of the host's ability to accommodate a problem which shows no sign of abating, eventually resulting, in some countries, with similar border controls.

Even Germany, which was most generous in the acceptance of Syrian refugees, eventually was obliged to recognise the pressure put on public services and that the diminishing willingness of the population to absorb people of different languages, culture and religion, made speedy assimilation too challenging. With this recognition, Germany too scaled back its openness to accepting further refugees- not, it should be noted, before the national economy had vastly boosted its pool of mostly young, educated, flexible and mobile, workers.

So, one must ask why (or how) did Europe, having exhausted its ability or willingness to absorb refugees in response to the Syrian crisis, find itself opening the borders once again?

It has to be recognised that the trauma in Syria continues, although refugees are now more actively contained closer to their origins in internationally funded camps, mostly in Turkey. Further afield, populations are suffering similar devastation to their lives from warfare, murderous domestic governments, and climate change, exemplified by Afghanistan, Eritrea / Myanmar and sub-Saharan Africa respectively.

The automatic and immediate waiving of restrictions applied so recently, when considering the people of Ukraine, comes down to one overriding sentiment: kinship.

Try as they did (mostly), European nations could no longer extend the hand of brotherhood to those whose very difference made it easier for recognition of their common humanity to be subsumed by the growing popular focus on religious, ethnic and cultural otherness.

It is this very qualification in the welcome which Europe provides which runs contrary to the tenets of Sikh jurisprudence, which regards fellow humans first of all as brothers (or sisters). No qualities of religion, ethnicity or culture can impinge on this fundamental base.

Geo-Politics and Brotherly Love:

Whilst the open arms of Europe to Ukraine- spectacularly exemplified by the previously most recalcitrant countries (Poland, Hungary)- certainly resembles the Sikh generosity of spirit to fellow humans, there is a difference which may have been less apparent had the earlier arrival of desperate Syrians not lifted the veil.

Despite pretensions to the contrary, European nations, and the European Union itself, are fundamentally motivated by self-interest. The knee-jerk empathy shown to Ukrainians, especially by neighbouring countries which have deep historical, ethnic, and geographical links, has been impressive, and may indeed be lasting. However, the steadfastness of this generosity could all too soon be undermined as host countries and populations recognise the gradual and seemingly irresistible erosion of their living standards which results. The national transformation of popular mood in Germany, over a very few years after reunification, from jubilation and generosity to resentment and animosity, is an object lesson in the transience of superficial brotherly love.

Historically refugees' welcome is boosted if a political agenda is benefitted by their presence. French Huguenots found easy asylum in Protestant England when persecuted by Catholic France in the 17th century. Sephardic Jews, victimised, murdered and expelled by Spain in the 15th and 16th centuries, found open arms welcoming them within the Muslim Ottoman Empire. In the 1960s anglophone Uganda housed many thousands of refugee Tutsis, expelled from post-colonial francophone Rwanda by their Hutu neighbours, providing the safe base from which they would eventually retake control of their mother country. Palestinians, fleeing or expelled from Israel, found ready welcome in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and elsewhere, but when the impossibility of Israel's defeat became apparent, the refugees became superfluous, largely remaining stateless and unassimilated into their host countries' communities. Afghan refugees found safe havens, especially

in Pakistan and Iran, who saw them partly as a means of furthering their own interests in the status of Afghanistan.

For the Ukrainian refugees seeking safety within Europe, and especially neighbouring countries which have so closely shared their history, there are many aspects of this exodus which provide hope that the welcome given is and will remain uniquely compassionate. There is kinship with the peoples of Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Moldova, and Romania (Russia too). There is a long-standing political antipathy between Russia and the rest of Europe - in geopolitical terms this has existed almost since the emergence of the Russian proto-state more than 1000 years ago. This antipathy has only been aggravated since the demise of the Soviet Union. From Russia's perspective, NATO's expansionist approach resulting in its absorption of Warsaw Pact countries and the former Soviet republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania - more concerning to Russia, Ukraine's own expressions of interest to join the alliance. From the European / NATO perspective there has been a steady growth of aggressive Russian militarism, with actions in Georgia, Moldova and Syria, prior to the annexation of Crimea and interference in the Donbass. These factors create a unique focus on Ukraine and its people, the welcome afforded to whom is certainly unique, as indeed is each and every manifestation of geopolitical conflict.

Conclusion:

The human and political motivations which partially inspired the welcome given to Ukrainian refugees are commonplace, although impressive in the initial phase. However, this welcome does not have at its core the absolute and unquestioning empathy central to Sikh jurisprudence, it depends rather for its longevity on the continued ability of host countries and peoples to shoulder the cost, combined with the endurance of political circumstance.

It is reasonable to expect that geopolitical conflict will continue for the long-term, doubtless subject to fluctuating degrees of hostility, born of the fundamental conflict of interests and motivations between Russia and its European neighbours in alliance with NATO.

The endurance of this fundamental divergence between Russia and its adversaries has at its kernel the question of Ukrainian independence. For Russia to fully overcome Ukrainian nationalism, would require such brutality, more than likely accompanied by ethnic cleansing, that the silent acquiescence of wider Europe is unthinkable. However, military intervention is similarly unconscionable.

In this scenario, generosity of welcome to Ukrainian refugees must serve many purposes. It does indeed satisfy, to a degree, the moral repugnance felt on the

human level at the sight of innocent and vulnerable fellow human beings being subjected to appalling horrors.

It also provides the propaganda weapon in the longer term geopolitical conflict, which could be articulated thus: ‘you traumatise people; we rescue them; hence you are bad; we are good’.

The critical aspect of this approach is the tenacity with which welcoming governments and peoples across Europe hold on to their moral outrage and override practical calculations of cost and the impact on communities and services. As time passes this balance is tested, and signs show that this is already happening where short-term arrangements reach their conclusion.²⁰

The reception provided to refugees could be graded on a spectrum, from unhesitating solidarity, through dutiful kindness, toleration, indifference, to antipathy and outright hostility. Europe has displayed all of these approaches in recent years. Whether it maintains the current level of welcome shown to Ukrainian refugees, depends on a cost/benefit calculation, which will eventually diminish the regard for fellow human beings in a way unthinkable in Sikh philosophy.

²⁰ BBC News, ‘*Ukrainian refugees are now living in the UK - so how is it going?*’, May 28, 2022.

In the end, as shown by the erosion of euphoria at German unification, and the demographic impact of the Palestinian diaspora, even on the closest neighbours, large migrations of people do not find welcomes extended indefinitely. Sikh jurisprudence can, and surely does to a degree, inspire and elevate the response of the world to human tragedy. The response however, to the Ukrainian refugee crisis is already tainted by time-limits and qualifications, which will inevitably erode the spectacular solidarity visible at present.

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