

“The welcome to Ukrainian refugees is uniquely compassionate. Discuss”.

INTRODUCTION

Refugees are defined as “people who have fled war, violence, conflict or persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country.”¹ This essay references asylum seekers – people whose refugee status is yet to be determined by the country they are seeking asylum in. This essay discusses whether the EU’s welcome to Ukrainian refugees is uniquely compassionate compared to the treatment of other refugees, often from Asia, the Middle East and Africa (hereafter referred to as “non-White refugees”). I aim to contrast the law and policies which affect Ukrainian and non-White refugees, as well as the treatment of Ukrainian refugees by wider society and their portrayal in the media. Finally, this thesis seeks to explore the effects of drawing from principles of Sikhism and Sikh jurisprudence.

THE UNITED KINGDOM

Contrasting the treatment of refugees based on their background reveals how the United Kingdom has been discriminatory in their welcome. Those who arrive in the United Kingdom (UK) under the Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme and the Ukraine Family Scheme will be granted leave to remain for 3 years, thus giving them access to the labour market and health services.²

It should be noted that the visas extended to family members did not originally include parents and grandparents, which left many elderly individuals unable to flee from Ukraine to the UK.³ However, the Ukraine Family Scheme was launched in May to remedy this issue and

¹ UNHCR. (2022). What is a refugee? [online] Available at: <<https://www.unhcr.org/uk/what-is-a-refugee.html>> [Accessed 4 September 2022].

² GOV.UK. (2022). Guidance for businesses offering work to people coming from Ukraine. [online] Available at: <<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/guidance-for-businesses-offering-work-to-people-coming-from-ukraine>> [Accessed 1 September 2022].

³ Sparrow, A., Taylor, D. and O’Carroll, L. (2022). Changes to UK visa rules for Ukrainians called ‘shameful’ by Labour. [online] the Guardian. Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/feb/27/uk-expected-ease-visa-restrictions-ukrainians-fleeing-war>> [Accessed 4 September 2022].

extended the scheme to include those family members. Regardless of initial hiccups, the UK Government have remained consistent in expanding visas to encompass all Ukrainian refugees who wish to resettle in the UK.

In contrast, the right to work is not afforded to current asylum seekers awaiting processing of their claim, thus leaving them destitute; the majority are from non-White backgrounds.⁴ The UK Government gives asylum seekers only £5.39 per day to buy food, clothing, and sanitary products.

Furthermore, in April 2022, the Home Office effortfully tried to send asylum seekers in the UK on small boats or lorries to Rwanda.⁵ Many of the asylum seekers are at a huge risk of being retraumatised due to being victims of human-trafficking and torture. The UK Government has consistently promoted and defended this arrangement, despite oppositions from over 160 charities and numerous legal challenges to the policy's application to the asylum seekers' cases.⁶ The Home Secretary stated that "Rwanda is a safe country,"⁷ despite the UK Government's own guidance describing Rwanda as "unstable" and where "conflict can flare up with little notice."⁸ Moreover, NGO Human Rights Watch had reported use of excessive

⁴ Asylum Information Database | European Council on Refugees and Exiles. (2022). Statistics - Asylum Information Database | European Council on Refugees and Exiles. [online] Available at: <<https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/united-kingdom/statistics/>> [Accessed 4 September 2022].

⁵ Ft.com. (2022). Large jump in number of Ukrainian refugees securing work in UK. [online] Available at: <<https://www.ft.com/content/aff14825-189e-48fd-925e-0948d80185c0>> [Accessed 1 September 2022].

⁶ BBC News. (2022). Rwanda asylum plan: First removal flight will take off, foreign secretary says. [online] Available at: <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-61791994>> [Accessed 5 September 2022].

⁷ The National. (2022). UK Government's own website contradicts Priti Patel's claims 'Rwanda is safe'. [online] Available at: <<https://www.thenational.scot/news/20203082.rwanda-safe-country-priti-patel-contradicted-uk-government-website/>> [Accessed 5 September 2022].

⁸ GOV.UK. (2022). Safety and security - Rwanda travel advice. [online] Available at: <<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/rwanda/safety-and-security>> [Accessed 4 September 2022].

force on refugees and frequent attacks on civilians who opposed the Rwandan Government and documented the abuse of those belonging to the LGBTQ+ community.⁹

The first flight exporting asylum seekers to Rwanda was intended to take place on 14th June 2022. However, moments before take-off, The European Court of Human Rights granted injunctions under its Rule 39 procedures which forced the Home Office to cancel the flight.¹⁰ Regardless, the UK Government remains committed to enforcing its arrangement with Rwanda to export asylum seekers, and the Home Secretary has commented that the plans for future flights have begun.¹¹

The Home Secretary has also expressed that there is “no reason” for Ukrainians to be sent to Rwanda following this arrangement, because they have entered “legitimately and legally.”¹² To label (non-White) asylum seekers, arriving by boats, as “criminals” is the Home Office’s deceptive attempt of justifying the discrimination against non-White refugees. It dismisses the fact that the only reason Ukrainian refugees have been able to enter the country legally is because the UK Government set up the schemes for them specifically; no such scheme has been previously set up for non-White asylum seekers. Furthermore, it dismisses the reality that these asylum seekers’ decision to enter the UK illegally was their only option of escaping war and persecution in their own country.

⁹ Barry, E. (2022). UK-Rwanda Deal Marks a Dangerous New Era for Asylum Seekers. [online] Time. Available at: <<https://time.com/6187390/uk-rwanda-asylum-seekers-deportation/>> [Accessed 4 September 2022].

¹⁰ Blackall, M. (2022). Rwanda flight cancelled as flurry of last-minute legal action removes all seven people onboard. [online] inews.co.uk. Available at: <<https://inews.co.uk/news/rwanda-flight-european-court-human-rights-blocks-asylum-seeker-deportation-1687163>> [Accessed 5 September 2022].

¹¹ Adams, C., (2022). Rwanda: We're committed to asylum plan, says Priti Patel. [online] BBC News. Available at: <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-61808120>> [Accessed 4 September 2022].

¹² Hanrahan, L. (2022). [online] Available at: <<https://www.euronews.com/2022/05/19/no-reason-for-ukrainian-refugees-to-arrive-in-uk-illegally-says-priti-patel>> [Accessed 5 September 2022].

THE NATIONALITY AND BORDERS BILL

Prioritisation of refugees has been further proven by the Government passing the Nationality and Borders Bill into law (“The Act”). The Act is not only incompatible with the Refugee Convention 1951, but significantly damages access to justice for those who need it the most. Clause 11 purports to deter people from seeking asylum in the UK through unauthorised routes.¹³ This is deceptive because this suggests that safe and legal routes exist by which asylum seekers can travel to reach the UK, where in fact no such routes exist for anyone other than Ukrainian refugees. Moreover, applications for asylum cannot be made from outside of the UK. Consequently, clause 11 discriminatorily and unfairly punishes asylum-seekers for the UK’s own decision of not creating safe and legal routes.

Clause 11 also introduces a two-tier refugee status system based on how individuals have arrived in the United Kingdom: those who meet the entry requirements (group 1), and those who do not— those are often non-White asylum seekers (group 2).

The Act gives the UK Government the power to criminalise those entering the UK without valid entry clearance, with a punishment of up to 4 years imprisonment.¹⁴ The Act also enshrines the UK Government’s power in law to deport asylum seekers and refugees whose claims are inadmissible to other countries (which had already existed in the Immigration Rules), where they could be placed in detention centres while their claim is being processed and face abuse. The Act also penalises those who submit evidence late which may damage

¹³ bills.parliament.uk. (2021). Nationality and Borders Bill Explanatory Notes[online] Available at: <<https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/44460/documents/1174>> [Accessed 4 September 2022].

¹⁴ GOV.UK. (2022). Risks of illegal migration to the UK. [online] Available at: <<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/risks-of-illegal-migration-to-the-uk>> [Accessed 5 September 2022].

the applicant's credibility or affect the weight that is given to that evidence. Moreover, it removes fast-tracking certain cases and scrapes stages of appeal.

The procedural changes and removal of appeal-stages eradicates vital safeguards, which were intended to protect those seeking asylum and refuge. The welcome to Ukrainian refugees is uniquely compassionate: the legal routes the Government has created to help them enter the UK means that they are never forced to use illegal routes into the Country, hence will not be subjected to the Act like non-White refugees. Sikhism places an emphasis on defending the rights of the oppressed and fighting against injustice. It is represented in the Kirpan¹⁵- the ceremonial sword that Sikh men are obliged to wear. The UK Government can learn from this principle to protect the rights against all refugees fleeing persecution and not solely White refugees.

THE RECENT WITHDRAWEL FROM AFGHANISTAN

The uniquely gracious welcome granted to Ukrainian refugees can also be demonstrated by contrasting the actions taken to resettle refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine and refugees fleeing the Taliban in Afghanistan.

In April 2021, the UK Government launched the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) ahead of its announcement to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan by August 2021. The scheme intends to resettle Afghan nationals who have supported British efforts in Afghanistan and are assessed to be under serious threat to life. The UK Government is supposed to issue application outcomes within two weeks. However, over a year later, many applicants are dealing with the UK Government's unlawful delays and are still awaiting the

¹⁵ Sikhcoalition.org. (2022). [online] Available at: <<https://www.sikhcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/kirpan-factsheet-aug2018.pdf>> [Accessed 5 September 2022].

outcome. There have been legal proceedings brought against the UK Government on the basis that the delays have caused applicants' lives to be at risk.

After the UK withdrew its troops from Afghanistan in May 2021, the ramifications were catastrophic – the Taliban rapidly took over within Afghanistan. During the crisis, several leaders were on holiday, demonstrating “a fundamental lack of seriousness”¹⁶ in the UK Government's response. Following the withdrawal, the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) was announced in August 2021 but did not open until January 2022. Deservingly so, the Home Office was criticised by numerous members of Parliament for “dragging their feet.”¹⁷ This delay was also held to be the reason that 27 refugees died in November 2021 when attempting to cross the Channel.¹⁸

Under ACRS, the government intends to prioritise those who supported the UK's efforts in Afghanistan and vulnerable groups such as women and LGBT+ individuals.¹⁹ The ACRS is split into three specific pathways which categorise people eligible for resettlement; however, pathways two and three were not opened until the 13th June 2022— ten months after the Taliban had taken over Afghanistan.²⁰ This left oppressed minority groups who were ineligible under pathway one of ACRS and ineligible under ARAP, at risks for their lives.

¹⁶ the Guardian. (2022). Top official at Foreign Office called upon to resign over Kabul withdrawal. [online] Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/may/24/top-official-at-foreign-office-called-upon-to-resign-over-kabul-withdrawal-sir-philip-barton-dominic-raab>> [Accessed 5 September 2022].

¹⁷ the Guardian. (2022). Tory anger grows over Priti Patel's failure to start resettling stranded Afghans. [online] Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/28/tory-anger-grows-over-priti-patels-failure-to-start-resettling-stranded-afghans>> [Accessed 5 September 2022].

¹⁸ Ft.com. (2022). The perilous journey for Afghans to reach UK by boat. [online] Available at: <<https://www.ft.com/content/38969e06-a9eb-4dbb-a336-597b8e298196>> [Accessed 5 September 2022].

¹⁹ GOV.UK. (2022). Afghan citizens resettlement scheme. [online] Available at: <<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/afghan-citizens-resettlement-scheme>> [Accessed 5 September 2022].

²⁰ Richmond Chambers. (2022). Afghanistan Citizens' Resettlement Scheme Update - Richmond Chambers. [online] Available at: <<https://immigrationbarrister.co.uk/afghanistan-citizens-resettlement-scheme-update/>> [Accessed 5 September 2022].

Under ACRS, there is no application that can be made for ACRS individuals who are already in the UK to bring additional family members to the UK. In direct contrast, the UK Government established The Ukraine Family Scheme which welcomes British nationals' immediate and extended family members who are Ukrainian into the UK.

One of the biggest differences in how the UK has resettled the two parties is that multiple legal routes have been provided to Ukrainian versus Afghan refugees. Under ACRS, there is no application process— rather, individuals must wait to be referred for the scheme via one of the three pathways.²¹

BIOMETRICS

Biometrics (a requisite to most UK visa applications²²) is the most reliable method of identifying and authenticating individuals through their unique biological makeup. Biometrics is another instance where the UK has discriminated between Ukrainian and Afghan refugees.

The Home Office has consistently refused to relax the rules for Afghans eligible to resettle in the UK. Those fleeing the Taliban in Afghanistan are caught in a catch-22 situation of not being allowed into the UK until their biometrics have been provided, yet not being able to provide their biometrics as there are no British Visa processing centres in Afghanistan. The only option available is travelling to the nearest available visa office, hundreds of miles away in Pakistan, through a perilous journey, passing through numerous Taliban borders. Even if the individual

²¹ GOV.UK. (2022). Afghan citizens resettlement scheme. [online] Available at: <<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/afghan-citizens-resettlement-scheme>> [Accessed 5 September 2022].

²² GOV.UK. (2022). [online] Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1065793/Biometrics_information_introduction_v9.pdf> [Accessed 4 September 2022].

reaches Pakistan and provides their biometrics, the Home Office can still reject their application to be resettled, leaving them to return to the hands of the Taliban.

Due to this, an Afghan judge asked the Home Office to reverse the procedure — first, a decision on the application, then, if approved, to provide the biometrics in the UK. In the judgment Justice Lieven J expressed her disappointment in the Home Office not altering its policy on biometrics in refugee family reunion applications since it was declared unlawful in November 2021 regarding an Eritrean refugee.²³ In this case, the Upper Tribunal reasoned that the Home Office's decision to be inflexible on biometrics fails to acknowledge the legal discretion the Home Office has in relation to provide biometric information.²⁴

This stance on biometrics originally caused issues for Ukrainian refugees. In March, 300 Ukrainian refugees who made it to Calais were told to travel 70 miles to Lille²⁵, where a pop-up visa centre had been opened to process biometrics. Shortly after the public outcry in the UK, the Home Office announced that Ukrainians with passports will be able to apply for refuge in the UK online and will be able to get biometrics once in Britain.²⁶ The Home Office reversed the standard procedure on biometrics only for Ukrainian refugees, while consistently refusing to do so for non-White refugees. This demonstrates that the Home Office is prepared to

²³ [2022] EWHC 771 (Admin)

²⁴ [2022] UKUT 15 (IAC)

²⁵ Gallagher, P. (2022). Brexit and Government hostility combine to make 'bizarre and cruel' system for Ukraine refugees. [online] inews.co.uk. Available at: <<https://inews.co.uk/news/brexit-and-government-hostility-combine-to-make-bizarre-and-cruel-system-for-ukraine-refugees-lawyer-says-1507587>> [Accessed 5 September 2022].

²⁶ reuters.com. (March 2022). [online] Available at: <<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-looking-easing-visa-rules-ukrainians-minister-says-2022-03-10/>> [Accessed 4 September 2022].

quickly change policies to welcome White refugees but are happy to abandon non-White refugees.²⁷

THE EU

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the EU's decision to activate the Temporary Protective Directive (TPD) was instantaneous.²⁸ Although passed in 2001, this directive was only activated for the first time in March 2022 to provide immediate temporary protection for Ukrainian refugees in any EU country.²⁹ This entitles Ukrainian refugees to live in an EU country for a year, subject to extension depending on the crisis in Ukraine. The TPD also confers rights such as residence permit, right to work, access to social and health services, and right to education for children.³⁰ The TPD is a practical and necessary instrument to manage a large influx of refugees: it prevents individuals spending months in detention centres and the consequential abuse while awaiting the outcome of their application.

However, the EU's activation of the directive is unforeseen and surprising. Historically, the EU has been unwavering in its refusal to activate the TPD to aid arrivals of refugees, such as in

²⁷ the Guardian. (March 2022). High court hears case of Afghan family unable to get to UK without biometrics. [online] Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/mar/30/high-court-hears-case-of-afghan-family-unable-to-get-to-uk-without-biometrics>> [Accessed 4 September 2022].

²⁸ European Commission. (2022). [online] Available at: <https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/common-european-asylum-system/temporary-protection_en> [Accessed 5 September 2022].

²⁹ European Commission. (2022). Temporary Protection. [online] Available at: <https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/common-european-asylum-system/temporary-protection_en> [Accessed 4 September 2022].

³⁰ European Commission. (2022). Information for people fleeing the war in Ukraine. [online] Available at: <https://eu-solidarity-ukraine.ec.europa.eu/information-people-fleeing-war-ukraine_en#:~:text=Temporary%20protection%20will%20last%20for,access%20to%20education%20for%20children> [Accessed 4 September 2022].

2015 when 1.2 million refugees fleeing the civil war in Syria reached Europe.³¹ Predating 2015, EU migration directives allowed for detentions of refugees up to 18 months.³²

Moreover, the EU, in its attempt to prevent refugees and asylum seekers reaching its borders, has been providing incentives to countries like Libya and Turkey to uptake those refugees.³³

Those who do manage to reach Europe are left starving and vulnerable in camps in Greece while they await their application outcome.³⁴

Additionally, several EU countries have paused their refugee resettlement programmes to reallocate these resources away from non-White refugees (who have been in the EU for years) to Ukrainian refugees. Consequently, asylum seekers who are already in the EU are waiting longer to access the same services granted by the TPD to Ukrainian refugees.³⁵ This difference in treatment has been described as a “two-tiered system”.³⁶ This is reflective of a refugee hierarchy where White refugees are prioritised and seen as more deserving of sanctuary and hospitality than non-White refugees – an idea that has been confirmed by European politicians.

³¹ Osso, B. (2022). Of Borders and Hypocrisy: The Very Thin Line Between Protection and Expulsion - Refugee Law Initiative Blog. [online] Refugee Law Initiative Blog. Available at: <<https://rli.blogs.sas.ac.uk/2022/06/14/of-borders-and-hypocrisy-the-very-thin-line-between-protection-and-expulsion/>> [Accessed 5 September 2022].

³² Izabella Majcher, Michael Flynn, and Mariette Grange, *Immigration Detention in the European Union: In the Wake of the "Crisis,"* Springer 2020

³³ The IRC in the EU. (2022). What is the EU-Turkey deal?. [online] Available at: <<https://eu.rescue.org/article/what-eu-turkey-deal>> [Accessed 5 September 2022].

³⁴ The IRC. (2022). People in Greece are going hungry, as over one third of those living in refugee camps are denied food. [online] Available at: <<https://www.rescue.org/press-release/people-greece-are-going-hungry-over-one-third-those-living-refugee-camps-are-denied>> [Accessed 4 September 2022].

³⁵ Reidy, E. (2022). What the EU's policy toward Ukrainians may mean for other refugees. [online] The New Humanitarian. Available at: <<https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2022/04/21/what-the-EUs-policy-toward-ukrainians-may-mean-for-other-refugees>> [Accessed 4 September 2022].

³⁶ The New Humanitarian. (2022). What the EU's policy toward Ukrainians may mean for other refugees. [online] Available at: <<https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2022/04/21/what-the-EUs-policy-toward-ukrainians-may-mean-for-other-refugees>> [Accessed 5 September 2022].

The unique welcome granted to Ukrainian refugees shows “how it is possible to rapidly and extensively mobilise support for refugees...when political commitment is there”.³⁷ In other words, politicians have compared Ukrainian refugees to other refugees, emphasising this belief that White refugees are more deserving of refuge.

Hungary

Since 2015, Hungary has unfailingly refused entry to refugees from non-European countries. Prime Minister Orbán has described these refugees as “Muslim invaders”, and migrants as “a poison.” An account of an asylum seeker fleeing violence in Afghanistan to Hungary reads, “police beat us a lot. I want to know why they are doing this to us. We are not animals, and we are not criminals.” In a paradoxical contrast, following the invasion of Ukraine, Orbán was quick to state that all refugees from Ukraine are being taken care of in Hungary.³⁸

Hungary also has a well-documented history of abusive treatment of refugees and asylum seekers. The European Union Court of Justice has found Hungary to have been unlawfully detaining asylum seekers in transit zones on its border with Serbia.³⁹ The boastful claim made by Orbán of preserving the “ethnic homogeneity” of Hungary⁴⁰ not only shows that the welcome to Ukrainian refugees has been uniquely compassionate, but also reveals the

³⁷ The New Humanitarian. (2022). The UN’s (non-Ukraine) funding gap, Tigray 2.0, and the UK’s colonial debt: The Cheat. [online] Available at: <<https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2022/08/26/UN-funding-gap-Tigray-ceasefire-UK-colonial-debt-Cheat-Sheet>> [Accessed 5 September 2022].

³⁸ Hungary Today. (2022). PM Orbán: All Refugees from Ukraine Taken Care of in Hungary. [online] Available at: <<https://hungarytoday.hu/orban-ukrainian-refugees-ukraine-migrants/>> [Accessed 5 September 2022].

³⁹ Global Detention Project. (2022). Hungary Immigration Detention Profile. [online] Available at: <<https://www.globaldetentionproject.org/countries/europe/hungary>> [Accessed 5 September 2022].

⁴⁰ abouthungary.hu. (2022). PM Orbán: Every refugee arriving in Hungary from Ukraine must be helped. [online] Available at: <<https://abouthungary.hu/news-in-brief/pm-orban-every-refugee-arriving-in-hungary-from-ukraine-must-be-helped>> [Accessed 5 September 2022].

European exceptionalism which has been shown to be a common belief amongst European countries and politicians.

Poland

Poland has taken in the most Ukrainian refugees since the Russian invasion, establishing nine reception centres offering financial, legal, and medical aid dedicated to Ukrainian refugees.⁴¹

The top aide to the Polish Prime Minister has expressed that “everyone escaping [the war in Ukraine] will be received in Poland.”⁴² However, the same benevolence has not been granted to previous refugees who sought protection in Poland.

In 2021, refugees and asylum seekers, mostly from Iraq and Afghanistan, were trapped on the Belarus and Poland border. Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia pushed back the refugees and asylum seekers without allowing them to make an application for asylum. Although pushbacks are illegal under international and EU law, Poland passed a domestic law in October 2021, legalising the practise⁴³, then declared a state of emergency and sent 15,000 soldiers to prevent refugees from entering. This caused thousands of refugees sleeping in freezing temperatures along the border with little access to food or water.

⁴¹ Radio-Canada.ca. (2022). *Poland will help all Ukrainians fleeing war with Russia: officials | RCI*. [online] Available at: <<https://ici.radio-canada.ca/rci/en/news/1864902/poland-will-help-all-ukrainians-fleeing-war-with-russia-officials>> [Accessed 5 September 2022].

⁴² Ministry of the Interior and Administration. (2022). Information for refugees from Ukraine - Ministry of the Interior and Administration - Gov.pl website. [online] Available at: <<https://www.gov.pl/web/mswia-en/information-for-refugees-from-ukraine>> [Accessed 5 September 2022].

⁴³ Ecre.org. (2022). Poland: Parliament Approves ‘Legalisation’ of Pushbacks, Council of Ministers Adopt Bill to Construct Border Wall, Another Life is Lost at Border with Belarus | European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE). [online] Available at: <<https://ecre.org/poland-parliament-approves-legalisation-of-pushbacks-council-of-ministers-adopt-bill-to-construct-border-wall-another-life-is-lost-at-border-with-belarus/>> [Accessed 5 September 2022].

The Polish army also abused these individuals and told them “This country is not yours. Go back to your country.”⁴⁴ In efforts to avoid the Polish army, many asylum seekers went into the forest and swamps, where temperatures plummeted below zero degrees. This goes against the Sikh principle to not use force.⁴⁵ Instead, Sikhism encourages us to be gentle and act with humility. Using force causes grave harm as proven by the death of 20 people following their attempt to cross over from Belarus to Poland.

European countries’ differential treatment goes directly against Article 3 of the Refugee Convention, which directs that all member states “shall apply the provisions of this Convention to refugees without discrimination as to race, religion or country of origin”.⁴⁶

DIFFERENCE IN MEDIA PORTRAYAL

Since Russia began its invasion, journalists have been quick to contextualise the plight of Ukrainian people by drawing racist comparisons to the plight of non-White refugees. A CBS News senior foreign correspondent stated that Ukraine isn’t a place “like Iraq or Afghanistan, that has seen conflict raging for decades. This is a relatively civilised, relatively European [city]”.⁴⁷ Labelling Ukrainians as “civilised” implies that non-White refugees are uncivilised. To say that war has been raging for decades in these countries is enforcing a stereotype that war and tragedy in these places is normal and people from these countries are used to wars and are thus less deserving of refuge than Ukrainians who are used to a ‘civilised’ way of life.

⁴⁴The New Humanitarian. (2022). Why did we have to freeze in the forest?. [online] Available at: <<https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/first-person/2022/03/15/ukraine-poland-syria-refugee-welcome-forest>> [Accessed 5 September 2022].

⁴⁵ Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, p1375

⁴⁶ The Refugee Convention (1951)

⁴⁷ TheWrap. (2022). CBS Reporter Criticized for "Civilized" Ukraine Comments. [online] Available at: <<https://www.thewrap.com/cbs-charlie-dagata-backlash-ukraine-civilized/>> [Accessed 5 September 2022].

The media is instrumental in shaping our beliefs of what is happening in the world. The difference between how the media has portrayed Ukrainian refugees and non-White refugees has been influential to the way wider society has chosen to accept Ukrainian refugees over non-White refugees and has contributed to the compassion that has been granted solely to Ukrainian refugees. This can be proven by how British nationals have welcomed 83,900 Ukrainian refugees into their homes since the Homes for Ukraine scheme began in March.⁴⁸ Something previously unheard of when non-White refugees have attempted to seek refuge in the United Kingdom.

When the media previously covered wars in places such as Afghanistan and Syria, they labelled individuals fleeing these countries as “migrants,” whereas individuals fleeing Ukraine have only been described as “refugees,” as if to say that there is a higher criterion for non-White individuals fleeing war to prove that they are deserving of refuge.

The Sikh principle, Karseva, to mean selfless service⁴⁹ can be witnessed in how British people have been accommodating Ukrainian refugees in their homes. Karseva however is accompanied by the principle of working towards the common good of all. This means to serve all of humanity. This principle could have been practically followed had there been similar schemes set up for all refugees, including those who are non-White.

⁴⁸ the Guardian. (2022). 50,000 Ukrainian refugees in UK facing homelessness ‘disaster’ next year. [online] Available at: <[⁴⁹ Sikhiwiki.org. \(2022\). Fundamentals of Sikhi - SikhiWiki, free Sikh encyclopedia.. \[online\] Available at: <\[https://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Fundamentals_of_Sikhi\]\(https://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Fundamentals_of_Sikhi\)> \[Accessed 5 September 2022\].](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/28/50000-ukrainian-refugees-in-uk-facing-homelessness-disaster-next-year-homes-for-ukraine#:~:text=A%20total%20of%2083%2C900%20refugees,all%20matches%20have%20been%20successful.> [Accessed 5 September 2022].</p></div><div data-bbox=)

Interestingly, the data shows that 26% of British sponsors who have welcomed Ukrainian refugees into their homes want to end their sponsorship after six months or less.⁵⁰

The UK Government data shows 1,335 Ukrainian households have registered as homeless, 635 of whom were part of the scheme.⁵¹ The scheme was intended to house Ukrainian refugees for six-months, which ends for many refugees mid-September. It is predicted that between 15,000 and 21,000 Ukrainians could be homeless by Winter and this could peak to over 50,000 by mid-2023.⁵² However, the UK Government is reviewing the level of support for the scheme and reaching out to councils to find a solution. The UK Government is also asking existing hosts to allow Ukrainians to stay past the 6 months period while imploring for new sponsors. While it may seem that the scheme is flawed, it is worth the reminder that these schemes exist with imperfections because it is the first time the UK Government, like others, have put in an unmatched effort in welcoming refugees. And while these hiccups are a direct consequence of a unique novelty afforded only to Ukrainian refugees, the UK Government and society seem adamant on welcoming and helping Ukrainian refugees settle.

CONCLUSION

⁵⁰ Ons.gov.uk. (2022). Experiences of Homes for Ukraine scheme sponsors, UK - Office for National Statistics. [online] Available at: <<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/datasets/experiencesofhomesforukrainschemesponsorsuk>> [Accessed 5 September 2022].

⁵¹ the Guardian. (2022). 50,000 Ukrainian refugees in UK facing homelessness 'disaster' next year. [online] Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/28/50000-ukrainian-refugees-in-uk-facing-homelessness-disaster-next-year-homes-for-ukraine#:~:text=A%20total%20of%2083%2C900%20refugees,all%20matches%20have%20been%20successful.>> [Accessed 5 September 2022].

⁵² the Guardian. (2022). 50,000 Ukrainian refugees in UK facing homelessness 'disaster' next year. [online] Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/28/50000-ukrainian-refugees-in-uk-facing-homelessness-disaster-next-year-homes-for-ukraine#:~:text=A%20total%20of%2083%2C900%20refugees,all%20matches%20have%20been%20successful.>> [Accessed 5 September 2022].

The discriminatory treatment of non-White refugees compared to White refugees goes directly against the main principle of Sikhism – to “accept all humans as your equals”⁵³; a belief which underpins the basis of Sikhism and its legal jurisprudence. Guru Nanak’s pivotal message, “we are one” is embedded in the Sikh legal system as it protects the equal treatment of all people, regardless of categories such as race or ethnicity. This exposes how countries view White individuals as superior to non-White individuals: a belief that fortifies their racist policies and discriminatory treatments. Politicians and lawmaker should learn from Sikh jurisprudence by embedding this principle into their policies and providing the same welcome and support to all refugees, regardless of their race.

In conclusion, I agree with the statement. This essay has demonstrated that the welcome to Ukrainian refugees has been uniquely compassionate, in that Ukrainian refugees have indeed been welcomed into the countries they’ve sought refuge in unlike non-White refugees. Through policies and the media, it has also been well demonstrated that this is because Ukrainian refugees are White and European, making them superior to those who are not, consequently deeming them more worthy of refuge. Nothing has proven this belief that Black and Brown lives matter less than White lives than witnessing how unwelcomed non-White refugees have been for decades versus this uniquely compassionate welcome granted to Ukrainian refugees.

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Word count: 3,469 (excluding footnotes)

⁵³ Japji 28