

#OpenTheUK campaign - Open Letter

We, the undersigned wish to signify our support for the #OpenTheUK campaign.

We strongly condemn the ongoing military aggression of the Russian Federation in Ukraine which will have steep, traumatic ramifications for Ukrainian citizens. We know there is a strong possibility of a severe humanitarian crisis, instability, and forced displacement of Ukraine citizens who simply wish to live in their country in peace and security.

Since the invasion commenced, many countries in Europe have acted swiftly to open their borders, and offer refuge to Ukrainians fleeing the Russian invasion and ongoing hostilities. The authorities in Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Moldova swiftly mobilised to receive Ukrainians and provide shelter, food and legal assistance. These countries and their Western European neighbours have lifted their domestic requirements for Ukrainians seeking to enter their countries to apply for and be granted visas. Our closest neighbour, the Republic of Ireland, on Friday 25th February announced it would join this growing international community, and lift its visa requirements for Ukrainian citizens. The European community has refused to insist on bureaucratic red tape at a time of crisis, but instead has united to provide sanctuary and stability for those who need it. In light of this solidarity which places people before borders, the actions - indeed, the inaction - of the UK is all the more jarring.

It is a source of great shame that the UK has refused to waive the requirement for Ukrainian citizens to hold valid visas to enter the country. That the UK has opted to enforce visa requirements at this time of conflict, insisting on maintaining the lengthy status quo and thereby effectively denying a safe, legal route for Ukrainian citizens through Europe to the UK, is deeply disappointing, unjustifiable, and morally wrong.

We cannot fathom why the UK Government is essentially closing its eyes to the looming humanitarian crisis in Eastern Europe. The UK is fast gaining a reputation as a country which closes its borders to people desperately fleeing conflict and persecution, an inhumane approach which we have watched applied to people fleeing from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, and many more countries. We note that the Nationality and Borders Bill, still progressing through Parliament, represents an alarming reset of the UK asylum system, seeking to introduce a system which would breach international humanitarian and human rights law. The UK is at a crossroads in its treatment of migrants, and must now decide whether it will continue to treat those fleeing hostility with hostility of its own.

This is not a time for an ideological debate on immigration or asylum. Now is a time for action, and for countries to stand in solidarity with Ukraine, providing sanctuary for those who urgently need it. Practical support such as the lifting of visa restrictions and the opening of a safe and legal route for travel alongside a fast-track asylum process is required, otherwise the declarations of support to Ukraine are merely hollow gestures.

We believe that the UK Government must now uphold its promises and its obligations under international law, and commit to providing a safe harbour to Ukrainian citizens who seek refuge. As such, we call upon the UK Government to urgently implement the lifting of visa restrictions and the implementation of a safe and legal route to the UK.

Whilst the Northern Ireland Executive does not have legislative and policy competence for immigration matters, we call on the Northern Ireland Executive to pledge to welcome and assist Ukrainian refugees fleeing the conflict. Northern Ireland knows too well of the issue of conflict, of the instability and turmoil it invokes, and the need to secure a safe home and should act to provide sanctuary.

Signed:

Leah Rea, SDLP International Secretary, Vice President Young European Socialists

Karl William Duncan, SDLP Youth Chairperson

Hunter Christopher, PES Staff, UK Labour Member and Solidarität Vorstand

Aleksandra Iwanowska, FMS Poland International Secretary, YES Bureau Member, The New Left Warsaw Board

Oisín Donnelly, Membership and Recruitment Officer, SDLP Youth

Panny Antoniou, Young Fabians International & Outreach Officer, YES Bureau Member, Chair of Labour Doorstep

Laura Cunliffe-Hall, Chair of the Young Fabians, Social & Digital Media Lead for Labour in Communications

Jeremy Edmund Glasspool, UK citizen

Daniel Wilton, Chair of Wakefield District Young Labour, Campaign Coordinator of Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford NPC, Vice Chair Normanton BLP

Theo Biddle, Campaigns and Membership Officer of Wakefield District Young Labour; Social Media and Communications Officer for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford CLP

Eleanor Falshaw, Vice Chair of Wakefield District Young Labour

George Fairhurst, Secretary of the Young Fabians International Network

Owen Michael, Secretary of the LGBTQIA+ Young Fabians Advocacy Group

Amy Dwyer, Network Coordinator, Young Fabians

Will Barber Taylor, Chair of Warwick University Young Fabians, Universities and Union Outreach Officer West Midlands Young Fabians

Christine O'Mahony, Communications Officer for Meath Ireland-Palestine Solidarity Campaign, incoming VP for Diversity & Inclusion DCU SU (22/23)

Luke De Lacey, International Officer, Labour youth Ireland.

Rev. James Davidson, Ordained Minister & Activist

Tom Matthew, Board Member, European Youth Forum

Jimmy Sergi, Blog Editor of Young Fabians, Chair of Wirral Young Labour

Amisha Kular, Secretary-General of SDLP Youth

Ardeel Hussain, Secretary of Young Fabians Under 19's Advocacy Group, Youth Officer for Perry Barr CLP

Oliver White, teacher and Labour Party member, Calder Valley CLP

Solomon Cuthbertson, Chair of Edinburgh Labour Students and Vice-Chair of the Young Scottish Fabians.

Katy Crawford, Vice Chair of SDLP Youth.

Cllr. Séamas de Faoite, Social Democratic & Labour Party - Belfast City Council

Rhiannon Sullivan, Chair of Yorkshire and Humber Young Fabians

Lauren Mallon - Director & Outreach Manager at Pure Mental NI

Matthew Taylor - Co-Founder & Director of Pure Mental NI, SDLP member

Cara McAnaney, Women's officer of SDLP Youth

Cllr. Ryan Wilson - Social Democratic & Labour Party - Antrim & Newtownabbey Council

Leo Nasskau, Policy Officer Mole Valley Constituency Labour Party

David Cann, UK citizen

Dylan Vieites-Glennon, UK citizen

Brandon Green, Chair of Young Fabians Education Network

Shaan Ali, Chair of Young Fabians Devolution & Local Government Network, and Open Labour Membership Officer

Rachel Logue, Chair of SDLP Youth Derry

Anna Laetitia Rauchenwald, Vice-President Young European Socialists

Wirral Young Labour

Conor McLaughlin, UK Citizen

Patrick Cullen, Labour Party, UK Citizen

Kara Brennan, North West Ministry of Youth Member

Ella Quinn, UK Citizen

Rory Boyd, UK Citizen

Laura McElhinney, UK Citizen

Molly Farrell, Mid Ulster Pride Health and Well-being Officer

Sarah Patterson, UK Citizen

Amy Rea, UK Citizen

Lindsay Rea, UK Citizen

Branna Grieve, UK Citizen

Sophia McGinnis, UK Citizen

Janine Mason, UK Citizen

Hannah Cousins

Caoimhe McNeill, Co-Chairperson of SDLP Trade Unionists & Workers Group

Guy Lucas-Bhana, Vice-Chair of Labour Doorstep

Paul Sceeny, Secretary of SDLP Trade Unionists & Workers Group

Conal Browne, Co-Chairperson of SDLP Trade Unionists & Workers Group

Brendan F. Corr SDLP Youth Foreign Affairs Group member

Ruairi McMenamin - SDLP member

Praveen Kolluguri - Kingston and Surbiton CLP member

Cliona Evans - SDLP member

Charlie Ensor, UK citizen

Mark Whiley - UK citizen

Rachel Wise - UK citizen

Déirdre Vaughan SDLP Representative North Down

Paul Gosling, Derry

Brónach Crabtree - SDLP Derry

Cllr Simon Jeal- Bromley Labour Group

Rida Vaquas, citizen

Ana Oppenheim, Labour Campaign for Free Movement

Inez Murray, SDLP Youth Policy Officer

Corey French, SDLP Youth (West Tyrone) Branch Chairperson

Nojus Drapanauskas, Lawful Permanent Resident in UK

Maurizio Cuttin, UK Young Ambassador to the European Youth Forum, British Youth Council (BYC)

David Gorman, UK and Irish citizen

Thomas Plater, Chair, Hertfordshire Labour Forum.

Dhruv Kadam , Secretary Young Fabians Health Network

Paul Stich, Chair, Socialist Youth of Austria (SJ)

John Mooney

Erin Doherty, SDLP Youth Member

Maureen Mc Daid Irish Citizen

Ellie-Jo Taylor, Equality Officer SDLP Youth

Roisín Haughey

Bronagh O'Neill

Aobh Hollywood, SSUNI Education officer

Cllr Adam Gannon, SDLP Representative Fermanagh and South Tyrone

Michael Forte, UK Labour Party member

Aaive Brennan

Tom Laing, National Co-ordinator of Young Fabians and Secretary of Wirral Young Labour

James Bartholomeusz, UK Labour Party member, Young Fabian and Unite shop steward

Gordon Butler-Smith, UK Citizen

Lara Parizotto, Migrants4Labour Co-Founder

Elliott Callender, UK Labour Party Member

Jason Bunting, UK and Irish Citizen

Martin Green, UK Citizen

Wirral South Constituency Labour Party