

UK unveils new visa scheme for Ukrainians fleeing war

Move comes after government was criticized over low numbers of Ukrainians granted visas.

LONDON — A new visa scheme will allow Ukrainians fleeing the war without relatives in Britain to work in the U.K. and have full access to state benefits for up to three years.

Addressing the House of Commons on Monday, Communities Secretary Michael Gove said that under the “Homes for Ukraine” scheme, due to launch Friday, anyone in the U.K. with at least six months’ leave to remain will be allowed to sponsor a Ukrainian citizen or resident.

Sponsors will be required to undergo “light-touch” vetting checks and provide accommodation for at least half a year. In return for their support, they will be paid £350 a month by the government, with these payments being tax-free and not affecting benefit entitlement or council tax status.

Gove said there will be no cap on visas granted under this scheme, which will initially enable sponsorships “between people with known connections.” It will later be expanded in “a phased way” to allow churches, community groups and charities to sponsor Ukrainians in need, but there is no date yet for that expansion, he added.

Local authorities taking up Ukrainians will receive additional funding in order to ensure school places are available, Gove said.

The British government has faced criticism over the low numbers of Ukrainians granted visas to move to the U.K. since Russia launched its invasion of the country when compared with other European states. Ministers have touted the new scheme as a game-changer that will boost the numbers of Ukrainians moving to Britain.

Labour’s Shadow Communities Secretary Lisa Nandy welcomed the sponsorship scheme after weeks of delay, but warned that “a press release is not a plan and

we are really deeply concerned about the lack of urgency.”

Gove insisted the government is “moving as quickly as possible” to launch the scheme in collaboration with NGOs and local government.

Source:

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