



## The Ukraine War and the “Good” Refugee

### Description

UKRAINE: *Today, the dangers of military escalation are beyond description. What is now happening in Ukraine has serious geopolitical implications. **It could lead us into a World War III scenario.***

*It is important that a peace process be initiated with a view to preventing escalation.*

*A Bilateral Peace Agreement is required.*

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*“These people are not people we are used to... these people are Europeans.” – Kiril Petkov, Bulgarian Prime Minister, [Associated Press](#), March 1, 2022*

In the history of accepting refugees, countries have shown more than an erratic streak. Universal human characteristics have often been overlooked in favour of the particular: race, cultural habits, religion. Even immigration nations, such as the United States and Australia, have had their xenophobic twists and turns on the issue of who to accept, be they victims of pogroms, war crimes, genocide, or famine.

The Russian attack on Ukraine has already produced refugees in the hundreds of thousands. By March 2, with the war one week old, 874,000 people [were estimated](#) to have left Ukraine. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) [estimates](#) that up to four million may leave, while the European Union [adds a further](#) three million to the figure.

This is already producing a growing capital of hypocrisy on the part of receiving states who have shown deep reluctance in accepting refugees of other backgrounds from other conflicts. Tellingly, some of these conflicts have also been the noxious fruit of campaigns or interventions waged by Western states.



Refugees care for each other near Polish-border train station Przemyśl Główny (Licensed under CC BY 4.0)

Offers of generosity – least to fair Ukrainians – are everywhere. Poland, which will be a major recipient and country of passage for many Ukrainians, is showing ample consideration to the arrivals as they make their way across the border. They find themselves playing moral priests of salvation.

A [report](#) from the UNHCR notes facilities at various border crossings stocked with “food, water, clothes, sleeping bags, shoes, blankets, nappies and sanitary products for people arriving with only what they can carry.” Anna Dąbrowska, head of Homo Faber, [notes](#) the sentiment. “Our two peoples have always had close relations... Of course, we help our neighbours!”

Such solidarity has been selective. Those of African and Middle Eastern background have faced rather different treatment at the border – if and when they have gotten there. The [number of accounts](#) of obstructions and violence both within Ukraine and at the border, are growing.

Polish authorities have also been accused of explicitly targeting African students by refusing them entry in preference for Ukrainians, though the Polish Ambassador to the UN [told](#) the General Assembly on February 28 that this was “a complete lie and a terrible insult to us.” According to **Krzysztof Szczerski**, as many as 125 nationalities have been admitted into Poland from Ukraine.

The sceptics have every reason to be doubtful. Only last year, **Minister of the Interior Mariusz Kamiński**, and the National Defence Minister, **Mariusz Błaszczak**, gave a very different impression of welcome, suggesting that refugees of swarthier disposition – those from the Middle East, in particular – were [immoral types tending towards bestiality](#). Such arrivals were also accused of being weapons used by the Lukashenko regime in Belarus as part of a program of “hybrid warfare”. **President Andrzej Duda** also signed a bill into law to construct [what has been described](#) as “a high-tech barrier on the border with Belarus to guard against an influx of irregular migrants.”



People in Warsaw take part in a protest rally on October 17 in solidarity with migrants who have been pushed back at Poland's border with Belarus. (Licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0)

It's all well to accuse the Russians of disinformation, but Polish authorities have not been averse to sowing their own sordid variants, targeting vulnerable arrivals and demonising them in the process. In 2021, those fleeing Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq and Yemen [were left stranded](#) by their hundreds in the freezing woods along the Polish-Belarusian border. Eight individuals perished.

In this cruel farce of inhumanity, the European Union, along with Poland and the Baltic States, notably Lithuania, must shoulder the blame. The President of the European Council, **Charles Michel**, [has been openly calling](#) Lukashenko's fashioning of irregular arrivals as “a hybrid attack, a brutal attack, a violent attack and a shameful attack.” Doing so makes it easier to care less.

Globally, the war in Ukraine is now giving countries a chance to be very moral to the *right* type of refugee. They are fleeing the ravages and viciousness of the Russian Bear, the bully of history; this is an opportunity to show more accommodating colours. If nothing else, it also provides a distracting



cover for the more brutal policies used against other, less desirable irregular arrivals.

This is a strategy that is working, with media outlets such as *USA Today* running amnesiac pieces [claiming](#) that Ukrainian families, in fighting “Putin’s murderous regime”, were engaged in a “battle ... for life and death; there is no time for debates about political correctness.”

Countries in Western Europe are also showing a different face to those fleeing Ukraine. The UK, which is seeking to adopt an Australian version of refugee processing – the use of distant offshore islands and third countries, lengthy detention spells and the frustrating of asylum claims – has now [opened arms](#) for 200,000 Ukrainian refugees.



Hungarian volunteers assisting refugees (Licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0)

Distant Australia, whose participation in the illegal war against Iraq which produced refugees and asylum seekers that would eventually head towards the antipodes, is now offering to accept a higher intake of refugees from Ukraine and [“fast track”](#) their applications. The same politicians speak approvingly of a system that imprisons asylum seekers and refugees indefinitely in Pacific outposts, promising to never resettle them in Australia. The subtext here is that those sorts – the Behrouz Boochani-types – deserve it.

In [the words](#) of the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (ASRC), “The Morrison Government has presided over the dismantling of Australia’s refugee intake, leaving Australia unable to adequately respond to emergencies”, with 2022 “marking the lowest refugee intake in nearly 50 years.” True, the global pandemic did not aid matters, but COVID-19 did little in terms of seeing a precipitous decline in

refugee places. Australia's refugee intake cap was lowered from 18,750 persons in 2018-2019 to 13,750 in 2020-2021.

The reduction of such places has taken place despite Canberra's role in a range of conflicts that have fed the global refugee crisis. Australia's failure in Afghanistan, and its imperilling of hundreds of local translators and security personnel, only saw a half-hearted effort in opening the doors. The effort was characterised by incompetence and poorly deployed resources.

The grim reality in refugee politics is that governments always make choices and show preferences. "Talk of moving some applications 'to the top of the pile' pits the most vulnerable against each other," [opines](#) the critical founder of the ASRC, Kon Karapanagiotidis. "This is a moral aberration and completely out of step with the Australian public."

Sadly, the good people at the ASRC are misreading public sentiment. This is an election year; accepting Ukrainian refugees will be seen as good politics, just as indefinitely detaining boat arrivals from impoverished and war-ravaged lands – many Muslim majority states affected by the policies of Western states – will continue to be praised.

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*Featured image: Ukrainian refugees arriving in Przemyśl in Poland (Licensed under CC BY 2.0)*

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