



CEC Statement

Ukraine – Four Years of War on Workers



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GMB Congress 2026

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Introduction

- 1.1 After the 24th February 2026 marked the fourth anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, GMB reaffirms our unwavering solidarity with the Ukrainian people and their trade unions in their courageous resistance to this aggression.
- 1.2 The war has entered its fourth year in bitter military stalemate, dominated by drone warfare, trench raids and the continuing bombing, displacement, and suffering of Ukraine's civilian population. While polls show that a growing majority of Ukrainians are supporting a negotiated peace, Ukrainians are clear that attempts to impose an externally drafted 'peace plan' without popular support cannot form the basis of a just and lasting peace in Ukraine or Europe. On the contrary, they could embolden the rise of fascism and authoritarianism globally, heightening the risk of future wars.
- 1.3 At this critical moment, it is important that GMB restates our values and takes stock of our priorities for solidarity as a trade union. GMB reiterates our shared desire to see a peaceful end to this war, one that upholds Ukraine's territorial integrity in an agreement supported by Ukrainians themselves, accompanied by a progressive, socially-just reconstruction programme.
- 1.4 In response to repeated appeals from Ukrainian trade unions, we call on the Labour Government, in coordination with European allies, to recognise that continued occupation is not peace and to support the socially-just reconstruction of Ukraine through empowering its trade unions and strengthening civil society to defend against the rising new European far-right.
- 1.5 Four years on, GMB pledges to continue our full solidarity with Ukrainian trade unions via the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine (FTU) and Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine (KFTU) centres, as well as with the Ukrainian people in their struggle for a free, united, and democratic Ukraine.

Working in wartime

- 1.6 The cost of the war has fallen disproportionately upon Ukraine's working class. Systematic attacks on Ukraine's energy system have plunged towns and cities into darkness, shut schools and hospitals and placed entire communities at risk. Energy workers have restored power under fire, often at immense personal danger, to keep people safe through severe winter conditions. As Putin's war of aggression enters its fourth year, Ukraine's workers continue to face unrelenting violence. Russia's deliberate targeting of civilians and infrastructure is a grave breach of international law, deepening Ukraine's humanitarian crisis.

- 1.7 Yet, Ukraine's workers are not just defending their country but are also standing up for democratic rights, freedoms and labour standards that underpin our movement. In Ukrainian territories occupied by Russian forces, reports expose forced labour, suppression of trade union freedoms and violent mistreatment of workers alongside wider killing and torture of civilians. Tens of thousands of Ukrainian children have been forcibly deported to Russian territory, prompting the International Criminal Court (ICC) to issue an arrest warrant for Vladimir Putin.ⁱ
- 1.8 In free Ukraine, the war has been maintained at a dreadful cost in lives and the destruction of plant, infrastructure, and civil society. There have been more than 600,000 military casualties between February 2022 and January 2026 and some 15,000 civilian deaths and 41,000 civilian injuries. Meanwhile, proposed labour laws by Ukrainian politicians continue to risk eroding collective bargaining, bypassing social dialogue and weakening workers' rights at a time when workers' contributions are central to national resilience.
- 1.9 Since the outbreak of the war, some 6 million Ukrainians have sought refugee status in European countries, with 217,000 overwhelmingly women and young children finding a safe haven across the UK (with 17% in London, 18% in Scotland and 17% in the Southeast).² Congress notes with relief survey findings from Oxford University's Migration Observatory in 2024 that 69% Ukrainian refugees have found employment within the UK economy and 68% of respondents stating that they now intend to remain in the UK after the end of the war.³
- 1.10 However, Congress is concerned that some 50% of Ukrainian women refugees in the UK have reported experiencing difficulties in finding employment while a similar number find barriers to obtaining housing. Issues include lack of references, guarantors, or the basic financial means to enter the private rental sector. Most shockingly in March 2024, some 9,500 Ukrainian refugees were homeless or risked homelessness.⁴
- 1.11 GMB has an important role to play alongside bodies such as Ukrainian Refugee Help Charity, and the Ukrainian Welcome Charity to help Ukrainian refugees in the UK and to support those who are workers to join the union.

Continuing our trade union solidarity

- 1.12 GMB members have led the way in answering the call to help Ukraine by raising money and material aid so that Ukrainian unions can put their strength in organising workplaces towards strength organising humanitarian resistance.
- 1.13 GMB has consistently and unequivocally condemned Russia's invasion, based on our support for the universal application of international law and rights and has

been at the forefront of campaigning for more material support for the Ukrainian people and its trade unions to resist it, by delivering direct assistance to Ukrainian unions and working with groups like the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign.

- 1.14 GMB has also worked with progressive partners in Ukraine more widely, such as Save Ukraine which rescues children from occupied territories, provides housing, psychological care, and social support. In early 2026, GMB supported the 'March for the Children' in London to highlight the plight of 1.6 million children still under occupation and at least 35,000 abducted have been taken to Russia.
- 1.15 Throughout the war GMB has maintained its calls to oppose military aggression and support for international law and rights to national self-determination for Ukraine. It remains crucial that GMB continues to do so consistently at a time when we are witnessing powerful states retreat from international law and the rules governing military conduct elsewhere – be it in Iran, Palestine, Lebanon, Venezuela, Greenland and the illegal blockade of Cuba. International laws and rights including to national self-determination were hard-fought by trade unions in the ashes of the Second World War. We fought for them so that never again should workers of one country be forced to go to war with those of another.
- 1.16 GMB Regions and Branches have built direct links and initiatives of solidarity with their Ukrainian counterparts to provide humanitarian aid, including the Free Trade Unions of the Medical Workers of Ukraine (VPMU), the Independent Trade Union of Mineworkers of Ukraine (NGPU) and the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power workers' union.
- 1.17 As part of GMB's branch fundraising appeals we have contributed to much needed medical supplies to frontline zones subject to drone attacks, and off-grid power systems to assist miners working underground during power cuts.
- 1.18 Congress thanks and commends GMB Branches who contributed to the Ukraine Solidarity Winter Appeal which raised over £6,000 in donations which funded three pick-up trucks loaded with medical aid and winter supplies for Ukrainian unions.
- 1.19 We stand ready to explore more of these union-to-union humanitarian aid initiatives, especially in sectors where we also have members such as supporting Ukrainian education workers and care workers who grew their union membership by 70 per cent as they defended their health system stretched to the limit by war.⁵
- 1.20 GMB also notes that with strong backing of the case for material aid to Ukraine by unions including GMB, the UK government has committed £10.8 billion in military support for Ukraine since the invasion and to a further £3 billion a year until 2031 'for as long as it takes'. This support has also strengthened the UK's own defence capabilities and supply chains in which GMB members are employed.

- 1.21 This is what GMB has proudly campaigned for and helped deliver as a union, but we know that collective security and defence is strongest when it is also grounded in the wider workers' struggle for social and economic justice, democratic accountability, and public ownership.
- 1.22 Leaders in the Ukrainian trade union centre, KVPU have recently warned how the war is being used to push Ukraine towards a neoliberal economy, prioritising markets over workers. It is vital that workers fighting for their country's freedom return to a country committed to social justice and workers' rights.
- 1.23 GMB stands with Ukrainian unions in their call for the restoration of labour rights and for a socially just reconstruction that embeds collective bargaining and rejects deregulation and privatisation. GMB will also continue to focus upon delivering trade union solidarity throughout the darkest of times, through much-needed humanitarian aid and practical support.

For a socially-just peace and reconstruction of Ukraine

- 1.24 The shaping of peace in Ukraine and the rebuilding of its civil society is vital. We need to be under no illusions about the sheer scale of delivering upon those tasks.
- 1.25 There is a significant shortfall between government expenditures and revenue, only partially met by foreign loans and aid. In times of war there is understandably a squeeze upon non-military spending, but Ukraine is also subject to large foreign debt repayments and International Monetary Fund (IMF) conditions stipulating labour market deregulation and further privatisation. During the war Ukraine's parliament passed laws introducing 'zero hour' contracts and Law 5371, which exempts workers in companies with fewer than 250 employees from the coverage of collective agreements.⁶
- 1.26 Therefore, key to Ukraine's full and free development should be the cancellation of its war debt and the delivery of the promised \$200-£300 billion in Western funds for reconstruction, free of conditions and selling-off extraction of Ukraine's natural resources to foreign corporations. GMB, together with the Ukrainian unions, can build the international case for this.
- 1.27 Now more than ever, we must stand with Ukraine's unions so that they can effectively stand up to the restriction of their activities and organise Ukraine's workers to begin the reconstruction of their nation.
- 1.28 We must also be ready to stand together against the far-right, which is attacking union interests across Europe. It took two World Wars in Europe to show that war, and unjust peace terms to end it, can embolden the rise of fascism and authoritarianism globally. No country is immune to far-right politics, and we must

not be passive observers in the face of growing far-right movements, imperialist aggression and global authoritarianism.

- 1.29 GMB condemns the growth of far right and Neo-Nazi groups which have fought on both sides of the war, including the Russian 'Rusich' Paramilitary unit and the Ukrainian 'Azov' Battalion. There is credible evidence that both groups have committed war crimes and despite starting on the fringes of this war, they are growing in political base and links with Europe's far-right networks.
- 1.30 The far-right has also become emboldened in this war by US President Trump's dangerous rapprochement with Putin over Ukraine and his administration's publicly support for far-right politicians in countries across Europe, including Putin-ally Victor Orban in Hungary and the AFD Party in Germany. The Ukrainian peoples' courageous and righteous struggle to stem aggressive Russian nationalism and territorial expansion must not be hijacked by political groups hostile to their class interests and the defence of democracy in Europe.
- 1.31 With or without any external 'peace deal' manufactured by Putin and Trump, GMB will continue to provide direct solidarity to Ukrainian unions and together campaign for Russian Troops Out and for a Free and United Ukraine—free from oligarchs and occupiers

Conclusion

- 1.32 Ukraine's unions have shown extraordinary courage and determination, keeping workplaces operating under fire, defending democratic freedoms and holding communities together. Strong unions are needed not just for winning the war, but for winning the peace that must follow.
- 1.33 **Four years after Russia's war on Ukraine began, GMB:**
 - 1. Reaffirms our unwavering solidarity with the Ukrainian people and unions and their right to determine their own future
 - 2. Restates our call for Russia's immediate withdrawal from all occupied territories.
 - 3. Continues to support Ukrainian unions' appeals for the UK to provide the aid necessary to help secure a just and lasting peace.
 - 4. Calls for the withdrawal of proposed labour reforms and other anti-union policies in Ukraine that seek to roll-back workers' rights and union freedoms.

5. Calls on the UK government and European allies to maintain and strengthen sanctions on Russia's government and funding sources for its ongoing war
6. Demands a reorientation of UK defence policy towards strengthened collective security with Europe's democratic states
7. Continues to provide direct solidarity to the Ukrainian trade unions
8. Continue to oppose and condemn the growth of far-right politics in Russia, in European countries including Ukraine, and globally such as in the United States
9. Organise and campaign for better support for Ukrainian refugees in the UK.

References

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³ Migration Observatory, Ukrainian migration to the UK, 03 December 2024 <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/ukrainian-migration-to-the-uk/>

⁴ The Guardian, 'Ukrainians face growing homelessness crisis at home and abroad, report finds' 24 September 2024 <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2024/sep/24/war-ukrainians-homelessness-crisis-abroad-two-million-housing-idp-destroyed-damaged-ukraine-europe>

⁵ Uni Global Union 'Ukrainian care workers' union growth shows strength, resilience during war', 26 November 2024 <https://www.uni-europa.org/news/ukrainian-care-workers-organize-in-war/>

⁶ Social Europe, 'Workers' rights—a casualty of the war in Ukraine', 14 May 2024, <https://www.socialeurope.eu/workers-rights-a-casualty-of-the-war-in-ukraine>