

## Dogfennau Ategol – Y Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb, Llywodraeth Leol a Chymunedau

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Lleoliad:	I gael rhagor o wybodaeth cysylltwch a:
Ystafell Bwyllgora 2 – y Senedd	Naomi Stocks
Dyddiad: Dydd Mercher, 11 Ionawr 2017	Committee Clerk 0300 200 6565
Amser: 09.00	<a href="mailto:SeneddCymunedau@cynulliad.cymru">SeneddCymunedau@cynulliad.cymru</a>

Noder bod y dogfennau a ganlyn yn ychwanegol i'r dogfennau a gyhoeddwyd yn y prif becyn Agenda ac Adroddiadau ar gyfer y cyfarfod hwn

### – Consultation responses for the inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers

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(11.45 – 12.15)

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Llywodraeth Leol a Chymunedau  
**Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a  
cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru**

**Ymatebion i'r Ymgynghoriad**

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Ionawr 2017



**Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru**

Y Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb, Llywodraeth Leol a Chymunedau

Tudalen y pecyn 1

# Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru yw'r corff sy'n cael ei ethol yn ddemocrataidd i gynrychioli buddiannau Cymru a'i phobl, i ddeddfu ar gyfer Cymru, i gytuno ar drethi yng Nghymru, ac i ddwyn Llywodraeth Cymru i gyfrif.

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**Y Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb, Llywodraeth Leol a  
Chymunedau**

**Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr  
lloches yng Nghymru**

**Ionawr 2017**

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**Equality, Local Government and Communities  
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**Inquiry into refugees and asylum  
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<b>Rhif   Number</b>	<b>Sefydliad</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
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RAS 01

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Oasis

Response from: Oasis

I am a volunteer at the Oasis Refugee Centre in Splott Cardiff. If you are looking for an example of best practice then this would be a worthwhile place to start.

The buildings are a little dilapidated but the atmosphere is extremely friendly and welcoming. Oasis is a drop in centre for Asylum Seekers and Refugees to offer support and alleviate the boredom of inactivity.

There is food provided at lunch times and tea and coffee available at any time.

In addition to the vital and extremely popular English classes, there are several activities available. There is a strong focus on sport because the majority of asylum seekers are young men. Monday is women's focus day, offering women only crafts and activities. My absolute favourite is the most wonderful music group.

[REDACTED]  
We often have new arrivals appearing and are constantly amazed at the talented visitors. There have been so numerous "magic moments" where we have held our breath while beautiful music is produced from a new arrival.

The best way to fully appreciate Oasis is to pay a visit.

The best way to help Oasis is to offer financial support - they currently need a kitchen makeover.

The best way to understand the needs of our lovely Asylum Seekers is to speak to them and our dedicated volunteers.

The best way to arrange all of this is to speak to [REDACTED]

Wishing you good luck in your endeavours.

[REDACTED]



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RAS 01a

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Oasis (Gwybodaeth Ychwanegol)

Response from: Oasis (Additional information)

At the Sanctuary in the Senedd meeting held on Wednesday 7th December, I enquired how Clearsprings were allowed to get away with offering such a poor standard of housing when as a Private landlord I had to follow the rigorous standard imposed on the Welsh Landlord Licencing scheme. The members of the committee were very encouraging on the issue and stated that they would investigate as a matter of priority.

I have several more points and evidence to submit which may help the committee.

1. Asylum Seekers are already suffering severe stress while going through the arduous Asylum process. Living in poorly maintained housing with mould, damp and inadequate facilities affects their mental and physical health even further. Apart from the inhumanity of the situation, they also become a greater burden on the NHS. Surely it is more cost effective to employ a builder and decorator than to use the already overstretched services of our Doctors and Hospitals.

2. The furniture and other goods supplied by Clearsprings are of very poor quality and often broken. The standard issue of aluminium beds with broken springs and sofas and seating which is broken and only fit for scrapping causes neck and back pain, again posing another call on the NHS.

I have many stories to tell from my experiences of Clearsprings because I deliver bedding and duvets to Asylum Seekers so have witnessed these problems first hand. Asylum Seekers do not complain but are extremely grateful for an small act of kindness. This is why someone has to speak up for them.

From a purely economic perspective this makes no sense. From a humanitarian perspective it is a total disgrace and from a fairness perspective, I would not be allowed to get away with such poor standards so why should they?



Thank you for taking the time to deliberate this issue but I am eager to see if there is **positive action to improve.**

RAS 02

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Gesajda Asllani, Coleg Sir Gâr

Response from: Gesajda Asllani, Coleg Sir Gâr

### “What is it like to be a refugee”

Refugee, it's a word that we've been hearing for years, but what really is a refugee? A refugee is an individual that has been forced to flee his or her home country for protection and a better life. Some of the many reasons that they have fled their country are reasons like war, slavery, trafficking and physical abuse. They flee their home country with hope for a better life, but fleeing their country brings about other risks as some people might know, for example, most refugees come to the UK in a lorry. When they emerge from the Eurotunnel, many refugees make the common mistake of thinking that all their problems are solved. But this is not the case. After having arrived in England, they are met with a whole new host of problems. Racism, the legal battle for citizenship, the language barrier – the list goes on and on. Racism is something that some newcomers might experience when they arrive in the UK. People seem to be not fair to refugees because they think that we come here to take their benefits and their jobs, but this is not the case! Refugees and asylum seekers are often dehumanised and this is unacceptable. Are people really worth less for being from a poorer country?! Some people tend to say racist slurs such as “Why don't they go to a different country?” but questions like these are invalid. Countries in the Middle East have accepted MILLIONS of refugees whereas the UK right now has a refugee population of about 117,000. That's just 0.18% of the UK population. Last year alone, Germany welcomed 431,000 refugees into their country. But still, people who seek refuge in the UK are subject to overly-patriotic attitudes. Personally, I have been subjected to racism in my own school. As I went to sit at the table, one boy, who I won't name, whispered “terrorist” as I approached. I'm sure you can imagine how this made me feel.

Judging someone because of their origin or religious belief is a mistake made by many people, which hurts many people. It makes them feel unwanted in this society. As we all know about the organisation called ISIS which is causing an terrible war and it's spreading fear everywhere. It's

affecting the individuals in Syria also other individuals in different parts of the world, I remember during the summer I saw a video of a little Muslim boy and his mother having dinner at an American restaurant, near their table were some American people that were talking about ISIS and saying that all Muslims are like them and that they are all bad, you could see the little boy was very upset about what was said about him. His mother didn't hesitate to protect her son from these negative comments. Just because some religious individuals are using religion as a reason to make war it doesn't mean that all individuals that believe in that religion think the same. We are different individuals from each other we have different opinions , choices, lifestyle, religion and that doesn't mean we are all bad or good, at the end of the day we are all humans we all make mistakes but we need to make sure not to include innocent people in our problems. Being able to start a new life in another country without knowing anything about it or how to communicate with someone who doesn't speak your language is harder than it looks. I remember the first week when I arrived in the UK, it was totally different from what I was used to in Albania.

To be able to stay in this country refugees have to go through difficult legal procedures which take a lot of time. They have to give an interview about why they came to the UK. The interviews are given at a building called The Home Office, then they decide if they are going to allow you to live in this country or not. If they allow you to stay then they will give you a five year permission to stay in the UK. After five years you can re-apply for indefinite permission to remain here which means that they get permission to stay in this country and they don't have to apply ever again. If they are awarded permanent residency here, then they are legally a UK citizen.

Then, there is the language barrier. I was lucky enough to have good language-learning skills, and I started learning English in school in Albania. However, not all refugees have this opportunity. Not being able to speak the language also poses a risk of being bullied.

But on the good side, the best thing that has ever happened in my life was moving to the UK, the help that I've received from people has been unbelievable. What this country has done for me, I never thought it would happen. I have had the opportunity to have a better education, which is not

corrupt like it was in Albania. I've met so many different people and learnt so many new things that will lead me to a brighter future. Being a refugee is an amazing experience; there are moments that I wish I never experienced, but there are good moments as well, such as meeting people from across the world and visiting new places.

I'm very thankful for everything that this country has done for me, and the majority of people who treat me the same as the others and give me opportunities to try new things and the most important letting me build a new life here. *The end!!*

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru  
Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales  
Ymateb gan: Cymdeithas Seicolegol Prydain  
Response from: The British Psychological Society (BPS)



The  
British  
Psychological  
Society

John Griffiths AM

Chair Equality, Local Government & Communities Committee

National Assembly for Wales

Pierhead Street

Cardiff

CF99 1NA

21 November 2016

Dear John Griffiths AM,

## **Wales and the World: Supporting refugees and asylum seekers**

We welcome the decision by the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee to look at the support available for refugees and asylum seekers in Wales and how well Wales is responding to the large-scale displacement of Syrians because of the country's civil war.

We appreciate that this is largely in relation to the Welsh Government's 'Refugee and Asylum Delivery Plan' and how those services are provided through local authorities.

The British Psychological Society (BPS) would like to take this opportunity to share its views on the support and advocacy available to unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

Earlier this month, the BPS's Presidential Taskforce on Refugees and Asylum seekers issued a statement on the need for the prompt, effective and human treatment of minors from Calais. We believe that the committee may want to consider the principles outlined in this statement as part of their inquiry along with how they apply to unaccompanied asylum seeking children who arrive in Wales.

## **Statement by the British Psychological Society's Presidential Taskforce on Refugees and Asylum Seekers**

The British Psychological Society recognises work already undertaken to support and care for unaccompanied minors by the French and British Government. However, we would stress that there are important and additional considerations which need to be made.

The British Psychological Society (BPS) recognises the efforts of the British government to share responsibilities with France in protecting unaccompanied children and young people. In addition to those recently arriving, there are thousands of children and young persons in the UK as asylum seekers and refugees, with similar and urgent needs and large numbers still in Calais with an uncertain future.

Whilst efforts are being made by the Home Office in collaboration with the British Red Cross and others to provide support to recently arrived minors in the UK from the 'Calais Jungle' the BPS emphasises that there are important and additional considerations which need to be made in any measures taken with these minors. In particular prompt, effective and humane action is vital as many will have multiple and complex needs.

1. Prompt, holistic assessment of their overall wellbeing and medical, psychological, welfare and educational needs. This requires a coordinated response from a multidisciplinary team, which should include practitioner psychologists.
2. Psychological assessments of vulnerability (including to risk of further harm or exploitation) and of the impact of a range of experiences including loss (including of parents or other family members), violence, abuse or exploitation. Such assessments should be gender-appropriate, culturally-appropriate and in the relevant language of the individual using professional interpreters. Psychological assessments can take into account socioeconomic and other context factors which impact on the well-being, development and learning of a children and young persons. Such assessments can contribute to a prompt multidisciplinary response to ensure minors are able to access appropriate health and social care services, and that they are able to access education swiftly and that they can be adequately supported in the educational system; and placed in culturally-appropriate, safe foster care where necessary.

3. Multidisciplinary assessments in cases where the ages of minors is disputed in the legal asylum determination process. No single discipline has the expertise to provide a definitive or even a best approach to age determination and any such assessment requires more than a one-off assessment, which can provide an approximate age. Practitioner psychologists can contribute to multidisciplinary age-range assessments by assessing development and maturity, the range of psychological and social factors which may impact on such development. They can help by providing a psychological opinion on the implications of such an assessment for the individual's functioning and their protection, emotional, social and educational needs.
4. Effective support of any families who are supporting the minors, particularly in understanding the needs of the child or young person, providing a safe and supportive environment as best as possible to facilitate their development and adjustment to life in the UK and to the educational system. Psychological support should also foster any existing peer relationships, such as those formed in Calais, and existing relationships and communication with family members outside the UK.
5. Adequate training and ongoing support for foster carers and staff in residential settings hosting unaccompanied minors. This will ensure carers are prepared for the range and complexity of psychological, medical, educational and welfare needs as well as personal, emotional or other resources that unaccompanied minors may have to manage the challenges of adjusting to life in the UK.
6. Adequate and prompt training for health and social care staff and teachers receiving unaccompanied minors, to consider the psychological aspects of their needs and development to help ensure that every individual is supported in reaching their full potential.
7. Adequate training health service commissioners and local authorities to ensure adequate systems are in place to allow prompt access to social, health and educational systems to promote well-being and social inclusion of unaccompanied minors

The British Psychological Society urges the government, all psychologists and other health, social care and educational professionals to work together to uphold our legal obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and our humanitarian obligations to ensure the protection, safety and best interests of each and every unaccompanied minor arriving in the UK.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Hutchings', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dr Paul Hutchings

Chair Welsh Branch, British Psychological Society

The British Psychological Society – Cardiff House – Cardiff Road – Vale of Glamorgan – CG36 2AW

Tel: 01446 704414 – Web: [www.bps.org.uk](http://www.bps.org.uk)



RAS 04

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Grŵp Cymorth Ffoaduriaid Casnewydd a'r Ardal

Response from: Newport and District Refugee Support Group

### **Introduction**

1 Newport & District Refugee Support Group (N&DRSG) is a voluntary organisation which was founded in 1999 by as a response to the arrival of people arriving in Newport seeking safety from the war in South Europe. The organisation has no political or religious affiliations. In addition to awareness raising and information sharing meetings we started weekly drop-ins for people seeking safety and refugees only in 2002. Since 2010 the drop-ins have been open anyone from another country arriving or residing in Newport

2 We organised and have been involved in successful projects such as Paint back (Communities first), the Bike Project (Dyffryn Link, Police), the Allotment Project (Welsh Church Fund), section 4 food voucher exchange in partnership with St Mary's Church, Bethel Church and others, Community Space Partnership (7 communities/ Big Lottery) and we were instrumental in the development of the Young Asylum Support Service which was delivered by GAVO. We have been the main organiser for Refugee Week activities in Newport between 2002 and 2011 - with the 2009 presentation of the Refugee Inclusion Strategy by Brian Gibbons as highlight.

3 Our activities have varied in response to the presenting needs of new arrivals; we organised separate drop-ins for families with children to accommodate the difference in interest they had in the activities provided at the general drop-in, hosted the legal advice services of Asylum Justice when informed that these were urgently needed and exchanged Section 4 vouchers to provide people with some cash to enable using transport and buying cheaper/cultural appropriate goods.

4 I Start (International Support Training Advocacy Resettlement Touchpoint) is a new scheme which envisages to provide an equal-opportunity, safe and empowering environment for newly-arrived asylum seekers, refugees and European migrants in the Newport area. The first part of the scheme: a four-week rolling orienteering course has recently started to provide new arrivals

with key information about important paperwork, keeping safe in their accommodation, while out and about and training, education and employment opportunities. The course has been developed in cooperation with new arrivals, police, health – and accommodation providers.

We discussed the consultation at the recent Drop-in, and have included the responses of new (and not so new) arrived people in our response below.

### **Syrian resettlement scheme**

5 It is very encouraging and pleasing to see that all Local Authorities in Wales have said that they are prepared to help Syrian refugees, and that the Welsh Assembly Government has put a task force together to support the Local Authorities in this. It is interesting to see that the people who come to the UK through this scheme receive significantly more support with their integration than people seeking asylum and refugees who have arrived through the ‘normal’ asylum route. It appears an acknowledgement that this dedicated integration support is needed, but we don’t understand why people who have come through the usual route don’t receive the same level of support although they have gone through the same or very similar circumstances.

6 The Refugee Integration Strategy states that integration of people should start from the moment they arrive, but although we appreciate the efforts of N&DRSG and other voluntary organisations in Newport, the integration support for new arrivals coming through the ‘normal’ route is not planned, structured or resourced. There are also a number of other UK government schemes to help unaccompanied asylum seeking children which will need a lot of attention and resources and we are concerned that the focus and urgency of these recent schemes will distract any attention for the needs of people who have arrived through the ‘normal’ routes.

### **The pace and effectiveness of the Welsh Government’s approach to resettling refugees through the UK Government’s Syrian Resettlement Scheme**

7 We are unable to make any comments because we don’t have sufficient information about this. The numbers of resettled people seem low, but we understand that Local Authorities have many other matters which need their attention and appreciate that it may be difficult for some to find houses and

the services they need to help refugees because they don't have much experience of this.

### **The effectiveness of the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan**

8 We could not find any evidence of awareness, let alone incorporation of the delivery plan in local (Newport City Council) strategies. We don't know the reason for this, but it may be because the plan is very vague about responsibilities and time frames. It would be more helpful if the plan was more detailed and had so-called 'SMART' actions and it would be clear who would be responsible.

At the moment it seems that the delivery-drive depends mainly on voluntary sector organisations, who have varying levels, periods of –and criteria for funding, meaningful input from people seeking asylum and refugees and their services are not always coordinated. It seems that the additional input from 'Citizens of Sanctuary' in contributes to better coordination of services in Swansea and Cardiff. On the other hand it is good to have local support organisations who can respond to local needs and have knowledge of local resources, networks and opportunities. It may be more useful for the plan to become a framework where organisations can be responsible for parts of the plan.

9 It would also be useful if the delivery plan would be included in other plans and strategies of Welsh and UK Government. One of the Drop-in participants noticed that Wales is trying to recruit General Practitioners from other parts of the world, while there are a number of people seeking asylum who have successfully participated in the WARD scheme of the DPIA which is funded by Welsh Government and could be employed were it not for their current migration status. It would appear to be more efficient to lobby UK Government to amend legislation to grant people who have successfully completed the WARD scheme leave to remain.

### **General observations**

Drop-in participants had the following general observations most of which are not directly related to the refugee delivery plan:

### **10 What is good**

It is very good to have the WARD scheme for doctors; it would be good to have a similar scheme for other professionals and crafts people ( we explained about the CQFW: there is no awareness about this, and our experience is that colleges are not sufficiently aware nor funded to provide this option)

It is good to have to share accommodation with people of different cultures, religions and nationalities which we normally would not want to engage with: this helps us to understand and respect people and to see that it is possible to live in peace together.

There are different charities that help us with different things and for some things that they do the same we can choose where it is most convenient or we feel most comfortable.

It is better to live in Wales than in England because there is less racism in Wales.

### **11 What is not so good**

It is not so good that people seeking asylum are not allowed to work once they have completed the WARD scheme.

We would like the Welsh Government to allow us to work – or talk to the Home Office to allow us to work.#

The very low allowance doesn't allow us to buy books to study English because the library doesn't have enough books about English language.

It is very difficult to have access to training and education (due to cost and/or eligibility criteria)

There is no equality in the waiting times for the asylum application: some people get a decision within weeks, others have to wait years.

We can't open a bank account – which makes our life more expensive and unhealthy. We need a bank account to order bus tickets, a leisure card and to buy things on the internet which is often much cheaper.

It is not good that it is impossible, or takes a very long time to transfer people in asylum accommodation when it is necessary: e.g. mobility, mental health, violence.

## **12 What could be done to make things better**

Make it easier and cheaper/free to access training and education

Use the WARD scheme to get more GPs in Wales.

Increase the asylum allowance.

Allow us to do paid work.

Provide Welsh language classes for people seeking asylum.

Have refugee specialists (champions) in the Job Centres.

Have interpreters in the Job Centre.

Develop and coordinate an anonymous complaints procedure.

Trish Johns

Chair

I START

(Newport & District Refugee Support Group)



RAS 05

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol Hywel Dda

Response from: Hywel Dda University Health Board

**RE: Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee  
Refugees and Asylum Seekers**

Thank you for forwarding details of the Consultation on the Welsh Government's Refugee and Asylum Seekers Delivery Plan, which Hywel Dda University Health Board is pleased to receive.

The Health Board feedback is as follows:

1. The pace and effectiveness of the Welsh Government's approach to resettling refugees through the UK Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS);

WG appear to have taken an incremental and paced approach to resettling refugees through the SVPRS. Locally within the Hywel Dda University Health Board (H DUHB) areas, we have found the pace and effectiveness of the approach to be appropriate and manageable as we work with partners in the Local Authority and other organisations.

2. The effectiveness of the Refugee and Asylum Seekers Delivery Plan

The Refugee and Asylum Seekers Delivery Plan appears to cover a wide range of requisite elements to facilitate a seamless resettlement for refugees and asylum seekers in Wales. Within the H DUHB areas, refugees and asylum seekers who have been resettled report a generally positive experience. Locally, there have been press releases in the Welsh media and national press (Daily Telegraph) about good experiences in Ceredigion; whilst in Carmarthenshire, there has also been positive feedback received through the steering group, for example, around provision of/access to/delivery/quality of dental services.

## 2.1 Action area 2 - Health, Wellbeing and Social Care

2.1.1. Mental Health – bullet point 2 – we believe there is a point requiring clarification “ In particular, the guidance will ensure the need for age appropriate mental health services which are capable of meeting the clinical needs of the individual asylum seeker/refugee .”. How can guidance “ensure the need”?. We would suggest an alternative to read “ensure the provision of age appropriate mental health services ....”

2.1.2 Physical Health – bullet point 4 – it would be valuable to receive assurance that that the current problems being experienced within general medical services with a large number of GPs retiring would be taken into account during these discussions.

1

## 2.2 Action area 3 – Maternity and Children

2.2.1 Provision of health screening at initial assessment – would funding include additional funding to Health Boards to cover the costs of language interpreters?

## 2.3 Action area 5 – Education

2.3.1 Higher Education - How will advice available at the monthly surgery with Cardiff Metropolitan University be accessed by potential students living in other areas of Wales?

## 2.4 Action area 6 – Employment

2.4.1 Employment, Volunteering and Training – Will similar organisations to the Trinity Centre and the South East Wales Refugee Women Support Group which may exist in North and West Wales be similarly funded by the Equality and Inclusion Grant?

## 2.5 Action Area 7 - Gender based Violence, hate crime, modern slavery and community cohesion

2.5.1 FGM – Priority 2 – Will “the need to engage with Universities and Higher Education Establishments to introduce Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence, FGM and anti slavery training to 1st year medical students” also be taken into consideration for Nursing students and students in professions allied to medicine eg. Physiotherapists, Radiographers etc?

Priority 5 – Can the accuracy and validity of this data be assured and in what way?

The Health Board is particularly interested to note and would support the proposal of the identification and promotion of a diversity/equal access kite mark for organisations across Wales to demonstrate equal access and support for all groups in society.

## 3. The support and advocacy available to unaccompanied asylum seeking children in Wales

It is reassuring to note from the delivery plan that training for key professionals will be funded in order to help them understand particular issues relating to asylum seekers and refugees.

## 4. The role and effectiveness of the Welsh Government’s Community Cohesion Delivery Plan in ensuring the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Welsh communities.

Community Cohesion - the Health Board has some concern that the Community Cohesion Delivery Plan (see Page 26) activities appear to be centred around Cardiff. This may be where larger numbers of refugees and asylum seekers are resettled, but it will also be important to ensure that integration of refugees and asylum seekers resettled elsewhere in more remote, rural areas is similarly facilitated. Within our area, we are working closely with voluntary sector organisations, such as the Ethnic Youth Support Team to support resettlement.

5. Action area 8 – Arts/Culture and Sport

Bullet Point 3 – How will refugees and asylum seekers who do not have access to a computer or whose internet links are poor in their locality be informed of the concessionary rates available to them?

Do we know of any activities that have facilitated the increase the fitness of refugees and asylum seekers, particularly women – see example illustrated page 30? An example might be models of good practice that could be adopted and adapted locally.

In broad terms, Hywel Dda University Health Board welcomes the opportunities arising from the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan to work collaboratively with our public, private and third sector colleagues towards facilitating the resettlement programme and improving the lives of those who have been resettled within our communities. The plan is holistic and wide ranging and we would also feed back that the easy read version of the plan is a good example of an accessible document.

Yours sincerely

**Steve Moore**  
**Chief Executive**



RAS 06

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Eglwysi Ynghyd yng Nghymru

Response from: Churches Together In Wales

**Oddi wrth / From: Parch./Revd Gethin Rhys**  
**Swyddog Polisi'r Cynulliad Cenedlaethol / National Assembly Policy Officer**



Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb, Llywodraeth Leol a Chymunedau  
Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru.

[SeneddCymunedau@cynulliad.cymru](mailto:SeneddCymunedau@cynulliad.cymru)

22 Tachwedd 2016.

Annwyl gyfeillion

### **Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru**

Rydym yn ysgrifennu ar ran Cytûn – Eglwysi Ynghyd yng Nghymru – i fynegi ein cefnogaeth lwyr i'r cyflwyniad a wnaed i'r Ymchwiliad hwn gan Gynghrair Ffoaduriaid Cymru.

Mae nifer o'n haelod eglwysi yn gweithio'n lleol i groesawu ffoaduriaid o Syria ac o wledydd eraill. Wrth wneud hynny, maent bob amser yn cydweithio'n agos gydag asiantaethau swyddogol a chyrrff gwirfoddol eraill, ac mae ffrwyth eu profiad i'w weld yn yr ymateb gan y Gynghrair.

Gellir gweld rhestr gyflawn o'r eglwysi a'r mudiadau sy'n aelodau yn Cytûn yn: [www.cytun.cymru/ni.html](http://www.cytun.cymru/ni.html). Mae gan ein haelod eglwysi ryw 172,000 o aelodau mewn oed ymhob cymuned yng Nghymru, gan gynnwys nifer a ddaeth i Gymru yn y lle cyntaf fel ffoaduriaid. Mae gan yr eglwysi hyn hefyd gysylltiadau agos â llawer mwy o oedolion, plant a phobl ifainc yn eu hardaloedd. Mae rhai eglwysi lleol yn cynnig cartref i gymunedau ffydd a gynhelir gan ffoaduriaid a chymunedau lleiafrifol eraill.

*We are writing on behalf of Cytûn – Churches Together in Wales – to express our total support for the submission made to this Inquiry by the Welsh Refugee Coalition.*

*A number of our member churches work in their localities to welcome refugees from Syria and other countries. In doing so, they always work closely with official agencies and other voluntary bodies, and the fruits of their experience have influenced the submission made by the Coalition.*

*A full list of the churches and organisations in membership of Cytûn can be found at: [www.cytun.cymru/us.html](http://www.cytun.cymru/us.html). Our member churches have some 172,000 adult members in every community in Wales, including a number who came to Wales initially as refugees. These churches also have close contact with many more adults, children and young people in their areas. Some local churches host faith communities which are run by refugees and other minority communities.*

Yr eiddoch yn gywir

Handwritten signature of Aled Edwards in black ink.

Aled Edwards (Parch. Ganon)  
Prif Weithredwr

Handwritten signature of Gethin Rhys in black ink.

Gethin Rhys (Parch.)  
Swyddog Polisi

58 Heol Richmond, Caerdydd CF24 3AT | 58 Richmond Road, Cardiff CF24 3AT | 029 2046 4378  
[gethin@cytun.cymru](mailto:gethin@cytun.cymru) | [www.cytun.org.uk](http://www.cytun.org.uk)

Mae Cytûn yn gwmni cofrestredig yng Nghymru a Lloegr | Rhif: 5853982 | Enw cofrestredig: "Cytûn: Eglwysi Ynghyd yng Nghymru/Churches Together in Wales Limited" | Mae Cytûn yn elusen gofrestrdedig | Rhif: 1117071

Cytûn is a registered company in England and Wales | Number: 5853982 | Registered name: "Cytûn: Eglwysi Ynghyd yng Nghymru/Churches Together in Wales Limited" | Cytûn is a registered charity | Number: 1117071

RAS 07

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Coleg Brenhinol Pediatreg ac Iechyd Plant

Response from: The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health

The RCPCH welcomes the opportunity to respond to the inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales. In our response, we have chosen to set out our concerns about the current public discourse about refugee and asylum seeking children's arrival in the UK and concerns that RCPCH members have raised with us about the challenges of providing services to them.

The plight of child refugees, unaccompanied children and asylum seeking children continues to be a high profile issue and is likely to remain so in the immediate and medium term future. Upwards of 90,000 unaccompanied children have arrived in Europe in the last 12 months, many fleeing the horrors of war in the Middle East and elsewhere. Europol estimate that at least 10,000 of these have since disappeared, likely victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation. The UK has, to-date, accepted some 274 unaccompanied children.

A specific risk is that young, unaccompanied and traumatised refugees, many with complex mental and physical health needs, will be risk of being trafficked or potentially radicalised by their experiences. This is deeply worrying. We have urged the UK Government to fulfil their international obligations to secure the immediate safety of these children and set and honour an adequate quota of child refugees welcomed into the country. The UK government should also ensure that once welcomed, such children have access to a full process of determining needs and organising care, including comprehensive access to healthcare without cost barriers. Anything short of this contravenes the spirit of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

RCPCH members have raised concerns about the current health care provision to child refugees. Feedback indicates that many child refugees are presenting with specific issues and complex comorbidities which some members may feel ill-equipped to manage. Members have also stated that system and capacity issues are significantly reducing the ability of vulnerable child refugees to access appropriate health services.

Some of the immediate concerns raised by members include: significant challenges in service capacity, no systematic or strategic response for clinicians delivering work on the ground, complexity of need (both physical and mental health needs), lack of community paediatric experience and capacity, patchy primary care experience and access, public health risks, safeguarding and suitable accommodation concerns and transfers out of area before the immediate health needs of refugee children have been put in place.

In response to these concerns the RCPCH has undertaken a number of activities over the last 12 months, including:

- (a) Hosting an ['Insight' event](#) exploring the welfare needs of unaccompanied asylum seeking children in May 2016. The event was a one-day conference that brought together professionals from the health, education, social care and legal system to

- discuss, explore and share best practice in respond to the health and welfare needs of unaccompanied asylum seeking children.
- (b) Publishing revised web based [guidance](#) to support paediatricians in the management of young people and children of refugee background, including key practice considerations alongside other vital resources and links
  - (c) [Media responses](#) to reports about dental assessments for refugee children

In addition to this activity, the RCPCH is seeking funding to develop age assessment guidance to support paediatricians. When unaccompanied children and young people arrive and claim asylum in the UK, many have no documentary proof of their age or the documents they have cannot be relied upon. In these circumstances, the immigration authorities have to determine whether or not the young person is over or under 18 years of age, in order to route them correctly through the asylum process, as there are additional protections for children.

These age assessments have far-reaching consequences in terms of the asylum process, welfare provision, child protection and the young person's sense of identity and mental health. They impact on how the applicant's asylum claim is handled, with consequences for their permission to remain, and also on whether they will receive social services support under the Children Act 1989 or whether they are accommodated by the Home Office as adult asylum applicants.

Paediatricians have an important role in the age assessment process as they have expertise in taking histories from young people and have expertise in assessing the role of factors such as environment and disease on physical and psychological development. However the variation in practice among paediatricians undertaking age assessments has resulted in the credibility of these reports being called into question. Therefore, to ensure that asylum seeking children receive appropriate support and response to their needs, it is essential that funding is made available to enable the development of age assessment guidance.

Yours sincerely



Dr Mair Parry

RCPCH Officer for Wales

RAS 08

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Cymdeithas y Plant

Response from: The Children's Society

1) The Children's Society is a leading charity committed to improving the lives of thousands of children and young people every year. We work across England with the most disadvantaged children. Our direct work with vulnerable groups includes a long history of working with refugee and migrant children both within families and those who arrive unaccompanied and enter the care system. Last year we worked directly with over 650 such children and young people through projects in the North East, Leeds, West Midlands, Greater Manchester and London. Whilst we do not provide direct work with children in Wales we currently have one policy officer who is based in the Church of Wales offices.

2) In this response we will be focusing on unaccompanied children and the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan. We will not be commenting on the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS). We will also make some commentary on the needs of children who have been reunited with family members in Wales under the Dublin III Transfers.

3) As we do not currently operate frontline services in Wales, we will be referring to best practice in context of the existing projects we run across England, as well as the 'Safeguarding and Promoting the Welfare of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and Young People: All Wales Practice Guidance' (2011)<sup>1</sup>.

4) We will focus on issues around safeguarding, access to advocacy, mental and physical health, education, and crucially we also explore the urgent need to ensure that the often complex immigration cases of unaccompanied and separated children and young people are addressed in a timely and thorough manner with access to expert advice.

### **Assessments and support frameworks for unaccompanied children arriving in local authority care**

5) The experiences for children and young people vary depending on whether they are reuniting with family in the UK, or arriving with no connections in the UK. In either scenario, thorough assessments of the best interests of the child should be conducted, taking into account their wellbeing, development needs, safety and security considerations and individual views and desires<sup>2</sup>, and they should be referred into independent advocacy services in all instances. As outlined

<sup>1</sup> All Wales Child Protection Procedures Review Group (2011) 'Safeguarding and Promoting the Welfare of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and Young People: All Wales Practice Guidance' <https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwidnflI3rzQAhWKDcAKHazRB74QFggkM AA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.childreninwales.org.uk%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2015%2F09%2FSafeguarding-and-Promoting-the-Welfare-of-Unaccompanied-Asylum-Seeking-Children-and-Young-People-All-Wales-Practice-Guidance.pdf&usg=AFQjCNHRAWPF1dnFCHA8Txq3b-JJVzfKMQ> [accessed 22 Nov 2016]

<sup>2</sup> Guidance on conducting best interests assessments can be found in 'Annex 1' of the 'Interim National Transfer Protocol for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children 2016-17'; 'Section 1(3) of the Children's Act 1989'; 'The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations' 'Volume 2: care

in the 'All Wales Practice Guidance', social services should discuss this with the individual child and offer the services to them.<sup>3</sup>

**6)** For children being reunited with family members in Wales we would recommend all children joining family members in Wales receive a thorough assessment of their needs and the capacity of their family member to meet them under section 21 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

**7)** As the young person gets used to their new life in the UK, post-traumatic stress-related issues and other problems that were not initially identified may become apparent. For example one study of young refugees found that the likelihood of a child refugee experiencing post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD) increased by 8% three years after arrival whilst depression rates doubled<sup>4</sup>. In order to respond to future difficulties local authorities will need to maintain contact and offer support where appropriate. This is easier to facilitate if the young person remains in contact with an advocate.

**8)** Those children without family in the UK are likely to have been dispersed to Wales through the National Transfer Protocol<sup>5</sup>. The scheme only began operation in June 2016 and some receiving local authorities may not be experienced in supporting unaccompanied children.

**9)** Many unaccompanied children will be older teenagers. This does not make them any less vulnerable than younger children<sup>6</sup>. Supported accommodation has been used by the Home Office for unaccompanied children upon arrival but we would discourage this as a long term option. This cohort is at risk of going missing<sup>7</sup>, being trafficked<sup>8</sup>, and experiencing severe mental ill-health<sup>9</sup> issues. There is significant evidence to suggest that when placed in foster care, as opposed to supported accommodation, unaccompanied children are 18% less likely to experience post-traumatic stress disorder related symptoms<sup>10</sup>. Unless run by specialist staff, supported accommodation is unlikely to provide enough support and appropriate safeguarding<sup>11</sup> and is unlikely to be the best option for placement upon arrival.

**10)** The Department for Education has recently commissioned a programme of free training for this purpose in England<sup>12</sup>. We recommend Wales considers a similar scheme. In addition, local authorities should strongly consider further training for their social workers in areas where they have not previously supported many unaccompanied children as it demands specific additional skill and knowledge from their practice.

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[planning, placement and case review](#) and [Working together to safeguard children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children March 2015](#) [All accessed 11 Nov 2016]

<sup>3</sup> All Wales Child Protection Procedures Review Group (2011) 'Safeguarding and Promoting the Welfare of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and Young People: All Wales Practice Guidance' page 18

<sup>4</sup> Fazel and Stein (2002) 'The mental health of refugee children' <http://adc.bmj.com/content/87/5/366.short> [Accessed 11 Nov 2016]

<sup>5</sup> Interim National Transfer Protocol for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (2016-17)

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/534258/Interim\\_National\\_UASC\\_transfer\\_protocol.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/534258/Interim_National_UASC_transfer_protocol.pdf) [Accessed 11 Nov 2016]

<sup>6</sup> The Children's Society (2015) 'Seriously Awkward: how vulnerable 16 and 17 year olds are falling through the cracks'

[http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/seriously\\_awkward\\_youth-at-risk\\_full\\_online-final.pdf](http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/seriously_awkward_youth-at-risk_full_online-final.pdf) [Accessed 11 Nov 2016]

<sup>7</sup> Department for Education (2014) 'Care of unaccompanied and trafficked children'

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/330787/Care\\_of\\_unaccompanied\\_and\\_trafficked\\_children.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/330787/Care_of_unaccompanied_and_trafficked_children.pdf) [Accessed 14 Nov 2016]

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>9</sup> UNICEF (2006) 'Seeking asylum alone' [http://www.childmigration.net/files//SAA\\_UK.pdf](http://www.childmigration.net/files//SAA_UK.pdf) [Accessed 11 Nov 2016]

<sup>10</sup> UNICEF (2006) 'Seeking asylum alone' [http://www.childmigration.net/files//SAA\\_UK.pdf](http://www.childmigration.net/files//SAA_UK.pdf) [Accessed 11 Nov 2016]

<sup>11</sup> The Children's Society (2015) 'On your own now'

[https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/Supported\\_Accommodation\\_Report\\_2015.pdf](https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/Supported_Accommodation_Report_2015.pdf) [Accessed 11 Nov 2016]

<sup>12</sup> ECPAT (2016) 'Foster Carer and Accommodation Support Training' <http://www.ecpat.org.uk/content/foster-carer-and-accommodation-support-training> [Accessed 11 Nov 2016]

**11)** It will be important to have access to good interpreters, both on arrival, and for ongoing access to services. Interpreters need to be appropriately vetted and not pose a risk to the young person. They should be able to explain complex terminology, enabling professionals to have open and honest conversations with the young person, in their first language, about their wishes, risks they face and decisions they must make.

### **How can we best safeguard these children?**

**12)** The most immediate risk is that unaccompanied children go missing. They may be re-trafficked or could disappear from their placement, particularly if they feel they are not being adequately supported, or have not reached their final destination. Often young people will have travelled with the knowledge that there is a specific location or community that they must reach or join which will cause them to go missing. For children being transferred as part of the national interim protocol there is a specific risk that the receiving local authority might not be the place they had planned as the end of their journey.

**13)** The risk of going missing is highest within the first few hours of arrival<sup>13</sup>. Professionals will have to work hard to build a trusting relationship quickly emphasising that they have the best interests of the child at heart and that they are there to keep them safe. It will also be important to get as many personal details as possible from the young person during the initial meeting – recent photographs are particularly important for missing person investigations conducted by the local police force. Advice on best practice for avoiding trafficking in the first few hours can be found in '[Safeguarding children who may have been trafficked: practice guidance](#)'<sup>14</sup>.

**14)** The UK Government is due to launch the early adopter phase<sup>15</sup> of the Independent Child Trafficking Advocates scheme, established through the Modern Slavery Act 2015<sup>16</sup>. It will be available in Wales during the early adopter phase. Whilst a strong relationship with an advocate may help to reduce the risk of a child going missing it cannot guarantee it. Furthermore, as currently devised, the scheme will not meet the needs of all unaccompanied and separated children as it will only support those who have been trafficked. We recommend that all unaccompanied, separated and trafficked children have access to an independent advocate.

**15)** If indicators of trafficking are evident, an immediate referral to the National Referral Mechanism<sup>17</sup> (NRM), which identifies and supports victims of trafficking, could be appropriate. We are aware of at least one local authority that is referring all unaccompanied children to the NRM regardless of their individual circumstances and allowing the mechanism to determine if a child has been trafficked. In our practice in England we offer training to social workers on the NRM process – many social workers have not had to work through this process in their casework before and often require additional training.

### **Access to health and mental health services**

**16)** In terms of the physical health of young people, it will be important to complete registration with a local GP quickly and ensure that a statutory health assessment is carried out in accordance

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<sup>13</sup> Department for Education 'Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care' [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/307867/Statutory\\_Guidance\\_-\\_Missing\\_from\\_care\\_3\\_.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/307867/Statutory_Guidance_-_Missing_from_care_3_.pdf) [Accessed 14 Nov 2016]

<sup>14</sup> Home Office and Department for Education (2011) 'Safeguarding for children who may have been trafficked' [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/177033/DFE-00084-2011.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/177033/DFE-00084-2011.pdf) [Accessed 11 Nov 2016]

<sup>15</sup> Home Office (2015) 'Evaluation of Independent Child Trafficking Advocates trial: Final Report' [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/486138/icta-horr86.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/486138/icta-horr86.pdf) [Accessed 11 Nov 2016]

<sup>16</sup> Modern Slavery Act 2015 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/30/contents/enacted> [Accessed 11 Nov 2016] Guidance forthcoming

<sup>17</sup> National Crime Agency (2016) 'National Referral Mechanism' <http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/about-us/what-we-do/specialist-capabilities/uk-human-trafficking-centre/national-referral-mechanism> [Accessed 11 Nov 2016]

with relevant guidance, following arrival into a local authority<sup>18</sup>. We would recommend that, as outlined in guidance on promoting the health of looked-after children, social workers play a leading role in ensuring that this is done for both unaccompanied children and those being reunited with family. GPs will need to be properly briefed about the young person's circumstances and this needs to be done in a way that is thorough, in line with the young person's wishes and does not re-traumatise them. Thorough physical examination will be needed and should include tests for sexually transmitted infections. Often unaccompanied and separated children will be living with malnutrition, undiagnosed and untreated infections and injuries<sup>19</sup>.

**17)** The mental health needs of these children and young people are likely to be significant, but may not be immediately or clearly apparent<sup>20</sup>. Many will not present with a diagnosable condition<sup>21</sup> despite having experienced significant trauma. They are likely to need access to therapies addressing trauma and, if the young person has experienced the death of close family members, some form of grief counselling may be appropriate.

**18)** In our own practice we have found that strong advocacy, health education, befriending and strong orientation programme can play a significant role in empowering young people to seek mental health support, which, often for cultural reasons, they might find a difficult issue to raise on their own.

### **Making the immigration system accessible**

**19)** Unaccompanied and separated children arriving in the UK will require long term support to ensure that their immigration status in the UK is secured. An independent advocate can help them to access to independent and high quality legal advice.

**20)** These children and young people will have a range of immigration statuses. Immigration proceedings concerning this cohort are often complex and are unlikely to reach a quick conclusion. In all instances young people will need access to quality advice and would ideally receive independent advocacy support so they can fully understand their options and make informed decisions. Local authorities must be proactive in supporting young people to make their immigration claim. If deadlines are missed or applications not pending it can result in serious consequences for a young person's long term prospects. This is true for both unaccompanied children but also separated young people reunited with family members in Wales. Local Authorities need to plan long term to ensure that unaccompanied children in care can access services as care leavers once they turn 18 and are not prohibited from doing so because their immigration status has been left unaddressed.

**21)** The immigration system can be prohibitively expensive to vulnerable young people. Whilst asylum cases are still eligible for legal aid<sup>22</sup>, most other more complex cases are now out of scope following implementation of the Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act (2012)<sup>23</sup>. The Act can also have funding consequences for asylum cases that also have non-asylum related

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<sup>18</sup> Department for Education and Department for Health (2015) 'Promoting the health and well-being of looked-after children' [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/413368/Promoting\\_the\\_health\\_and\\_well-being\\_of\\_looked-after\\_children.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/413368/Promoting_the_health_and_well-being_of_looked-after_children.pdf) [Accessed 14 Nov 2016]

<sup>19</sup> Merredew and Simmonds (2010) 'The Health Needs of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and Young People' <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ph28/resources/looked-after-children-ep23-unaccompanied-asylum-seeking-children-john-simmonds-and-florence-merredew2> [accessed 14 Nov 2016]

<sup>20</sup> Fazel and Stein (2002) 'The mental health of refugee children' <http://adc.bmj.com/content/87/5/366.short> [Accessed 11 Nov 2016]

<sup>21</sup> Future in Mind (2015) 'Vulnerable Groups and Inequalities Task and Finish group Report' [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/414326/Vulnerable\\_Groups\\_and\\_Inequalities.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/414326/Vulnerable_Groups_and_Inequalities.pdf) [Accessed 11 Nov 2016]

<sup>22</sup> Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act (2012), <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2012/10/contents/enacted> [Accessed 11 Nov 2016]

<sup>23</sup> The Children's Society (2015) 'Cut off from Justice', [http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/LegalAid\\_Full\\_0.pdf](http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/LegalAid_Full_0.pdf) [Accessed 11 Nov 2016]



grounds. Exceptional Case Funding<sup>24</sup> may be available in some cases but, in our own practice, the funding is difficult to achieve without specialist legal support which can be difficult to secure.

**22)** There is also a disparity in the availability of quality immigration advice across the country<sup>25</sup>. Social workers and advocates will need to liaise closely with solicitors and help young people to attend appointments, ensure that the young people feel empowered and understand decisions relating to themselves and follow up to make sure that solicitors progress cases in a timely manner.

### **Orientation and integration**

**23)** The Welsh Government, through its Community Cohesion Delivery Plan has committed to providing funding for orientation and integration support for refugees and asylum seekers. This aspect of the work is currently delayed however as the Government decide how best to take it forward.

**24)** Orientation is a valuable opportunity not only to help refugee and migrant children during transition but also to improve their well-being, monitor progress and spot unmet needs. Orientation schemes can also play a crucial role in providing opportunities to make friends, socialise and form support networks.

**25)** The Welsh Government should bring forward its plans to deliver this aspect of the programme as quickly as possible. For children and young people the orientation provided should be as long term as possible and provide lasting opportunities for young people to participate and develop.

### **Recommendations**

- a) All children, whether unaccompanied or being reunited with family members need to be thoroughly assessed by a qualified social worker. For those being reunited, assessment should closely scrutinise the family's capacity to care for the child in question and long term contact plans should be in place to monitor progress.
- b) The Welsh Government should commission free training for foster carers and accommodation support workers caring for unaccompanied children to give them the necessary skills to support unaccompanied children.
- c) The Welsh Government should consider supporting local authorities in providing training for social workers around the needs of unaccompanied children. This should include the NRM process and an overview of the immigration system.
- d) The Welsh Government should review access to high quality interpreters. Any gaps identified in current provision should be addressed with an action plan.
- e) All unaccompanied and separated children, regardless of whether they have been trafficked, should have access to an independent advocate as soon as they arrive in Wales. Training should be provided to existing advocates to ensure they have the skills to properly support these children in the long term.
- f) The Welsh Government should review access to quality legal advice across Wales for unaccompanied children and support local authorities to help children access the legal advice they need.
- g) Local authorities must include immigration planning within their care plans to ensure that children's long term needs can be met when they turn 18 and become care leavers.

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<sup>24</sup> Gov.uk (2014) 'Legal aid: apply for exceptional case funding' <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/legal-aid-apply-for-exceptional-case-funding> [Accessed 11 Nov 2016]

<sup>25</sup> The Children's Society (2015) 'Cut off From Justice' [http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/LegalAid\\_Full\\_0.pdf](http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/LegalAid_Full_0.pdf) [Accessed 14 Nov 2016]

- h) The Welsh Government should bring forward the offer for refugees and migrants under the Community Cohesion Plan and ensure it has a specific strand of work targeted at migrant children that provides them with skills for life, opportunities to make friends, and long term support.
- i) Much of the framework in place to support unaccompanied children is very new or recently updated. The Welsh Government should commit to a wholesale review in the near future to ensure that all documents are complimentary, that policy is being properly implemented and gaps in provision are effectively addressed.

***For more information, please contact Tom Davies on  
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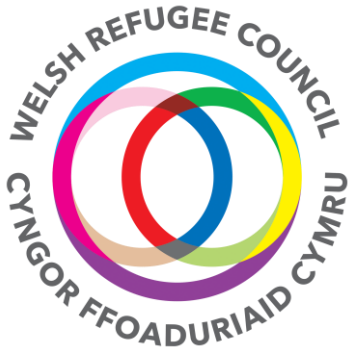
RAS 09

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Cyngor Ffoaduriaid Cymru

Response from: Welsh Refugee Council



## Welsh Refugee Council

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### Submission of evidence to the National Assembly for Wales' Equality, Local Government & Communities Committee inquiry into Refugees & Asylum Seekers in Wales (November 2016).

#### 1. Welsh Refugee Council.

1.1 For over 25 years, Welsh Refugee Council has been working people who are fleeing persecution, conflict & oppression. We deliver direct specialist support services to refugees in Cardiff, Wrexham, Newport & Swansea & work to empower asylum seekers & refugees to build new futures in Wales. We work extensively with a range of community, voluntary & statutory sector partners & strive to contribute to the creation of a society where respect & equality for all are paramount & where human rights are enjoyed. We are an active member of both the Welsh Refugee Coalition<sup>1</sup> & City of Sanctuary<sup>2</sup> movement in Wales. We welcome the opportunity to submit written evidence as part of this inquiry & outline our responses to each of the inquiry's 4 points below.

#### 2. The pace & effectiveness of the Welsh Government approach to resettling refugees through the UK Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS).

2.1 By the end June 2016, Local Authorities in Wales had resettled 112 refugees from Syria through the SVPRS. By October 2016, 17 of 22 Local Authorities had welcomed Syrian refugees through the scheme, with all others preparing to do so by December 2016. For many of these Local Authorities, refugee resettlement is a new area of work & great care has been taken to ensure it works for both the resettled families & the communities that receive them. The Home Office leads on the scheme, with the Welsh Government facilitating a Taskforce & an Operation's Board to co-ordinate the arrival & effective integration of people. Membership of the Taskforce & Board includes representatives from health, local government, education, the third & private sectors, the Home Office & police. Initially set up to oversee the effective implementation of the SVPRS, the remit of these bodies has been extended to include a Children's Task & Finish Group, which looks beyond the SVPRS to other Home Office schemes such as the Vulnerable Children Resettlement scheme & the UASC National Transfer Scheme.

2.2 We welcome Welsh Government's coordination role re the SVPRS, though also seek reassurances that:

**Recommendation 1:** Welsh Government are facilitating an evaluation of SVPRS in Wales & developing mechanisms to promote the sharing & expansion of good integration practice across public services and local authorities. This is especially important in areas where people are resettled in areas without diaspora communities.

1 A coalition of organisations working in Wales with asylum seekers & refugees at all stages of their journey, & with the communities in which they live. We work together in the interests of asylum seekers & refugees, to ensure that our limited resources can be used to best effect & to speak with one voice on policies & practices affecting people seeking safety in Wales.

2 <https://cityofsanctuary.org/>

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**Recommendation 2:** Welsh Government ensure such learning is ongoing & used to inform responses to future refugee crises, in order that these responses can be rapid, as well as effective for refugees & the communities that receive them.

**Recommendation 3:** Welsh Government to require responses to refugee crises be incorporated into the remit of the Wales Resilience Forum & into Local Authority resilience & civil contingency planning.

2.3 In terms of the support available to people, we recognise the SVPRS as a gold standard in many ways: people are welcomed at their arrival point, taken to their housing, supported with cash until benefits start, are accompanied to health & education related appointments & supported to find employment. This contrasts to the support available to people who secure status in the UK after travelling independently of managed migration routes (often referred to as 'spontaneous' refugees). Welsh Government have funded Welsh Refugee Council on an annual basis since 2004 to provide advocacy support for these people gaining status<sup>3</sup> whilst living in Wales or choosing to move to Wales following a grant of status through its move-on service. This service is in high demand & operates from offices in the 4 dispersal cities of Swansea, Cardiff, Newport & Wrexham. Over the quarter July – September 2016, this service supported 734 main applicants (196 of them were newly recognised refugees), with issues as varied as obtaining status documents, obtaining National Insurance numbers, opening bank accounts, applying for integration loans & benefits, seeking employment & accessing homelessness, housing & health services. Through this advocacy provision, we know that people, immediately after being recognised as in need of international protection, are highly likely to experience financial hardship, homelessness & destitution (see also Refugee Council's 'England's Forgotten Refugees'<sup>4</sup> and Red Cross's 'The Move-On Period: An Ordeal for New Refugees'<sup>5</sup>). People moving through the SVPRS are not as vulnerable to these experiences as, arriving with status, they do not face a 28 day move on period, as administrative procedures (particularly around obtaining National Insurance numbers) that contribute to such problems are addressed earlier. We are concerned that the level of investment & focus on Syrian refugees moving through the SVPRS compared with the investment & interest in spontaneous refugees has created a two-tier system. This impacts directly on refugees in Wales at a vulnerable time in their lives, creating tensions between members of the Syrian community & negatively influencing personal perceptions of welcome. It encourages public misunderstanding around the need for international protection & contributes to the damaging rhetoric of the 'deserving' versus 'undeserving' migrant.

2.4 We urge the committee to acknowledge & address this two-tier system by seeking commitments from Welsh Government to:

**Recommendation 4:** demonstrate leadership & proactively promote positive messages & narratives about *all* refugees being welcome in Wales, as well as the benefits of migration to Wales.

**Recommendation 5:** fund the refugee move-on service on a long-term & sustainable basis.

**Recommendation 6:** extend the remit of the Syrian Taskforce & Operations Board to include *all* asylum seekers & refugees.

**Recommendation 7:** vocalise the impacts of UK policy (e.g. homelessness, destitution & an associated pressure & demand on public & third sector services) on people in Wales & actively seek to influence Home Office policy & practice in the following ways:

- The Home Office should ensure that relevant documentation (e.g. NINO & Biometric Residence Permits) is received by refugees at the same time as they are informed of their status.
- Where an application has been made for welfare benefits within the 28 day move-on period, the Home Office not cease asylum support until the first payment has been made, including where that payment is a short-term benefit advance

<sup>3</sup> <http://welshrefugeecouncil.org.uk/what-help-do-you-need/i-have-been-granted-status>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0003/7935/England\\_s\\_Forgotten\\_Refugees\\_final.pdf](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0003/7935/England_s_Forgotten_Refugees_final.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.redcross.org.uk/en/About-us/Advocacy/Refugees/Ending-destitution/The-move-on-period>



- The target time for processing an application for an Integration Loan must be less than the length of the move on period. When a newly recognised refugee has applied for an Integration Loan & has not yet received it, they should be allowed to remain in their asylum accommodation
- UK Government guidance to banks to advise them what documents are issued to refugees & others with leave to remain in the country so that they are encouraged to recognise them as evidence of identity. Bank staff should also be familiarised with the types of ID refugees have available to them.

### 3. The effectiveness of the Refugee & Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan.

3.1 Whilst this plan was welcome, Welsh Refugee Council had concerns that it would neither address critical issues for people seeking sanctuary in Wales, nor create the conditions needed to ensure that people are safe, able to contribute & integrate into communities or enjoy their human rights. Since the committee's consultation in August, Welsh Government have proposed a budget & an outline specification for work they would like to see delivered under the Refugee, Asylum Seeker & Migrant strand of their Inclusion Fund from April 2017. This proposal has been through a number of iterations, with the most recent including areas of work which are missing from the Delivery Plan, though fundamental to recognising & securing the rights of asylum seekers & refugees in Wales: legal advice, advocacy for children & young people & destitution. The latest iteration of the proposal additionally included an uplift in the level of funding available to deliver the work. These developments are very much welcomed. Concerns remain however:

#### 3.2 Ambition

The plan provided missed an opportunity to champion Wales as a Nation of Sanctuary, with clear commitments to improving equality of opportunity, rights based approaches & humane practices. It missed an opportunity to reiterate previous Welsh Government<sup>6</sup> messaging that integration begins on day one of arrival (rather than upon receipt of status or approaching the point at which people are eligible to apply for citizenship or naturalisation) & the opportunity to contextualise & celebrate Wales' response to often restrictive UK/Home Office legislation & policy, as well as to challenging international humanitarian crises. Scotland's Refugee Integration Strategy, *New Scots: Integrating Refugees in Scotland's Communities*<sup>7</sup> offers such ambition, whilst remaining pragmatic.

**Recommendation 8:** Future updates of the plan to promote Wales as a Nation of Sanctuary, re-assert Wales' commitment to integration beginning on day 1 & to acknowledge & celebrate Wales' response to the UK & international context in which the plan is contextualised.

#### 3.3 Accountability

The plan lack clear actions, indicators, benchmarks, lead responsibilities, timeframes or a monitoring & evaluation framework.

#### 3.4 Housing & advice services

a. *Move-on:* As outlined above (section 2.3), Welsh Government fund Welsh Refugee Council to deliver advice & advocacy services to newly recognised refugees (as well as to people with humanitarian protection & discretionary leave). This service is over-subscribed & works with, on average, 700 people a quarter. Evidence from this service highlights that people in priority need spend lengthy periods in temporary & often unsuitable/unsafe accommodation. People not deemed to be in priority need are generally unable to access private rented housing, due to the requirement to pay agency fees, one or two month's rent in advance, the need for a guarantor and lengthy delays in integration loans being processed. When people are able to secure private rented housing, there are concerns about the quality & cost. Where dedicated housing officers exist, with experience & understanding of refugee needs (e.g. in Swansea), evidence suggest that housing outcomes are much improved for refugees.

<sup>6</sup> <http://gov.wales/dsjlg/publications/communityregendevelop/refugeeinclusionstrategy/strategye.pdf?lang=en>, page 22

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0043/00439604.pdf>



Housing is one of the areas likely to be impacted by the Immigration Act 2016. The Act provides for 'Right to Rent Checks', making it compulsory for landlords to check the immigration status of all new adult tenants. This places additional pressure on landlords, especially small-scale landlords who are private individuals and will exacerbate concerns of renting to anybody without clear immigration status or documentation and thus potentially increasing unintended discrimination. These checks could lead to destitution and an increase in homelessness, putting more pressures and costs on already stretched local authorities.

**Recommendation 9:** The Welsh Government should act to offset discrimination against refugees in housing, both as new refugees and later. For example:

- Issue guidance to Local Authorities classifying all new refugees as vulnerable so that they are regarded as in priority need for housing; alternatively, provide adequate funding to local authorities and accompanying guidance to enable newly recognised refugees who are not considered in priority housing need to benefit from rent deposit schemes.
- Consider ring-fencing a proportion of the 'Supporting People' fund for refugees (this fund helps people maintain tenancies, with a view to preventing homelessness).
- Ensure Local Authorities in dispersal areas have dedicated housing resettlement officers with an active role in assessing priority need for individual refugees.
- Undertake an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) of Right to Rent Checks<sup>8</sup> in Wales and monitor the impact of this legislation.
- Work with private landlords to raise awareness of different types of migration status to mitigate any impacts of Right to Rent Checks in Wales.

*b. Asylum housing:* Despite housing being devolved to Wales, asylum housing is an exception to this. This is problematic as housing is a major issue for many asylum seekers with reports that the housing provided is often inadequate and unhygienic. Evidence collated by Welsh Refugee Coalition<sup>9</sup> members highlighted failings with Initial Accommodation housing, failings which are often reported as issues in dispersal accommodation: overcrowding; poor states of repair; broken appliances, boilers & furniture; lack of maintenance; damp conditions & harassment and anti-social behaviour from other tenants and members of staff. Standards of service provision were reported as a serious concern, with a general feeling that the service provider had little appreciation of the difficulties faced by asylum seekers and their reasons for seeking asylum in the UK. This was accompanied with a perception that the service provider is more concerned with internal targets and profit generation than on providing a service that protects and supports vulnerable people. Asylum accommodation is a source of worry and anxiety for people living in it, aggravating pre-existing experiences of trauma, rather than providing a place of sanctuary. It is unacceptable that asylum housing in Wales is not subject to any independent scrutiny on standards nor subject to any independent means of complaint. This lack of accountability, coupled with the fact that asylum seekers are unlikely to complain because of a fear of retribution (from either the Home Office or from the housing provider) mean that people are forced to endure housing which would not be of an acceptable standard for any other publicly funded accommodation.

**Recommendation 10:** Welsh Government actively engages with the UK Visa & Immigration Asylum Accommodation & Support Transformation (AAST) stakeholder consultation to ensure that any new contract for asylum housing in Wales brings housing quality standards, complaints procedures, monitoring & enforcement in line with Welsh Quality Housing standards.

**Recommendation 11:** Welsh Government insist that the quality of asylum housing in Wales is scrutinised by either Welsh Government or local authorities

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.taipawb.org/policy-influencing/immigration-right-rent-checks/>

<sup>9</sup> Welsh Refugee Coalition Briefing for Welsh Affairs Select Committee, 29th February 2016



- c. Homelessness: Welsh Refugee Council, working in partnership with agencies like the Red Cross, see on average of 20 to 25 people who are destitute & homeless each week. People tend to be refused asylum seekers, newly granted refugees or women with insecure immigration status experiencing domestic violence. With the exception of refugees, people have no right to public housing, no money, no right to benefits & no legal right to work. As a result, this group of people are characterised by vulnerability, inability to satisfy essential living needs and poor health and wellbeing<sup>10</sup>. At Welsh Refugee Council, people are provided with small payments of between £5-£10 per week, items of clothing & occasionally food, as well as being advised where they can access community & faith based support (e.g. Sharedydd<sup>11</sup>, Oasis<sup>12</sup> & Nightshelter<sup>13</sup>). Destitution is a breach of the rights of individuals & a community cohesion issue. It is also a resource issue, as the practice places significant & unpredictable demand & on Local Authority & third sector services.

**Recommendation 12:** In line with the Wales Refugee Coalition recommendation, Welsh Government expand the eligibility criteria for the Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF) to include people who currently have no recourse to public funds (NRPF).

- d. *Advice Services:* Specialist advice & advocacy services for *refugees* have been funded by Welsh Government since 2004. Specialist advice & advocacy services for *asylum seekers* were funded by the Home Office in Wales until March 2014. The later ensured that asylum seekers were informed about their rights & entitlements & had a voice when faced with issues relating to their welfare. Advocacy for asylum seekers is likely to be offered again in Wales from April 2017, via Welsh Government Inclusion funding, though with the level of funding available, it is unlikely that provision will meet need.

### 3.5 Education

- a. *ESOL:* Gaining proficiency in English as soon as possible is one of the most important pillars enabling inclusion & integration & is identified time & time again in focus of asylum seekers & refugees as a key need. Welsh Refugee Council, in partnership with South Wales University, offer free ESOL in Cardiff to approximately 270 students per quarter. Their feedback on accessing ESOL informs our understanding of what is needed. We welcome commitments in the Delivery Plan to improve the flexibility of ESOL provision & for it to have parity with basic skills. We welcome the commitment to providing more contextualised ESOL provision in order that people are able to work towards updating their existing qualifications to those recognisable in the UK & to offer provision which meets the variety of leaner needs. Whilst these commitments and outcomes are welcome, for them to have the desired impact,

**Recommendation 13:** Welsh Government must ensure that provision:

- responds to gender based needs (e.g. women are often carers for children or other family members & so are more able to access provision outside of the school run or which has crèche facilities).
- continues to be available on a no-cost basis and irrespective of immigration status (mirroring the recognition that integration begins on day one).
- is accessible throughout the academic year

### 3.6 Employment

- a. *Employment, Volunteering and Training:* With access to the labour market the most critical aspect of migrant integration<sup>14</sup>, efforts to ensure refugees are empowered to utilise their skills and knowledge

<sup>10</sup><http://www.redcross.org.uk/~media/BritishRedCross/Documents/About%20us/South%20Yorkshire%20destitution%20report.pdf>

<sup>11</sup><https://cardiffdestitutionnetwork.wordpress.com/sharedydd/>

<sup>12</sup><http://oasiscardiff.org/about-us/>

<sup>13</sup><http://newportnightshelter.org/>

<sup>14</sup> Hagendoorn, Louk, Justus Veenman, and Wilma Volleburch, eds. (2003). *Integrating Immigrants in the Netherlands: Cultural versus Socioeconomic Integration*, Aldershot/Burlington: Ashgate.





and to achieve their full potential as members of Welsh society, as detailed in the Delivery Plan, are applauded.

Refugee communities in Wales often rely on 'word of mouth' within their own networks to find employment, rather than finding job opportunities through other means such as online search due to limited digital access & language barriers. This has led to a concentration of refugees in some low-skilled areas of the labour market. In 2015, about 19% of non-UK born residents in Wales worked in elementary occupations compared to 12% of those born in the UK<sup>15</sup>. Through our move-on service and our links with refugee communities, we know of many highly qualified individuals employed in low paid jobs in factories, even years after gaining status. Agencies such as Job Centre Plus, with their emphasis on moving people into work regardless of experience or qualifications, can exacerbate this situation by not looking beyond English language skills, as well as overlooking skills, experience & qualifications gained overseas.

**Recommendation 14:** Welsh Government to support Jobcentre Plus staff in Wales to increase their understanding of the barriers faced by refugees in job seeking to provide a person-centred service with improved longer term outcomes (e.g. refugees being employed in industries they are qualified for).

**Recommendation 15:** Welsh Government invest in systemic support for the transfer & recognition of qualifications: an education and employment advisor in each of Wales' dispersal areas and NARIC<sup>16</sup> (national agency for the recognition and comparison of international qualifications and skills) membership for lead agencies.

**Recommendation 16:** Welsh Government, under its 'Prosperity for All'<sup>17</sup> agenda, to work with business and industry to create training and internship programmes which maximise the use of refugees' skills & minimise time spent outside the labour market. This could include supporting employers to deliver tailored programmes to promote smooth access to the labour market complimented by specialist language provision where appropriate or intensive and flexible ESOL provision to fit around working hours – this would both enhance the skills of their workforce and promote the welfare and retention of employees.

#### **4. The support & advocacy available to unaccompanied asylum seeking children.**

4.1 Whilst Welsh Government's Delivery Plan acknowledges the need to 'ensure the UNCRC derived principles underpin children's policies & programme in Wales in the field of asylum & immigration', this is far from a robust commitment to protect asylum seeking children's rights in Wales. The plan's sole outcome to ensure 'UASCs are safe & supported in order to prevent isolation & social exclusion' similarly lacks fortitude. The Delivery Plan identifies a number of briefings & toolkits which can be used by service providers, though contains only one action to directly support the promotion of rights amongst children as rights holders themselves: that UASCs have access to independent advocacy in respect of the duties owed to them under the Social Services and Wellbeing Act 2014. Advocacy is very much needed as UASCs – before and after being formally recognised as such - have particularly complex needs which demand specialist knowledge & advocacy<sup>18</sup>. Currently, there is no such advocacy in Wales following the closure of Tros Gynnal Plant's specialist provision in 2014. There is a possibility that some advocacy provision for UASCs will be resurrected from April 2017 as part of Welsh Government's Inclusion funding – though again, concerns around levels of funding and competing priorities for this funding apply. This concern is heightened in light of plans to expand resettlement schemes with further Home Office initiatives for asylum seeking & refugee children.

**Recommendation 17:** Welsh Government reconsider their allocation of funding for work with UASCs and seek to provide dedicated, ringfenced funding (i.e. in addition to the Inclusion funding) in order to

<sup>15</sup> Welsh Refugee Council, *Migrants in the Welsh Labour Market*, 2016, <https://www.welshrefugeecouncil.org/migration-information/migration-trends/migrants-in-the-welsh-labour-market>

<sup>16</sup> <http://naric.org.uk/naric/>

<sup>17</sup> <http://gov.wales/docs/strategies/160920-taking-wales-forward-en.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> <http://welshrefugeecouncil.org.uk/resources/research/young-lives-in-limbo>



ensure compliance with recommendations made by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child<sup>19</sup> to 'provide sufficient support to migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking children to access basic services'.

**Recommendation 18:** Welsh Government to ensure that advocacy provision exists for all age disputed asylum seeking children and young people, not just those who have been recognised as UASCs and who are looked after.

## 5. The role & effectiveness of the Welsh Government's Community Cohesion Delivery Plan in ensuring the integration of refugees & asylum seekers in Welsh communities.

5.1 *Departments, organisations and people understand hate crime, victims make reports and get appropriate support (Outcome 1):* Welsh Refugee Council's focus groups with people around hate crime suggest that experiences of hate crime are common amongst asylum seekers and refugees and that much more work needs to be done to ensure that people to recognise hate crime and develop the confidence and trust in services to report it<sup>20</sup>. This is especially pressing given the rise in hate crime reported following the Brexit vote.

**Recommendation 19:** Welsh Government, as part of their Framework for Action on Tackling Hate Crimes & Incidents, to require real or perceived migration status to be recognised & recorded as a reason for Hate Crime.

5.2 *Increased evidence and awareness on immigration and supporting the inclusion of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants (Outcome 4):* Funded by Welsh Government, Welsh Refugee Council, in partnership with the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) and the Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford, lead the Migration Services in Wales project. This project provides up-to-date information on migration policy and practice & facilitates the development of a strategic approach to migration in Wales. As part of this project we produce Legal and Policy Briefings<sup>21</sup>, have provided specialist training<sup>22</sup>, support the development of local strategic frameworks on migration<sup>23</sup> and provide a migration enquiry service<sup>24</sup>. All aspects of this project contribute directly and significantly to this outcome, an outcome that will be jeopardised when this work ceases in March 2017 due to the cessation of Welsh Government funding.

**Recommendation 20:** Welsh Government invest in continuing and building on the work of the Migration Services project to ensure that practitioners and policy makers in Wales have access to up-to-date, Welsh specific, information on migration trends and migrant rights.

**Recommendation 21:** Welsh Government develop a comprehensive National Migration Strategy to address poverty, the labour force and economic renewal of Wales, alongside commitments to equality and human rights and clear messages on the role of migration in Wales' future and the status of migrants in Welsh society<sup>25</sup>. Scotland's Strategic Migration Partnership Policy Toolkit provides a good example<sup>26</sup>.

5.3 Whilst a national strategy is needed to ensure that legislation and policy facilitate integration, it is Local Authorities that, with their partners, have the greatest capacity to build an inclusive culture and practice that touches on everyday lives. Local migration strategies (rather than ad hoc responses by

<sup>19</sup> <http://gov.wales/docs/dsjlg/publications/cyp/160727-final-concluding-observations-2016-en.pdf> (76.f)

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.welshrefugeecouncil.org/news/07102016-1554/hate-crime-report-it>

<sup>21</sup> <https://wrc.wales/migration-information/legal-briefings>

<sup>22</sup> <https://wrc.wales/migration-information/training>

<sup>23</sup> <https://wrc.wales/migration-information/strategic-frameworks>

<sup>24</sup> <https://wrc.wales/migration-information/migration-enquiries>

<sup>25</sup> The conference report is available on the Migration Services in Wales webpage on Local Strategic Frameworks on Migration:

<https://wrc.wales/sites/default/files/Resource%20-%20Strategic%20Frameworks%20on%20Integration%20-%20Conference%20Report.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> [http://www.migrationscotland.org.uk/uploads/files/documents/csmp\\_policy\\_toolkit\\_v2.0\\_0.pdf](http://www.migrationscotland.org.uk/uploads/files/documents/csmp_policy_toolkit_v2.0_0.pdf)



individual services) harness shared goal across the authority, ensure consistency of approach and in communicating a common narrative, and to deliver joined up services. It ensures that full account is taken of the demographic context, that partner agencies can be engaged in considering the options and their role in delivery, and that measurable deliverables are identified.

**Recommendation 22:** Welsh Government to build on the work that it has funded since April 2015<sup>27</sup> and compel local authorities to develop local migration strategies.

5.4 *Key policies and programmes are supporting and evidencing delivery against the national goal on more cohesive communities through the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (Outcome 6):* The establishment of a 'buddy' programme or mentor system, with clear guidelines and safeguarding measures, which, with sufficient resource, could be coordinated by civil society at the local level and would establish early contact between new migrants and their local community. Throughout Europe, volunteering programmes for refugees promoted contact and understanding across diverse groups<sup>28</sup>.

**Recommendation 23:** Welsh Government invest resource into harnessing the enthusiasm of the many people who have signed up to support refugees across Wales in recent months, including support for the development of established networks such as the City of Sanctuary movement. Additional resource for the voluntary sector would do much to support such efforts.

**Recommendation 24:** Welsh Government compel public service boards to include the needs of migrants, to ensure that the duties owed to different types of migrants are well understood by both front-line practitioners and policy makers and to encourage clear, positive messages on migrant integration. This should recognise the specific needs of vulnerable migrants as well as those of refugees and asylum seekers and demonstrate sensitivity towards the human rights challenges facing those with irregular immigration status.

## 6. Immigration Act 2016

In line with concerns raised by the Wales Refugee Coalition, Welsh Refugee Council urge the committee to consider the constitutional implications and potential impact of the Immigration Act 2016 in Wales.

**Recommendation 25:** Welsh Government should keep a close watch on UK policy on asylum and immigration and where there are adverse effects either lobby for changes or seek ways within its competence to mitigate these. In particular, Welsh Government should explore the impacts of the Immigration Act on individuals, devolved public services and on local authorities in Wales, commissioning additional research where necessary and putting in place policies to mitigate any negative impacts.

Tracey Sherlock  
07817 333511  
22 November 2016

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<sup>27</sup>

<https://wrc.wales/sites/default/files/Developing%20a%20Strategic%20Approach%20to%20Integration%20in%20Wales%20A%20practical%20resource%20for%20local%20authorities%20and%20their%20partners%20in%20Wales.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> Two examples from the UK can be found on the Cities of Migration website, Birmingham- [Meeting, Mediating and Mentoring: The Power of Peer Mentoring](#), London- [Time Together: Mentoring for Daily Life](#)

RAS 09

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Oxfam Cymru

Response from: Oxfam Cymru

## **Oxfam Cymru submission to Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee inquiry into refugees and asylum-seekers in Wales**

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Oxfam has a long history of working with asylum-seekers and refugees in the UK, particularly in Wales over the last decade, and we represent the Welsh Refugee Coalition on the Welsh Government's Syrian Resettlement Operations Board and are working with the Coalition to try to establish Wales as a Nation of Sanctuary. We fully support the evidence submission and recommendations presented to the Committee by the Welsh Refugee Coalition.

In May 2015, we completed a three year Sanctuary in Wales<sup>1</sup> project (funded by Big Lottery Fund) in the four asylum dispersal areas – Cardiff, Swansea, Newport and Wrexham – alongside our partners [Oasis Cardiff](#), [African Community Centre](#), [Displaced People in Action](#), [BAWSO](#) and [Business in the Community](#). Over 450 women participated in this project sharing their experiences and identifying issues important to them. Some of these women reflected their experiences in this short video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9F-8b72mBUU>.

### **The pace and effectiveness of the Welsh Government approach to resettling refugees through the UK Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS)**

1. The SVPRS<sup>2</sup> was launched in September 2015 and in response the Welsh Government set up a Syrian Refugee Taskforce and an Operations Board. Initially set up to oversee the effective implementation of the SVPRS, the remit of these bodies has been extended to include a Children's Task and Finish Group, which looks beyond the SVPRS to other Home Office schemes such as the Vulnerable Children Resettlement scheme<sup>3</sup> and the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) National Transfer Scheme<sup>4</sup>. The Operations Board has not met since June 2016.
2. Oxfam was critical of the pace of resettlement at the beginning of the process, although there has now been an improvement. An announcement by WLGA in November 2016 stated that *'So far around 17 authorities have resettled refugee families and we anticipate families will have been resettled within all 22 council areas by the end of the year.'* By the end June 2016, Local Authorities in Wales had resettled 112 refugees from Syria through the SVPRS with updated Home Office statistics available on 1 December 2016<sup>5</sup> providing official information up to the end of September.
3. Oxfam welcomed Welsh Government's aspiration to provide a coordination role for the SVPRS, however it is not clear what influence either the Taskforce or Operations Board has had or whether Welsh Government has been able to add value to the work of the WLGA, local authorities and civil society. The Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan, for example, does not mention the SVPRS or how Welsh Government is approaching the resettlement of refugees through this scheme. We believe Welsh Government has a role to play in offering greater strategic leadership in responding to humanitarian crises, providing a greater urgency and 'troubleshooting' to ensure local authorities, communities and service providers can respond quickly to such challenges. It is not clear to us that Welsh Government has played this role in responding to the SVPRS.
4. In responding to the SVPRS, there has been a risk of creating a 'two-tier' system, where those arriving through this scheme have received a different level of support to Syrians arriving via the asylum route or those of other nationalities. In assessing the Welsh response to the SVPRS, it is vital that we do not allow this two-tier structure to become permanent. Welsh Government should act to learn from what has and hasn't worked across all schemes in Wales – including through meaningful dialogues with people in Wales – with a clear view to improving provision for all refugees and asylum-seekers in Wales.

5. To that end, having a specific Taskforce and Operations Board focussing on this single scheme while in many ways welcome, risks giving the impression of endorsing a two-tier system. A new, permanent, structure should be created to co-ordinate services for all refugees and asylum-seekers in Wales, which would provide an improved starting point to act in response to urgent humanitarian crises.
6. For example, the Welsh Government has engaged with stakeholders interested in the Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrants Inclusion Project specification and budget through a parallel process. Although this engagement has been welcomed, a more strategic approach could have utilised cross sector expertise from the Operations Board to inform and co-produce the specification. This would not only have saved time and resources but may also have enabled a better understanding of how Home Office, third sector and local authority provision could be delivered to provide a more seamless service for asylum-seekers and refugees across Wales. Working in this way could also have prevented delays in issuing this contract which would have allowed maximum opportunity to make effective transition arrangements for when the new contract is in place.

### **The effectiveness of the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan**

7. Oxfam Cymru has welcomed Wales' positive humanitarian stance towards those seeking sanctuary, with asylum-seekers provided with free access to NHS healthcare and access to education. As a globally responsible nation, it is vital that Wales continues to play its part.
8. The Welsh Government Refugee Inclusion Strategy (2008)<sup>6</sup> was seen as progressive: *'One of the principles on which the strategy is based is that refugee inclusion begins on day one of arrival in the UK and successful inclusion is closely related to the standard of reception procedures and people's experiences as asylum-seekers.'* This recognises that the asylum system itself and the support provided to asylum-seekers has a significant impact on the ability of people to integrate into the community and ultimately how well they will integrate once status has been granted. Immigration and asylum is a non-devolved area and successive UK governments have introduced restrictive legislation. The Welsh Government nevertheless has responsibility for many areas that have a key impact on the lives of people seeking sanctuary. This includes health, housing, education, transport and social services.
9. Oxfam Cymru was disappointed with the quality of the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan which lacks concrete and accountable actions in areas of devolved responsibility and lacks any provision to mitigate impacts of UK Government legislation or policy on people living in Wales. At present, many of the actions listed under each priority are not delivery actions but focus on guidance and toolkits, which are unlikely to improve life significantly for refugees and asylum-seekers living in Wales. We would like to see much more detail in the actions that will be taken to achieve each priority. What will Welsh Government do? What will others do? How will the actions be resourced? What is the budget for this work? How will the impact of actions be monitored?
10. In addition to the above concerns, there are a number of significant omissions from the Delivery Plan, some of which are outlined below.

### **Supporting people faced with destitution or with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)**

11. Wales is the only region within the UK not to have a forum or specific staff dedicated to supporting people with NRPF and there is currently no NRPF Network in Wales<sup>7</sup>. This risks leaving an extremely vulnerable group of people without co-ordinated support or ongoing monitoring of practice. Action is needed to ensure people faced with destitution and with NRPF are effectively supported across Wales and that health and social services have expertise and oversight built in. We would recommend the reforming of the NRPF Network.
12. There is clear evidence that the lack of institutional, social and economic resources faced by people living in destitution or with NRPF denies them a sustainable livelihood, and results in a life that is robbed of dignity and unacceptable by human rights standards<sup>8</sup>. Oxfam research documented the humiliating and degrading strategies adopted by destitute asylum-seekers to survive and avoid deportation. This is not acceptable in Welsh society. Oxfam believes that no one should have to live in poverty. The poverty experienced by asylum-

seekers is a consequence of policy that is designed to force them into destitution and encourage their voluntary return to their country of origin. As research shows, not only is current policy deeply inhumane, it simply does not work.

13. We welcome the possible inclusion of practical advice and support for 'those at risk of destitution' in the draft specification the Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrants Inclusion Project, but recommend the eligibility criteria for the Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF) should be expanded to include those with NRPF.

#### **Access to justice/ legal support / cuts to legal aid**

14. With the loss of advocacy support as part of the Welsh Refugee Council's (WRC) 'one-stop-shop' service in April 2014, access to justice on areas relating to and outside of the asylum claim has become much more difficult to obtain. The loss of this service, coupled with a lack of accessible [legal] advice services or any advocacy support to replace it, makes it increasingly difficult to ensure asylum-seekers and those with NRPF have access to legal support in the event of errors and failure to support them. With the Home Office looking to increase the number of dispersal areas, monitoring provision across Wales will be of great importance. It should not be the case that asylum-seekers have significantly different access to legal support depending on where they are located.
15. The lack of legal aid provision has an even greater impact on women and girls, including those who have experienced violence or sexual abuse, including victims of trafficking. In Wrexham, asylum seekers must now pay a fee for lawyers who travel from Manchester. Fresh asylum claims (from those already in Wales) now have to be made in person in Liverpool at the UK Visa and Immigration (UKVI) office – a recent change made by the Home Office. The Welsh Government should urgently explore whether such claims could once again be made in Wales to reduce costs for asylum-seekers.
16. This is especially important in the field of family reunion. Long term separation causes costs to Welsh public services (in particular around mental health provision). Yet the issues are complex and require legal support for an application to be successfully filed. Even if a family reunion application is successful, very limited support is available to ensure practicalities such as flights are covered to enable the reunion to take place.

#### **Impact of UK Government legislation and policy**

17. The UK Government Immigration Act 2016 is of serious concern. In response to the UK Government Welfare Reform Act, the Welsh Government set up a Ministerial Task and Finish Group that commissioned extensive research<sup>9</sup> into the impacts of welfare reforms on people living in Wales. This evidence base was used to inform mitigating action across a range of devolved policy areas<sup>10</sup>. The Immigration Act introduces new sanctions on illegal working, changes to financial asylum support, aims to prevent undocumented migrants from accessing housing, driving licences and bank accounts, and introduces additional measures to enforce existing immigration laws.
18. Certain aspects of the Immigration Act impact upon areas of devolved competence including residential tenancies, availability of local authority support and transfer of responsibility for relevant children, which affords the Welsh Government an opportunity to influence and challenge how these provisions are implemented in Wales. Welsh Government should assess this legislation in the same way it has assessed the impact of Welfare Reform, commissioning extra research where necessary and introducing new policies to mitigate negative impacts.
19. In addition to the above, we have some comments on existing sections of the Delivery Plan including:

#### **Language Services – English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)**

20. Welsh Government has a positive policy to provide free ESOL courses. Improvements are required in the local availability of and access to ESOL classes. This is essential as the ability to speak English has an enormous impact on an ability to integrate, social outcomes and community cohesion. Barriers prevent people – particularly women – accessing formal ESOL classes including a lack of childcare and transport as well as issues around the timings of classes.

21. With class intakes often commencing annually, individuals who arrive at other times in the year are often forced to wait many months before accessing formal provision. The provision of more advanced ESOL Level 2+ classes is incredibly limited and not adequate to support the need identified. Gender analysis of need and provision is required because of the additional barriers facing women (e.g. caring responsibilities, cultural barriers).
22. Welsh Government must work with initial accommodation providers (e.g. Clearsprings) or the Home Office or Migrant Help to ensure we have an understanding of the level of ESOL supply versus demand.

### **Health services – Interpretation & Language Line**

23. Welsh Government policy providing primary and secondary health services to asylum-seekers is particularly welcome. This is not the case in England and is something we should be proud of providing.
24. There is a particular challenge, however, around language and interpretation, which can lead at worst to misdiagnosis and errors in prescribing – both of which were reported by women we worked with. We have evidence from women who have had to rely on their children to interpret for them about health conditions. Clearly this is not appropriate and has occurred at GP surgeries and at hospitals. For example, some Wrexham GPs were found not to be using Language Line despite the fact that health visitors in the area do so.
25. Welsh Government needs to work with health colleagues to ensure all health services in Wales fully integrate Language Line into local health provision. Any guidance needs to make clear that Language Line is not an optional extra. There is also a need for retention of in-person interpretation and not an overreliance on Language Line where particular vulnerabilities are identified and in all complex cases.
26. There could be a role for the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales to ensure that complaints procedures are accessible and there is clarity about the separation of health and immigration services for any patient. At the moment, there is no ability for refugees and asylum-seekers to complain, and as a group they are much less likely to do so due to vulnerability because of their immigration status.

### **Housing**

27. It is unacceptable that asylum housing in Wales, particularly ‘Initial Accommodation’, is not subject to any independent scrutiny on standards and that provision is not subject to any independent means of complaint. The result is that people are forced to endure housing which would not be of an acceptable standard for any other publically funded accommodation. Historically, the advocacy service provided by the WRC assisted with such complaints, as well as collecting data on issues of concern and problem areas for asylum-seekers and refugees. An independent advocacy service must be re-established which enables refugees and asylum-seekers to raise issues of concern without fear of the consequences.
28. The quality of the Home Office contracted housing provider Clearsprings’ housing management also differs considerably. A project participant we worked with had reportedly been threatened with eviction by her housing manager, having complained following a conflict with a house mate. There is legal right to do this.
29. The Welsh Government should prioritise finding ways of using its devolved powers to improve asylum accommodation in Wales by engaging actively with the UKVI Asylum Accommodation and Support Transformation (AAST) stakeholder consultation on new contracts for asylum housing; insisting that the quality of asylum housing is scrutinised by Welsh Government or local authorities; and bringing the next asylum accommodation contract into Wales by supporting a bid from one or more Welsh housing associations, other third sector organisations or Local Authorities, or negotiating with the Home Office to undertake the contracting process itself.

### **Employment**

30. Further action is needed to ensure employers in Wales are as accessible and open as possible to employing people from all backgrounds including refugees. Evidence from our programme experience in Wales suggests:



- The public and third sectors should be actively enabling asylum-seekers and refugees to volunteer in their organisations to build up language skills, social/professional networks, and gain valuable UK work experience.
- The Business Wales service was inaccessible for all the women we worked with during our three year Big Lottery funded project and this area of enterprise was the most challenging to develop. The generic advice and courses available on the website and even on the phone are not adequate in providing the holistic support which refugees often require to get a sound grounding in the UK economy, local markets and opportunities, and the requirements in terms of HMRC and employment law which will likely be very different to the set-up in countries of origin.
- Involving businesses and employee volunteers is a key way of getting employers to value and seek out the contributions of a diverse workforce, including refugees.
- Cuts to Voluntary Community Service (Cymru) in Cardiff, for example, and other volunteering services are further stymieing asylum-seekers' opportunities to volunteer as the competition for voluntary places increases. There needs to be a dedicated training programme for volunteer bureaux across Wales so that the involvement of asylum-seekers and refugees and the positive contributions they can bring are able to be realised.
- There is continued demand for the preparation for volunteering and work via employability training and job coaching – something which Displaced People in Action did in the past, the recent project we ran delivered, and which now is a significant gap in ensuring equality of opportunity.
- One-to-one support is vital in determining individual requirements and providing a safe and secure environment contributing to wellbeing for refugee women and their families - a personalised approach to the delivery of support with flexibility in the allocation of funding for travel, childcare and/or training courses according to individual needs works best.

### **The support and advocacy available to unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) in Wales**

31. The Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan states that UASC will have access to independent advocacy in respect of the duties owed to them under the Social Services and Well-being Act 2014. In this regard, UASC have a statutory right to advocacy the same as any other looked after child in Wales. However, UASC all have specific vulnerabilities and need access to dedicated services. To our knowledge no such support exists for asylum seeking children in Wales despite previous commitments from Welsh Government to explore '*the need for a Guardianship model<sup>11</sup> for Wales*'.
32. Appointed Guardians will support young people by helping them to navigate immigration and welfare processes, feel supported and empowered throughout the asylum process and assist them to access the help they need when they need it and help them make informed decisions about their future.
33. Advice and support for children now appears to be included with the specification of Welsh Government's Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrants Inclusion Project, which is not recommending this model. Oxfam also has concerns about the age assessment process and safeguarding issues for young people going through this process. It is totally unacceptable, for example, for young people in age dispute cases to be housed in initial accommodation at Lynx House, a practice that has occurred. In accepting UASC from Calais, this was at risk of occurring again, however Cardiff Council acted fast to find alternative accommodation.

### **The role and effectiveness of the Welsh Government's Community Cohesion Delivery Plan in ensuring the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Welsh communities**

#### **Stigma and Media Portrayal**

34. Research into the portrayal of asylum in the media, undertaken by Oxfam Scotland<sup>12</sup> over a decade ago, found that at the time of study, press coverage was negative to the point of being hostile. The research concluded that government policy was no longer subject to independent scrutiny: the press reflects the government's line that making conditions less welcoming and more hostile for asylum-seekers will deter them from travelling to Britain.
35. Nothing has changed today in 2016 – indeed the situation has worsened, with a recent UN report pointing to the prevalence of "divisive, anti-immigrant and xenophobic rhetoric"<sup>13</sup>. Welsh Government cannot change

editorial policy, but it and local authorities should understand the importance of its communications on community cohesion. Indeed negative comments, and even no comment, can maintain hostile press coverage.

### **Safeguarding**

36. Safeguarding is extremely important and we also agree with protecting the privacy of resettled families. However, a balance has to be struck to enable resettled families to establish a much needed support network of friends and neighbours within their communities. Without such a network people can become isolated which not only impacts on health but can also put people at risk and ultimately affect the success or failure of resettlement schemes.
37. We are also concerned by perceptions and understanding among people resettled via the SVPRS in terms of their rights and responsibilities and their ability to speak out on issues that are important to them. Having experienced so little control over their lives immediately prior to resettlement, people need to be empowered to make decisions on behalf of themselves and their families. Government limiting the voice or freedom of choice of residents, however well intentioned, infringes on basic human rights and has potentially damaging consequences for individuals and society as a whole.

### **Participation**

38. Action needs to be taken to ensure active participation by asylum-seekers and refugees within national and local policy development, including the involvement of asylum-seekers and refugees in policy forums and the co-production of services in Wales. We are concerned, for example, that although asylum-seekers and refugees were consulted about the drafting of the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan, there has been no feedback from Welsh Government on how this input was used or what was changed in the drafting of the Delivery Plan as a result.

### **Education for Global Citizenship**

39. We would like to see support for Education for Global Citizenship as a useful way of making schools more welcoming to asylum-seeking and refugee children and to help mitigate and minimise instances of discrimination/racism on the part of children, teachers and parents. There are also specific resources available like the Schools of Sanctuary resource<sup>14</sup> that could be useful for schools to promote community cohesion (especially in non-dispersal areas).
40. The development of the new curriculum in Wales offers an excellent opportunity to ensure that all our children and young people are ethical, informed citizens who 'respect the needs and rights of others, as a member of a diverse society', and are healthy, confident individuals who 'form positive relationships based upon trust and mutual respect'.

### **Conclusion**

While there are examples of good practice across Wales and Welsh Government's rhetoric has remained welcoming, there are a number of clear areas for improvement within Wales to support the refugee and asylum-seeking communities living here.

We believe that following the recommendations in our report would have a significant impact in supporting some of the most vulnerable individuals within Wales. Importantly, they would also set us on the way to becoming a Nation of Sanctuary, along the lines of the Seven Steps to Sanctuary set out by the Welsh Refugee Coalition.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Arad Research (2015), Sanctuary in Wales Final Evaluation & Executive Summary <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/final-evaluation-sanctuary-in-wales-project-581107>

<sup>2</sup> Home Office (2015), Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme (SVPRP), Guidance for Local Authorities and Partners [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/472020/Syrian\\_Resettlement\\_Fact\\_Sheet\\_gov\\_uk.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/472020/Syrian_Resettlement_Fact_Sheet_gov_uk.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Press release: Home Office (2016), New Scheme Launched to Tackle Children at risk <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-scheme-launched-to-resettle-children-at-risk>

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- <sup>4</sup> Home Office (2016), Interim National Transfer Protocol for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children 2016-17 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/unaccompanied-asylum-seeking-children-interim-national-transfer-scheme>
- <sup>5</sup> Home Office (2016), Immigration Statistics (quarterly releases) <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/immigration-statistics-quarterly-release>
- <sup>6</sup> Welsh Government (2008), Welsh Government Refugee Inclusion Strategy <http://gov.wales/topics/people-and-communities/communities/communitycohesion/publications/refugeeinclusion/?lang=en>
- <sup>7</sup> No Recourse to Public Funds Network <http://www.nrpfnetwork.org.uk/regionalnetworks/Pages/default.aspx#wales>
- <sup>8</sup> Crawley, Hemmings and Price (2011), Oxfam GB, Coping with Destitution: Survival and livelihoods strategies of refugees asylum seekers living in the UK <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/coping-with-destitution-survival-and-livelihood-strategies-of-refused-asylum-se-121667>
- <sup>9</sup> Welsh Government (2015), Analysing the impact of the UK Government's welfare reforms in Wales <http://gov.wales/topics/people-and-communities/welfare-reform-in-wales/analysing-reforms/?lang=en>
- <sup>10</sup> Welsh Government (2015), Mitigating the Impact of the UK Government's Welfare Reforms <http://gov.wales/docs/dsijg/publications/151019-mitigating-impact-welfare-reform-en.pdf>
- <sup>11</sup> Scottish Refugee Council [http://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/how\\_we\\_can\\_help/advice\\_services/the\\_scottish\\_guardianship\\_service](http://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/how_we_can_help/advice_services/the_scottish_guardianship_service)
- <sup>12</sup> Mollard, C (2001), Oxfam GB, Asylum: The Truth Behind the Headlines <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/asylum-the-truth-behind-the-headlines-111959>
- <sup>13</sup> UN Periodic Review, Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination - CERD/C/GBR/CO/21-23 – 26 August 2016, p.4. [http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CERD/Shared%20Documents/GBR/CERD\\_C\\_GBR\\_CO\\_21-23\\_24985\\_E.pdf](http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CERD/Shared%20Documents/GBR/CERD_C_GBR_CO_21-23_24985_E.pdf)
- <sup>14</sup> Oxfam, Schools of Sanctuary: Giving a warm welcome <http://www.oxfam.org.uk/education/resources/schools-of-sanctuary>
- <sup>15</sup> Welsh Refugee Coalition (2016), Seven Steps to Sanctuary <https://www.welshrefugeecouncil.org/sites/default/files/news/files/Welsh%20Refugee%20Coalition%20Manifesto%20CYM%2016%20English.pdf>

RAS 11

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Asylum Justice

Response from: Asylum Justice

Asylum Justice is a charity providing legal services to refugees and asylum-seekers in Wales. We are a registered charity and regulated by the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) to provide Level 3 Immigration and Asylum Advice. Asylum Justice has a long history of working with asylum seekers and refugees in Wales over the last decade. We are part of the City of Sanctuary movement and are working with Welsh Refugee Coalition partners. We are members of the Welsh Refugee Coalition and endorse the recommendations made within their submission.

We hope this response offers the Committee a snapshot from an independent legal service provider and is illuminating in assisting the creation of a progressive, far-reaching, rights-based set of services for all refugees, asylum seekers and those whose claim has been refused. As a legal services provider, we are deeply concerned by the removal of legal aid for family reunion cases (which make up a large proportion of our caseload) and changes by the Immigration Act 2016 to limit further rights to appeal and removal of asylum support for those whose claim has been refused.

Whilst we are aware that immigration and asylum and legal services are not devolved to Wales, the impact of changes in these areas is directly felt by other support services (advice, social services, housing, health etc) which the Welsh Government does have competency for. Asylum Justice very much welcomes the Welsh Government's recognition that "*refugee inclusion begins on day one of arrival*"; we would therefore advocate that inclusion can only be realised if an asylum seeker is able to access the asylum system. Legal advice should be provided from 'day one' as it is a fundamental starting point for asylum seekers arriving in Wales, and is the point from which every other aspect of integration should follow. The provision of advice and paralegal services can and has been supported by the Welsh Government in the past. In view of the significant cuts to legal aid and asylum support over the last eight years since the Welsh Government's Refugee Inclusion Strategy (2008) was devised, as well as the removal of an accredited advice and advocacy service for all refugees and asylum seekers (Welsh Refugee Council all-Wales 'one stop shop' service which ceased April 2014), the need for services like ours is significantly outstripping supply.

## **1. The pace and effectiveness of the Welsh Government approach to resettling refugees through the UK Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS)**

Asylum Justice does not deal with refugees coming through this scheme and therefore cannot comment.

## **2. The effectiveness of the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan**

There are a number of areas of this plan which remain areas of concern regarding service provision to refugees. Asylum Justice is aware of delays in providing 'move on' services to refugees.

Quality of housing to asylum seekers remains an issue of particular concern – Lynx House and the associated properties on Newport Road in Cardiff continue to offer an extremely poor standard of accommodation, and there is no independent advocacy support for asylum seekers in asylum support accommodation which leads to poor quality housing going unchecked as tenants fear reprisal from housing managers.

It is noted that the current All Wales Multi Agency Toolkit regarding unaccompanied minors is in the process of being re-drafted. This process has halted and it is currently uncertain when the new guidance will be published – it is vital that this guidance is made available as soon as possible.

Asylum Justice is aware of cases where asylum seekers and refugees have not been suitably assisted in education. In a recent case repeated requests by education providers had been made for the young person to be tested for special educational needs. These had been ignored and when, at the point of an immigration appeal, an Asylum Justice legal adviser questioned why he had not progressed further in English in his time in the UK the personal adviser responded that he had not been attending school and college. Asylum Justice are also concerned by the delays faced by unaccompanied asylum seeking young people aged 16 and above in accessing further education.

## **3. The support and advocacy available to unaccompanied asylum seeking children in Wales**

Asylum Justice remains deeply concerned about the levels of support and advocacy available to unaccompanied asylum seeking children in Wales. The main provider of independent advocacy services – the 'Fair and Square' project run by Tros Gynnal Plant – closed in February 2016. Since then young people have been left in many cases without an independent advocate. This project was the main provider of independent adults for Local Authority age assessments, and without this service a variety of inappropriate persons

have been used in their stead – including Home Office accommodation staff. It is vital that a source of independent adults for age assessment is found. Should Wales follow the Scottish model of providing guardians for unaccompanied asylum seeking children, this might alleviate this issue. The removal of any mention of a guardianship service from the more recent iteration of the Refugee & Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan, however, is a disturbing omission if symptomatic of an intention to ignore this need altogether.

The quality of age assessment services in Wales remains patchy. Asylum Justice is aware of a case where a lone male worker was sent to age assess a female victim of trafficking found in a brothel, who subsequently and unlawfully declined to undertake a full assessment. It is vital that training is made compulsory for any social worker carrying out an age assessment. The reinstatement of a Wales No Recourse to Public Funds Network would be a good start in ensuring the required training and current case law awareness is up to date, Wales currently being the only region of the UK without an NRPF Network in operation. Furthermore, it is noted that at present there is only one solicitor in Wales that specialises in advising on and challenging unlawful age assessments. It is therefore difficult for Local Authorities to be held to account when unlawful assessments are carried out. The Welsh Government must act to ensure lawful assessments are carried out in every case.

It is clear that the well-being of children is not being taken into account when decisions regarding their immigration cases are being made. As Asylum Justice does not charge for its services it appears that it has become the provider of choice for immigration advice for Local Authorities across South Wales – which impacts on the level of service that can be provided for clients who have no choice in where they go for legal advice. Asylum Justice has been asked to represent young people by a number of Local Authorities in Wales, where they have not been entitled to Legal Aid. Asylum Justice clients have been told incorrectly by Local Authorities that the Authority cannot pay for legal representation in cases where Legal Aid is not available – there appears to be no distinction between cases which are ‘out of scope’ for Legal Aid purposes, and cases where Legal Aid has had to be withdrawn due to the poor merits of a case. Asylum Justice is aware of a case where a Local Authority declined to lodge appeal papers for a young person where the legal representatives had withdrawn, without informing the young person or undertaking any consideration of whether doing so would promote the well-being of the young person. It is gravely concerning that case management decisions are being made by workers without appropriate training.

Asylum Justice has also recently been referred a ten year old child who has been placed with a family member for two years before advice was sought regarding how to regularise her immigration status. It is inappropriate for Local Authorities to be seeking to rely on the third sector for specialist advice in these cases. It is vital that Local Authority legal advisers are trained

in immigration and asylum law so that appropriate advice can be obtained in a timely fashion without placing an undue burden on the third sector.

**4. The role and effectiveness of the Welsh Government's Community Cohesion Delivery Plan in ensuring the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Welsh communities.**

Asylum Justice is unable to comment on this aspect other than to say that refugees who arrive without their families will find it extremely difficult to integrate if they are unable to make an application for family reunion. The first and foremost concern will be for the safety of their family and they will be consumed by worry and fear until their family are arrive in the UK.

## **Conclusion**

Asylum Justice would like to conclude by highlighting the lack of good quality legal advice available for asylum seekers in Wales (and would also like it to be noted the lack of solicitors able to lodge judicial review applications in asylum related matters). This lack of provision coupled with the restrictions on legal aid (both in terms of the merits test and matters which fall out of scope) impacts the ability of asylum seekers to access justice. Asylum Justice recommends that the Welsh Government gives urgent consideration to funding legal advice provision in Wales to readdress this injustice and disparity compared to other parts of the UK.

Yours faithfully,



**Siân Summers-Rees**

Chair of Trustees  
Asylum Justice

Sent to: [SeneddCommunities@assembly.wales](mailto:SeneddCommunities@assembly.wales)

RAS 12

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Hiraeth Hope

Response from: Hiraeth Hope

Please ask the Senedd to request the following from British government:

The opportunity to trial different approaches to refugees/ immigration in Wales or parts of Wales

A scheme to allow communities to choose refugees that they will host at their own expense. That these refugees will be additional to those the UK is committed to host under its government schemes. That those in the middle of a war inside their country of origin are recognised as refugees in as desperate or far worse plight than those who have escaped a war zone. They are trapped refugees. To exclude them from protection is iniquitous.

Community sponsorship is a scheme whereby communities host and pay for refugees in our communities. They therefore should have the right to name the people they will host.

Any costs imposed by any layer of government, as opposed to costs the community and their refugee guests will incur (eg for a home or a course they choose to do) should be paid for by government. eg if government requires hosts to take a course, all costs must be paid for by government. Or if the government requires a legal agreement the full costs must be paid by them.)

The reason this is a good idea, and necessary is that it will:

1. Ensure communities have the number of refugees they want, where they want them
2. Give refugees a humanitarian and civilised alternative to getting over here via the mafia or reaching desperation
3. Ensure there is no meaningful opposition from the population to these guest refugees
4. Enrich the receiving communities culturally and economically and improve their self-esteem and cohesion.



5. Test an alternative to an ineffective and expensive strategy to keep migrants out
6. Respects the fundamental right of a person to help another in their need where there is no third party detriment
7. Follows the well tried and tested and successful model of community sponsorship in Canada.

RAS 13

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Estyn

Response from: Estyn

1. The pace and effectiveness of the Welsh Government approach to resettling refugees through the UK Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS)

Estyn has no evidence relating to this question

2. The effectiveness of the [Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan](#)

The Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan is dated March 2016 and Action Area 5 relates to education. It is to

“Ensure refugees and asylum seekers have equality of opportunity to fulfil their potential and develop the skills to contribute effectively to Welsh society”

Estyn inspection reports make reference to refugees in reports when appropriate. Generally, these references are positive, as the examples below show:

“The school is an inclusive community where diversity is respected and celebrated. The school supports well pupils from a range of minority ethnic groups and those who are asylum seekers. The school is the first in Wales to achieve ‘School of Sanctuary’ status. This acknowledges their work in raising awareness amongst other pupils about problems and challenges that asylum seekers and refugees who live in Swansea face.” **Pentrehafod School, September 2012**

“Many providers use specialist services well to support learners who have mental health conditions and disabilities. Across the partnership, providers offer a range of support to ESOL learners, particularly regarding issues relating to Asylum Seekers and Refugees.” **Cardiff Adult Community Learning Partnership, January 2013**

Other inspection reports refer to schools raising awareness of refugees and asylum seekers, for example recently:

**Awel y Mor school, July 2016** - The school teaches pupils to respect diversity and to feel proud of their identity. For example, to welcome new families into the school community, a refugee week was organised to enhance pupils' knowledge and understanding of a range of different cultures. All pupils show tolerance, fairness and respect for each other.

**Llanmartin primary school, June 2016** - Teachers plan effectively for pupils to learn about life in the wider world. For example, younger pupils learn about foods that we import, such as coffee and cocoa beans. Older pupils write with interest about topical issues that affect children living in other countries, such as the refugee crisis in Syria and the Zika virus.

**St Giles VC Church in Wales Primary School, May 2016** - In key stage 2, many pupils read with expression and empathise with how the different characters in

stories may feel, for example when discussing Christophe's Story about a little boy who is a refugee.

**Mold Alun School, April 2016** - There are also valuable trips, assemblies and a wide range of events that successfully develop pupils' understanding of global citizenship. For example, pupils contribute to work locally to support refugees, and each house has beneficial and longstanding links with other countries, including Brazil, Sri Lanka, China and Patagonia.

**St Andrews Major C.I.W. Primary School, February 2016** - Pupils develop a growing awareness of the wider world and those less fortunate than themselves. For example, they know about fair trade products, raise money for charities and collect clothes for Syrian refugees.

Estyn thematic reports also refer to refugees and asylum seekers, when relevant. For example, see case studies of Cathays High School, Cardiff and St Woolos Primary School, Newport in 'Effective practice in tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools' (Estyn, November 2012).

<https://www.estyn.gov.wales/sites/default/files/documents/Effective%20practice%20in%20tackling%20poverty%20and%20disadvantage%20in%20schools%20-%20November%202012.pdf>

Relevant national statistical data on refugees and asylum seekers is limited and national data on education attainment is not readily available. Estyn advises that schools should themselves analyse performance and attendance for all relevant groups of pupils.

Aspects regarding minority ethnic pupils are covered in Estyn's common inspection framework. Estyn's handbook for secondary school inspections is available here:

<http://www.estyn.gov.wales/document/guidance-inspection-secondary-schools>

Inspectors consider the performance of different groups of learners including minority ethnic groups, refugees, asylum seekers, migrant workers, and gypsies and travellers, and judge how well the provider establishes an ethos that is inclusive as well as other equality and diversity issues. Inspectors judge how well the provider promotes the prevention and elimination of oppressive behaviour including racism. Estyn has supplementary guidance for inspecting Equality, human rights and English as an additional language.

[https://www.estyn.gov.wales/sites/default/files/documents/Supplementary%20guidance%20%E2%80%93%20equality\\_0.pdf](https://www.estyn.gov.wales/sites/default/files/documents/Supplementary%20guidance%20%E2%80%93%20equality_0.pdf)

3. The support and advocacy available to unaccompanied asylum seeking children in Wales

Estyn has no evidence relating to this question

4. The role and effectiveness of the Welsh Government's Community Cohesion Delivery Plan in ensuring the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Welsh communities.

Estyn has no evidence relating to this question

RAS 14

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Glymblaid Ffoaduriaid Cymru

Response from: Welsh Refugee Coalition

# Welsh Assembly Committee on Equality, Local Government and Communities

## *Inquiry on Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Wales*

### Submission from the Welsh Refugee Coalition<sup>1</sup>

1. This submission results from consultation among our membership of over 30 organisations with direct experience of working to welcome and support asylum seekers and refugees in Wales. It is informed by the results of a day's participative meeting attended by 20 member organisations, as well as input from focus groups held in Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham. The intention is to highlight the main issues of concern of asylum seekers and refugees in Wales and those working with them. Individual member organisations of the Coalition will submit their own evidence which, in many cases, will offer much more detail on specific areas of concern.

#### General

2. There is a strong welcome for asylum seekers and refugees in Wales. Many asylum seekers and refugees comment positively on the friendliness of Welsh people towards them and the Welsh Government's policies make a positive difference in the areas where there is devolved competence. It is notable that four Welsh political parties have committed themselves to supporting the aspiration of Wales becoming a 'Nation of Sanctuary'<sup>2</sup>. At the same time as the unfortunate recent rise in hate crime and hostility towards refugees from a minority, there has been a surge in offers of help to our member organisations from the Welsh public. We very much welcome the continued commitment of the Welsh Government to the principle that "refugee inclusion begins on day one of arrival"<sup>3</sup> which underpins its policy approach to supporting refugees.

**Recommendation 1:** The Welsh Government principle of "refugee inclusion begins on day one of arrival" should be reaffirmed and interpreted to apply equally to all those seeking sanctuary, irrespective of the route by which they came to Wales. We urge the Committee to consider carefully the implications of applying this principle in all areas of devolved responsibility even if this puts Wales at odds with UK government policy.

3. There is now experience of refugees and asylum seekers arriving in Wales by a variety of routes. Elements of good practice in welcome, support and integration can be derived from the best experience from all routes. Thus, there are some excellent provisions for support services in different resettlement schemes aimed at specific groups, including the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS) and the new Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) arrangements. On the other hand, there is long experience of welcoming and supporting asylum seekers dispersed to Wales after spontaneous arrival in UK and those who go on to obtain leave to remain as refugees through the asylum system.

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<sup>1</sup> We are a coalition of over 30 organisations including all the major Welsh refugee NGOs and others working in Wales with asylum seekers and refugees at all stages of their journey, and with the communities in which they live. We work together in the interests of asylum seekers and refugees, to ensure that our limited resources can be used to best effect and to speak with one voice on policies and practices affecting people seeking safety in Wales. See list of members at the end of this document.

<sup>2</sup> The vision for Wales to develop a culture of hospitality and for its towns, cities and rural areas to become places of welcome for those fleeing persecution. 'City of Sanctuary' is a movement of people across the UK and Ireland who seek to create a culture of hospitality and welcome for people seeking sanctuary. As well as two established 'Cities of Sanctuary' in Swansea and Cardiff, people across Wales have been responding to the refugee crisis in towns and villages across the country, setting up schemes which offer support and welcome.

<sup>3</sup> <http://gov.wales/dsjlg/publications/communityregendevelop/refugeeinclusionstrategy/strategye.pdf?lang=en>, page 22

**Recommendation 2:** Systematic sharing of experience and learning should be set up to link all schemes and services for welcome, support and integration of asylum seekers and refugees. Wherever possible, elements of the good practice delivered via the SVPRS should be replicated and extended to all seeking asylum.

4. Many of the most important policy issues affecting asylum seekers and refugees are outside the areas of devolved competence of the Welsh Government. For example, the Immigration Act 2016 introduces new sanctions on illegal working and changes to financial asylum support, aims to prevent undocumented migrants from accessing housing, driving licences and bank accounts, and introduces additional measures to enforce existing immigration laws. Immigration is a reserved matter, therefore many of its provisions fall within the remit of the Home Office and will be implemented in Wales in the same way as the other administrations of the UK. Certain aspects of the Immigration Act 2016 however impact upon areas of devolved competence. These include:
  - Sections 39-42 on residential tenancies
  - Section 68 and Schedule 12 on availability of local authority support
  - Sections 69-73 on transfer of responsibility for relevant children
5. This Act raises important questions regarding Welsh devolution. As has occurred with other reserved policy matters such as Welfare Reform<sup>4</sup>, it offers the opportunity to analyse, influence and challenge how these provisions of the Immigration Act 2016 are implemented in Wales.

**Recommendation 3:** The Welsh Government should keep a close watch on UK policy on asylum and immigration and where there are adverse effects either lobby for changes or seek ways within its competence to mitigate these. In particular, the Welsh Government should commit to exploring the impact of the Immigration Act 2016 on individuals, devolved public service and local authorities in Wales, commissioning additional research where necessary and putting in place policies to mitigate any negative impacts.

## The effectiveness of the Refugee and Asylum Seekers Delivery Plan

**Asylum Accommodation** (refer to specialist submission by Tai Pawb for further detail on housing)

6. Asylum accommodation is not devolved (an exception to the devolution of housing policy). Accommodation for asylum seekers in Wales is provided through a Home Office contract with Clearsprings, a large private landlord, through which it also runs the Initial Accommodation hostel in Cardiff. Both the quality of housing and the services provided by Clearsprings are unacceptably poor. There is no independent scrutiny on standards or independent means of complaint. This is a matter of grave concern.

**Recommendation 4:** The Welsh Government should prioritise finding ways of using its devolved powers to improve asylum accommodation in Wales. For example:

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<sup>4</sup> In response to the UK Government Welfare Reform Act, the Welsh Government set up a Ministerial Task and Finish Group. This group commissioned the Institute of Fiscal Studies to undertake extensive research into the impacts of welfare reforms on individuals and households in Wales, on devolved public service in Wales, on people with protected characteristics and local authority areas in Wales. <http://gov.wales/topics/people-and-communities/welfare-reform-in-wales/analysing-reforms/?lang=en>

- Engage actively with the UK Visa & Immigration Asylum Accommodation and Support Transformation (AAST) stakeholder consultation on new contracts for asylum housing
- Insist that the quality of asylum housing is scrutinised by Welsh Government or local authorities
- Bring the next asylum accommodation contract into Wales, preferably on a non-profit basis, by supporting a bid from one or more Welsh housing associations, other third sector organisations or Local Authorities or negotiating with the Home Office to undertake the contracting process itself.

### **Housing for New Refugees** (refer to specialist submission by Tai Pawb for further detail on housing)

7. Refugees who have come through the asylum route still experience significant difficulties in securing housing. This is exacerbated by the very short “move-on” period of 28 days (see section on move on). The local council's approach is key here. For example, in Swansea, new refugees are often identified as part of a ‘vulnerable group’ and so placed on the priority housing list, but this is not so in other areas.
8. Refugees who are successful with family reunion thereby expand the size of their family unit. Hence they experience renewed housing need some time after their original needs were met.
9. Housing is also one area where the Immigration Act 2016 is likely to have an impact. The Act provides for ‘Right to Rent Checks’, making it compulsory for landlords to check the immigration status of all new adult tenants. We are concerned that these checks will lead to destitution and an increase in homelessness, putting more pressures and costs on already stretched local authorities.

**Recommendation 5:** The Welsh Government should act to offset discrimination against refugees in housing, both as new refugees and later. For example:

1. Issue guidance to Local Authorities to class all new refugees as vulnerable so that they are regarded as in priority need for housing; alternatively, provide adequate funding to local authorities and accompanying guidance to enable newly recognised refugees who are not considered in priority housing need to benefit from rent deposit scheme.
2. Consider ring-fencing a proportion of the ‘Supporting People’ fund for refugees (this fund helps people maintain tenancies, with a view to preventing homelessness).
3. Ensure Local Authorities in dispersal areas (currently Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham) have a dedicated housing resettlement officer; and provide additional training for existing staff.
4. Undertake an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) of Right to Rent Checks<sup>5</sup> in Wales and monitor the impact of this legislation.
5. Work with private landlords to raise awareness of different types of migration status to mitigate any impacts of Right to Rent Checks in Wales.
6. Instigate a process for people successful with family reunion so that appropriate temporary housing is made available as soon as family members arrive.

### **Destitution and Homelessness**

10. Coalition members are all aware of increasing numbers of refused asylum seekers who are evicted from asylum accommodation and have no right to public housing, no access to public funds or benefits and no legal right to work. For example, The British Red Cross destitution services, which provide short term crisis support in the form of small amounts of cash, food, and clothing vouchers, in Newport and Cardiff provided financial support to a total of 1027 people in 2015 compared to 634 in 2014. A similar service exists in Swansea, where there is also the SHARE Tawe Voluntary

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.taipawb.org/policy-influencing/immigration-right-rent-checks/>



Hosting Scheme, which provided 1700 bed-nights of accommodation to 17 destitute asylum seekers in 2015 and a similar amount in only the first nine months of 2016.

11. Such people may be detained and forcibly removed, although more often than not, this does not happen and they are left destitute. The decisions leading to this point are often poor, as evidenced by the fact that, given safe space and time to gather fresh evidence and find a good solicitor who will submit a 'fresh claim' for them, they often succeed in proving their need for protection and are granted 'leave to remain' after all (8 of those accommodated by SHARE Tawe have done this since January 2015). In addition, increasing numbers of newly granted refugees experience temporary destitution due to the inadequacy of the 28-day 'move-on' period, while destitution can also affect some vulnerable migrants including women with insecure immigration status experiencing domestic violence.
12. This desperate situation is the result of a failure of UK asylum and immigration policy to provide a safety net for some of the most vulnerable people in our society. The enforced destitution of vulnerable displaced people has no place in Wales and the prevention of destitution should be prioritised.
13. We welcome the possible inclusion of the organisation of voluntary support for destitute people seeking sanctuary in the Welsh Government's Inclusion Grant. However, there is also a need for direct financial assistance. In 2015, Northern Ireland introduced the OFMDFM (Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister) Crisis Fund, which is intended to help minority ethnic individuals with no other means of support through emergency situations. The eligibility criteria include those who currently have no recourse to public funds, such as refused asylum seekers and other vulnerable migrants, as well as destitute refugees. A similar fund in Wales would prevent this form of avoidable destitution.

**Recommendation 6:** Welsh Government expands the eligibility criteria for the Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF) to include those who currently have no recourse to public funds (NRPF), such as refused asylum seekers and other vulnerable migrants including destitute refugees. To provide appropriate accountability there would need to be clear guidelines for the types and scale of assistance offered and expected short-term impact on individuals.

### Move on

14. In terms of the support available to people, the Welsh Refugee Coalition identifies the SVPRS as the gold standard. People are welcomed at their arrival point, taken to their housing, supported with cash for their first few weeks until benefits start, accompanied to health and education related appointments and supported to find employment. This contrasts to the support available to people who have travelled independently of managed migration routes to seek asylum. Welsh Government currently funds (secure until March 2017) advocacy provision for these people gaining status<sup>6</sup> whilst living in Wales or choosing to move to Wales following a grant of status.
15. Through this advocacy provision, we know and can evidence that people, immediately after being recognised as in need of international protection, are highly likely to experience financial hardship, homelessness and destitution. People moving through the SVPRS are not as vulnerable to these experiences as they are not faced with a 28 day move on period and administrative procedures that contribute to such problems are addressed earlier. The bespoke support available to Syrian refugees combined with the fast-tracking of administrative support is contributing to a two-tier system of support for people in Wales at a vulnerable point in their lives. We urge the Committee to acknowledge and address this two-tier system by:

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<sup>6</sup> <http://welshrefugeecouncil.org.uk/what-help-do-you-need/i-have-been-granted-status>

**Recommendation 7:** Asking the Welsh Government to replicate elements of the good practice delivered via SVPRS to all people seeking asylum and also extend the remit of the Taskforce and Operations Board to include **all** asylum seekers and refugees.

**Recommendation 8:** Seek a commitment from Welsh Government to fund the refugee move on service on a long-term basis.

**Recommendation 9:** Ensure Jobcentre Plus staff in Wales are required to increase their understanding, possibly through dedicated training, of the particular barriers faced by refugees in job seeking and supported on an ongoing basis to give specialist assistance to them.

## Health, Well-being and Social Care

16. Although refugees and asylum-seekers are able to access health services in Wales, there appears to be an issue around the availability of interpreters and the use of Language Line. Language Line should be available as a standard part of healthcare services, and indeed the Welsh Government has provided additional funding to Local Health Boards in dispersal areas to support basic medical costs including health needs assessments, a contribution to primary care and access to Language Line (see Refugee Inclusion Strategy<sup>7</sup>, p.54). Not all health services are offering or using Language Line, with some GPs refusing to make it available – likely due to the additional time required during an appointment – and in some cases, possibly because of direct discrimination. In some cases, parents have had to rely on their children to interpret for them about health conditions. Clearly this is not appropriate and has occurred at GP surgeries and at hospitals. Consultations without an interpreter can lead to misdiagnosis and errors with medication.

**Recommendation 10:** The Delivery Plan should include action by Welsh Government and health colleagues to ensure all health services in Wales fully integrate Language Line into local health provision. Any guidance needs to make clear that Language Line is not an optional extra. The Welsh Government needs to ensure that Wales level data is collected on the use of Language Line and that this evidence is used to hold the health service to account when needed. There is also a need for retention of in-person interpretation and not an over-reliance on Language Line where particular vulnerabilities are identified and in all complex cases.

17. Mental health support is often not sufficient for people who have experienced significant trauma. Coalition members report that people are waiting six months or more for any counselling, and two years or more for specialist Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) counselling. Often this counselling does not include appropriate translation or interpretation. Due regard needs to be paid to the impact of the asylum process on the wellbeing of sanctuary seekers, and that during the asylum claim period, a person's mental health can deteriorate significantly. The experience of being in the asylum process puts significant stress on individuals who are faced with an enormous lack of control over their lives for an unknown length of time along with exclusion from wider society and a lack of right to take part in work, education, training etc.

18. Although there is a requirement for more specialist mental health services (particularly talking therapies which understand trauma without necessarily being full-on PTSD services), where possible, Coalition members want refugees and asylum seekers in Wales to enjoy the same access to mental health services as do others in Wales. Such services need to consider how they could best support the linguistic, religious and cultural needs of vulnerable migrants, and this might entail looking outside statutory service providers for support – to the third sector, to non-health services, and to the migrant communities themselves. Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs), faith

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<sup>7</sup> <http://gov.wales/dsjlg/publications/communityregendevol/refugeeinclusionstrategy/strategie.pdf?lang=en>

groups and support groups can also play a vital role by acting as a bridge between refugees and mental health care services.

19. Existing services and/or systems need to change, adapt or develop in, order for effective engagement to happen. A whole scale creation of specialist services is not recommended, as this could potentially be divisive and would not help integration – whilst also being unrealistic given the current economic climate. Fostering good mental health is not only the preserve of the health services, since issues such as the asylum system, quality of housing and access to services all have a massive impact. For further information on mental health services please see Mind Cymru's inquiry submission.

**Recommendation 11:** Better collaboration is needed between third sector and statutory mental health provision and across government departments – the Welsh Government seem to have several divisions involved in this work without any proper joined up thinking between themselves and with important migrant health services like Cardiff Health Access Partnership (CHAPS). The Mental Health Sub Group of the Syrian Operations Board would provide a good starting point for this collaboration to happen.

**Recommendation 12:** Better initial health screening is needed to identify issues as early as possible. This needs to be undertaken by properly trained clinical staff alongside support for asylum seekers and refugees to better understand and express their mental well-being.

## Maternity and Children

20. Much more needs to be done to improve maternity services for asylum seeking and refugee women. We know that women experience hardship during pregnancy and struggle to access support services. Research<sup>8</sup> undertaken by the Refugee Council in England exposes many areas of concern which we feel are likely to be mirrored in Wales. In addition, evidence shows that maternal deaths among asylum seekers and refugees are high - 14% of maternal deaths in the UK are asylum seekers and refugees even though they only make up 0.5% of the population.<sup>9</sup> More could be done to help support awareness of issues for both asylum seekers and midwives and to facilitate networks to share best practice using the Maternity Streams of Sanctuary model<sup>10</sup> A small input in this area could have a big impact in terms of reducing maternal deaths for asylum seeking and refugee women and improving outcomes for all.
21. For example, Swansea City of Sanctuary held a Maternity Workshop in March 2016, attended by health board staff, students and the third sector. It identified a number of issues, ranging from appropriate cultural awareness to access to appropriate finance. One issue that could be fairly easily addressed for the asylum seeking and refugee community is a lack of awareness of what services are generally available in the UK so people don't know what to ask for. City of Sanctuary in Wales are planning a maternity work-stream in Swansea, potentially opening up across Wales later in 2017 and would be very keen to support Welsh Government/NHS research/action in this area.

**Recommendation 13:** Welsh Government to commission research from community, third sector, Public Health Wales & local health boards to map needs, identify good practice and develop an action plan to support collaboration across sectors to address identified needs.

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<sup>8</sup> [http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0002/6402/When\\_Maternity\\_Doesn\\_t\\_Matter\\_-\\_Ref\\_Council\\_\\_Maternity\\_Action\\_report\\_Feb2013.pdf](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0002/6402/When_Maternity_Doesn_t_Matter_-_Ref_Council__Maternity_Action_report_Feb2013.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.centreformidwiferyeducation.ie/news/cmace-2011-saving-mothers-lives>

<sup>10</sup> <https://maternity.cityofsanctuary.org/>

## Education

### English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

22. Improvements are required in the local availability of and access to English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes. This is essential, as the ability to speak English has an enormous impact on the ability to integrate, social outcomes and community cohesion. Barriers preventing people, particularly women, accessing ESOL classes include a lack of childcare and transport, as well as issues around the timings of classes. With class intakes often commencing annually, individuals who arrive at other times in the year are often forced to wait many months before accessing formal provision. The provision of more advanced ESOL Level 2+ classes is incredibly limited and not adequate to support the need identified. To our knowledge, there is no evidence of ESOL provision versus ESOL need. This could be done in partnership with Migrant Help and/or the Home Office housing provider (Clearsprings) to monitor English language ability on arrival. Migrant Help could also play a role in monitoring skills, educational qualifications and previous work experience.

**Recommendation 14:** The Welsh Government should, for transparency, clarify how and whether they are meeting ESOL need and addressing barriers to access. Gender analysis of need and provision is also required because of the additional barriers facing women (e.g. caring responsibilities, cultural barriers). A limit on waiting time should be set to ensure people can access courses as quickly as possible.

**Recommendation 15:** There is a need for increased funding/places for ESOL (including informal schemes such as FAN Groups and conversation clubs as well as formal course places). Action is also needed to ensure adequate ESOL provision in new dispersal and resettlement areas, for example the under the Syrian VPRS. This should include training of volunteers and linking to the context of everyday life and knowledge needed by newcomers. It should also include transport provision.

### Equality of Access to Education

23. The Welsh Government needs to work with the education sector to ensure equality of access for refugees and asylum seekers. There is no detail in the Delivery Plan on the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW), which was successfully trialled by Displaced People in Action (DPIA) to enable sanctuary seekers to have prior learning recognised and limit the need to repeat training and education unnecessarily. The CQFW is particularly useful for refugees and asylum-seekers as they often arrive without evidence of prior qualifications and training having fled their country of origin. A lack of consistent follow-up and resources to ensure the CQFW remains available means it is effectively non-existent for refugees and asylum-seekers now. Some colleges do not seem to be aware of the CQFW and even if they are it is often not advertised. We would like to see a requirement to make this consistently available as well as monitoring take up and sharing best practice
24. Access to higher education (HE) for asylum-seekers is limited by the approach of institutions, which treat asylum-seekers as international students in most instances. NARIC (national agency for the recognition and comparison of international qualifications and skills) cost is an additional barrier which asylum-seekers most often cannot afford, effectively costing up to two weeks of income or thereabouts, and constituting a further discriminatory barrier to HE. In order to widen access, improve integration and enable refugees and asylum seekers to progress in Wales, the Welsh Government could support HE institutions with embedding local fee rates for asylum-seekers as a matter of course. It could then add this as an indicator of progress towards the goal of becoming a Nation of Sanctuary.

**Recommendation 16:** Welsh Government should invest in systemic support for the transfer and recognition of qualifications: an education and employment advisor in each of Wales' dispersal areas and NARIC membership for lead organisations.

**Recommendation 17:** The Welsh Government should improve asylum seeker access to tertiary education by developing an appropriate system of student support. This is currently a huge barrier as asylum seekers are treated as international students and required to pay up front.

**Recommendation 18:** Working with businesses and business sector to improve access to apprenticeships, volunteering, strategic work placements. We would encourage Welsh Government to lead the way by proactively creating and celebrating volunteering opportunities within its own structure to legitimise volunteering for asylum seekers and myth-bust the belief that volunteering is not permitted under immigration law.

**Recommendation 19:** There is need for advice services to signpost people to FE/HE, to work, volunteering, and different employment support options for different professions and to revisit specialist employment advice, such as the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) and learn from good practice such as the DPIA Wales Asylum Seeker and Refugee Doctors (WARD) scheme for asylum seeking and refugee medical doctors<sup>11</sup>.

25. Transport costs are a big barrier, limiting access especially for asylum seekers to necessary ESOL classes, which, unlike many other community services, are not often available locally and require substantial travel costs. A lack of travel support prevents young asylum-seekers from continuing to sixth form college level, as there is no funding for public transport. Many young asylum-seekers are leaving school/ college because their parents cannot afford travel costs and the young people are prohibited from seeking work so their lives are placed on hold to their short and long-term detriment.

**Recommendation 20:** We advocate setting up a scheme for free/subsidised local transport for asylum seekers in partnership with bus companies and local authorities across Wales.

26. Whilst we recognise that Job Centre Plus is not a devolved responsibility, Coalition members regularly hear reports from refugees with limited or no English language skills being only offered interpretation at their first appointment. This leads to miscommunication and subsequent benefit sanctions as well as difficulties in securing employment.

**Recommendation 21:** We would ask that the Welsh Government supports schemes to provide support and interpretation to refugees where required in attending such appointments.

### **The pace and effectiveness of the Welsh Government approach to resettling refugees through the UK Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS)**

27. By the end June 2016, Local Authorities in Wales had resettled 112 refugees from Syria through the SVPRS. By the end October 2016, 17 out of 22 Local Authorities had welcomed Syrian refugees through the scheme, with all others preparing to do so by December 2016.
28. The Home Office leads on the scheme, with the Welsh Government facilitating a Taskforce and an Operation's Board to co-ordinate the arrival and effective integration of people. Membership of the Taskforce and Board includes representatives from health, local government, the third sector, the private sector, the Home Office and police. Initially set up to oversee the effective implementation of the SVPRS, the remit of these bodies has been extended to include a Children's Task and Finish Group, which looks beyond the SVPRS to other Home Office schemes such as the Vulnerable Children Resettlement scheme<sup>12</sup> and the UASC National Transfer Scheme<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.dpia.org.uk/our-projects/ward-group/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-scheme-launched-to-resettle-children-at-risk>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/unaccompanied-asylum-seeking-children-interim-national-transfer-scheme>

The Welsh Refugee Coalition welcomes Welsh Government's coordination role re the SVPRS, though also seeks reassurances that:

**Recommendation 22:** The Welsh Government must facilitate the systematic and rigorous collection and dissemination of information about what works and what doesn't in terms of newcomers feeling welcome, safe and able to integrate. This is especially important in areas where people are resettled in areas without diaspora communities and where a Local Authority is new to the provision of refugee support. It is vital that the experiences and opinions of people who have been resettled are included as an integral part of this learning. Learning should be captured from all relevant public services and key areas of interest should include safeguarding, utilisation of skills, positive stories and community support.

**Recommendation 23:** Welsh Government, as part of planning and readiness to engage effectively and rapidly with future crises, should require and resource Local Authorities to incorporate refugees in their civil contingency and emergency planning exercises and plans.

29. The Welsh Government has been vocal about their support for the SVPRS in Wales. In line with our concerns about the development of a two-tier system for refugee welcome and support, we also have concerns that poor public understanding of the need for international refugee protection is being further eroded with an almost exclusive emphasis on SVPRS.

**Recommendation 24:** We would like to see Welsh Government demonstrate leadership and proactively promote positive public messages and narratives about *all* refugees being welcome in Wales, as well as the benefits of migration.

30. An issue that may require consideration is the impact of the introduction of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) maxima rates within social housing. We understand that the SVPRS will support full recoverable costs in the first year but not past that. LHA rates may be an issue in terms of people sustaining tenancies after the first year if costs are not fully recoverable. Further, those who are single and under 35 will access the shared rate of the LHA rate under the changes to the LHA maxima. This is something that needs to be considered in terms of any single people in terms of support going forward post year 1 -5 of the SVPRS.

## Community Cohesion

31. Refugees bring skills and experience which enhance their new communities – in sport, arts, culture, faith and schools. Funds for refugee inclusion are often better used to enable access to mainstream provision and community activities rather than for special projects. The participation of refugees and asylum seekers should be normalised as part of everyday life.
32. Awareness-raising is an essential part of building community cohesion. This means more than supplying information and going beyond depicting refugees as needy survivors of trauma. It means humanising the 'refugee' through positive stories about their contribution to Welsh life and by maximising opportunities for other local people to meet, hear from and work alongside refugees. It also means publicising the variety of ways in which welcome and support is offered to refugees by Welsh people and includes awareness-raising within refugee communities themselves.
33. 'City of Sanctuary' is a movement of people across the UK and Ireland who seek to create a culture of hospitality and welcome for people seeking sanctuary. As well as two established 'Cities of Sanctuary' in Swansea and Cardiff, people across Wales have been responding to the refugee crisis in towns and villages across the country, setting up schemes which offer support and welcome. The generosity and compassion of people in Wales should be recognised and celebrated. The Welsh Refugee Coalition supports the establishment of Wales as the world's first 'Nation of Sanctuary'. The Welsh Government can play its part in making this a reality by publicly supporting

the movement, and by enacting policies and practices which promote safety and inclusion for all asylum seekers and refugees in Wales.

**Recommendation 25:** Welsh Government:

- Encourages pledges of support for a Nation of Sanctuary from local authorities, AMs and MPs, and public, voluntary and private sector organisations.
- Identifies and delivers actions which they and AMs can take towards making Wales Nation of Sanctuary a political and social reality.
- Pledges to use positive language when speaking of asylum seekers and refugees, and to speak out against and correct discriminatory or prejudiced language, or false information, about people seeking safety in Wales.
- Take an active role in spreading positive messages and stories about asylum seekers in the media and in developing community action to tackle hate crime and encourage positive messaging around integration.

**Arrangements for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children**

34. The Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan states that UASC will have access to independent advocacy in respect of the duties owed to them under the Social Services and Well-being Act 2014. In this regard, UASC have a statutory right to advocacy the same as any other looked after child in Wales. However, UASC, asylum seeking and refugee children all have specific vulnerabilities and need access to dedicated services. To our knowledge no such support exists for UASC in Wales despite previous commitments from Welsh Government to explore ‘the need for a Guardianship model<sup>14</sup> for Wales’. Coalition members are also concerned that advice and support for children now appears to be included with the specification of Welsh Government’s Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrants Inclusion Project which is under resourced.
35. It is now over 10 years since Save the Children with Cardiff University published their ground breaking report ‘Uncertain Futures’<sup>15</sup> which advised Welsh Government to consider how best it can provide accessible, specialist and well-funded independent advocacy support for UASC in Wales. The 2016 Concluding Observations<sup>16</sup> from the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child also called for ‘statutory independent guardians for all unaccompanied and separated children’, raising their concerns over the lack of support for, and increased vulnerability of this group of children and young people. They also called for ‘sufficient support to migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking children to access basic services’.
36. Coalition member, Children in Wales have long called for Wales to develop a model akin to the Scottish Guardianship service<sup>17</sup>, as independent evaluations have demonstrated the value this specialist service brings to vulnerable children and young people. Such a service would complement and add value to the existing support provided by local authority commissioned advocacy services, yet action to meet the specific needs and issues of this group of children through specialist support for UASC in Wales has remained limited at best. Such support for UASC should be seen as part of Welsh Government’s safeguarding duties and commitment towards prevention. Coalition members have serious concerns that a lack of such provision in the early

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/how\\_we\\_can\\_help/advice\\_services/the\\_scottish\\_guardianship\\_service](http://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/how_we_can_help/advice_services/the_scottish_guardianship_service)

<sup>15</sup> [https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/docs/uncertain\\_futures\\_summary\\_1.pdf](https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/docs/uncertain_futures_summary_1.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> <http://gov.wales/docs/dsjlg/publications/cyp/160727-final-concluding-observations-2016-en.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> [http://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/how\\_we\\_can\\_help/advice\\_services/the\\_scottish\\_guardianship\\_service](http://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/how_we_can_help/advice_services/the_scottish_guardianship_service)

weeks after arrival results in preventable harm to vulnerable children and can lead to increased risk of exploitation and trauma, and recourse to more costly interventions later on. Support workers report meeting children far too late after arrival, such that 'the light has gone out and the child/young person has no hope for future'. Vulnerability needs to be recognised from day one, with automatic access to independent specialist Guardians that can ensure children and young people are enabled to receive dedicated advice, support and advocacy, with signposting to other relevant services.

37. The numbers of UASC in Wales are relatively low and so providing an effective guardianship service should not be too costly. Funding such a scheme should be considered preventative spending in line with the principles of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. A system of guardianship would not only bring improved outcomes for children and young people, but should also contribute to efficiencies and cost-savings for key agencies working with separated and trafficked children. Without such support, we are not fulfilling obligations under UN Convention on Rights of the Child and are failing future generations, leaving them at risk of exploitation. Consideration will also need to be given to ensuring that transition arrangements are in place once a UASC reaches adult status.
38. Members of the Coalition also have concerns about age assessment process and what happens to young people while they are being assessed. For example, some young people have been living in initial accommodation at Lynx House while waiting an age assessment decision. This is totally inappropriate.

**Recommendation 26:** Welsh Government fund a Welsh Guardianship Service to work with children and young people seeking asylum in Wales. Appointed Guardians will support young people by helping them to navigate immigration and welfare processes, feel supported and empowered throughout the asylum process and assist them to access the help they need when they need it and help them make informed decisions about their future.

**Recommendation 27:** Welsh Government works with Local Authorities to explore the possibility of providing supported lodgings and supported housing projects for older UASC (16/17 years) and to ensure that permanent move on accommodation is made available when young people are ready to live independently.

**Recommendation 28:** Training on care and protection of asylum seeking children should be a compulsory part of professional qualification for relevant public body professionals e.g. social workers, teachers etc. Existing practicing professionals should have access to on-going training as part of their professional development.



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<p>African Community Centre Amnesty Cardiff Asylum Justice British Red Cross Children in Wales Christian Aid Cymru City of Sanctuary Cytun – Eglwysi Ynghyd yng Nghymru/Churches Together in Wales Displaced People in Action Diverse Cymru Ethnic Youth Support Team Evangelical Alliance Wales Henna Foundation Hope not Hate Cymru Just Across – Wrexham Oasis Cardiff Oxfam Cymru Race Council Cymru</p>	<p>Race Equality First Save the Children Cymru Share Dydd Swansea Bay Asylum Seekers Support Group Taff Housing Association Tai Pawb TCC (Trefnu Cymunedol Cymru / Together Creating Communities) The Syrian Association of Wales Trinity Centre Tros Gynnal Plant Unity in Diversity Welsh Centre for International Affairs Welsh Refugee Council Women Connect First Women Seeking Sanctuary Advocacy Group Wales</p>
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RAS 15

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: British Red Cross

Response from: British Red Cross

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## Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee Inquiry on Refugees and Asylum Seekers

### Response from the British Red Cross in Wales

(Contact: Cathrin Manning [cmanning@redcross.org.uk](mailto:cmanning@redcross.org.uk) / 01745 828232)

#### About us:

The British Red Cross helps millions of people in the UK and around the world to prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies, disasters and conflicts. We are part of the global Red Cross and Red Crescent humanitarian network and we refuse to ignore people in crisis. We support more than 90.000 people every year in Wales.

We welcome the opportunity to submit evidence to the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee Inquiry on Refugees and Asylum Seekers.

### The effectiveness of the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan

#### General comment about the plan:

Overall the plan lacks SMART actions. Many of the actions are activities which have already been delivered and are coming to an end or are very geographically specific and not available in all dispersal areas.

**Recommendation:** The intended outcomes of the plan, priorities and actions need to be clearly linked with specific, target driven and timed activities, with clear accountability and evaluation.

#### Housing and Advice Services

**1) Context:** The plan fails to address destitution amongst asylum seekers. The British Red Cross defines someone who is destitute as:

*“ A person who is not accessing public funds, is living in extreme poverty and is unable to meet basic needs, e.g. income, food, shelter, healthcare, and who is forced to rely on irregular support from family, friends, charities or illegal working to survive.”*

The Immigration Act 1999 further applies to future scenarios whereby an individual is also considered destitute if they are likely to become destitute within the next 14 days (or 56 days if they are already receiving support).

We provide support to asylum seekers in Wales, many of whom are families, who find themselves destitute for a range of reasons and often experience multiple complex issues including physical and mental ill health, trafficking, domestic servitude, and exploitative relationships. Destitution can occur at any stage in the asylum process. Asylum seekers do not have permission to work and although they are entitled to limited state support this amounts to only 50 per cent of standard income support and is subject to frequent delays due to administrative errors or changes of address. This also affects those who have made a successful asylum claim and whose asylum support is withdrawn while they transfer to mainstream welfare support. They are often left waiting weeks or months for benefits such as child tax credit. Even when a refugee is successfully accessing welfare support, they and their families can face destitution at the point at which they exercise their legal right to be reunited with their children and spouse due to delays in receiving further support, forced to live on one person's entitlement and in overcrowded accommodation.

Even those who are considered refused and appeals rights exhausted can then go on to get some form of leave to remain in the UK.

Many of those who have had their claim rejected and are eligible for Section 4 support experience delays in receiving it or difficulty accessing it leaving them with nothing (see British Red Cross Report<sup>1</sup>). Others feel unable to apply for Section 4 support as they fear for their safety if they return to their country of origin. There are then those who have had their asylum claim rejected and have not returned home or are too frightened to return home. Many failed asylum seekers choose to remain in the UK living a life of destitution over returning to their home country, living with no or very limited access to support from the UK Government.

Refused destitute asylum seekers have nowhere to live and no right to public housing; no money but no access to public funds or benefits and no legal right to work.

This destitution is the result of a failure of UK asylum and immigration policy to provide a safety net for some of the most vulnerable people in our society, including for those who have an entitlement to state support as well as those who are at the end of the asylum process

Destitution has a disproportionate effect on refused asylum seekers, newly granted refugees and women with insecure immigration status experiencing domestic violence. The enforced destitution of vulnerable displaced people has no place in Wales and the Welsh Government must prioritise the prevention of destitution.

We operate four destitution clinics in the dispersal areas of Wrexham, Newport, Swansea and Cardiff, where we provide small amounts of money and clothing to asylum seekers and refused asylum seekers who are destitute, a maximum of £10 a week per individual for a maximum of 12 weeks. The number of people referred to us for destitution support in Newport and Cardiff alone since 2013 has doubled (564 cases in 2013, 1027 in 2015). We fear these numbers will increase further as a result of Home Office intentions to broaden dispersal areas and the impact of the Immigration Act 2016 which introduces changes to financial support for asylum seekers and criminalises illegal working.

In Northern Ireland the Executive Office has established a crisis fund for migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. The fund provides a small amount of money for those who have issues with benefits, unemployment, have suffered family breakdown or domestic violence. The fund follows the success of a short pilot project, which supported 1,252 people, in 2012 and looked at whether small amounts of money could provide a significant bridge to allow people to get back on their feet. The fund also provides detailed evidence on the scale and cause of destitution to facilitate policy discussion.

The eligibility criteria include those who currently have no recourse to public funds, such as asylum seekers and refused asylum seekers, and other vulnerable migrants including destitute refugees. The Executive Office has continued to provide a further £100,000 until March 2017 which is being managed and administered by the British Red Cross.

***Recent key findings of the OFMDFM destitution fund are:***

- That benefit issues, domestic violence and outstanding and refused asylum claims are the most common causes of destitution amongst the 'client' group.
- Additional checks, administrative errors and a lack of understanding of benefit entitlements within statutory agencies are some of the primary reasons for delays in people receiving state support, (including section 95 and section 4 support) they are entitled to
- Statutory agencies such as Social Services, require support and guidance on what their duties are towards families and children in need and in particular their human rights duties.
- There is a tangible cost of not helping people in destitution.

***The key recommendations following the recent evaluation of the Crisis Fund are:***

- The Northern Ireland (NI) Executive should address the cause of destitution by introducing a range of policy and practical initiatives such as a dedicated point of expertise on the benefit entitlements of non-UK nationals within the Department for Communities.
- The NI Executive should plan for the impacts of the Immigration Act 2016 and UK's exit from the European Union.
- There should be a permanent commitment to making the Crisis Fund available.

**Recommendation:** Welsh Government expands the eligibility criteria for the Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF) to include those who currently have no recourse to public funds, such as refused asylum seekers and other vulnerable migrants including temporarily destitute refugees. This should include clear guidelines for the administration and monitoring of funds and expectations of the short-term impact on individuals.

**Recommendation:** The administration and monitoring of the expanded Discretionary Assistance Fund (as recommended above) to support the gathering of evidence on the scale and cause of destitution to facilitate policy discussion.

**Recommendation:** The delivery plan fails to consider the impact of the Home Office intention to broaden dispersal areas and the Immigration Act 2016 in Wales and the consequential risk to an increasing number of individuals and families left homeless and destitute. The Welsh Government should commit to exploring the impact of changes to dispersal areas and the Immigration Act 2016 on individuals in Wales, on devolved public service in Wales and on local authorities in Wales, commissioning additional research where necessary and plan to mitigate any negative impacts.

**Recommendation:** The Welsh Government should limit the impact of destitution by introducing a range of policy and practical initiatives such as a dedicated point of expertise on the benefit entitlements of non-UK nationals within the Department for People and Communities.

**Recommendation:** The Welsh Government should share the knowledge and expertise harnessed in Wales by the Wales Migration Partnership to feed into the future of COMPASS contracts.

**2) Context:** Our Supported People funded refugee tenancy support service in Swansea works with refugees during the move-on period after they have been granted refugee status by the Home Office. Once a person seeking asylum is given refugee status their National Asylum Support Service support will cease after 28 days, 21 days if they were in receipt of Section 4 support. This includes the cash allowance (usually £36.95 per week) and they will need to leave their asylum accommodation. Within this time a refugee needs to secure alternative accommodation and access mainstream support. In England and Wales, asylum accommodation is counted as a local connection. This limits the rights of refugees should they choose to move to another local authority and also places greater pressure on dispersal areas where consequently people choose to remain. Refugees who do move may become homeless because of the requirement that they have a 'local connection' with the area in which they are living in order to be entitled to homelessness services.

Refugees, particularly those with limited to no English language find it very difficult to navigate the associated systems and processes to establish their new lives during the 'move-on' period. This is exasperated by inadequate translation support which is only provided at the initial appointment at Job Centre Plus. Many refugees experience delays receiving their national insurance number (NINO) which impedes their ability to access mainstream benefits, despite there being no need to have a NINO to apply for benefits.

At the end of the move-on period many young refugee men become homeless as a result of not being considered a priority case by local authorities and are unable to afford private accommodation. Local authorities are encouraged to provide housing and support to refugees under the Welsh Government Code of Guidance on the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness. However, the approaches across Wales are inconsistent as to the classification of certain groups of refugees, particularly young male refugees, as non-priority which subsequently leads to homelessness. Despite the Welsh Government's

action within the delivery plan to promote access to the private rented sector to reduce homelessness if local authority housing is not available, the Immigration Act 2016 is likely to undermine this.

The Act empowers the UK government to extend the 'right to rent' scheme to Wales. Private landlords will be required to carry out 'right to rent' checks on potential tenants and introduces a financial penalty if they rent to anyone excluded from renting as a result of their immigration status. Despite the Welsh Government's action within the delivery plan to promote access to the private rented sector to reduce homelessness, the Immigration Act will likely result in an increase of homelessness amongst refused asylum seekers and those with status as landlords may be deterred from renting to ethnic minority tenants for fear of inadvertently renting to someone who does not have the correct status.

The varying application of the guidance by local authorities and the lack of actions to mitigate the negative impact of the Immigration Act will likely impede the achievement of the intended outcome of the plan to ensure refugees do not experience homelessness.

**Recommendation:** Welsh Government undertakes an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) of Right to Rent Checks in Wales and monitors the impact of this legislation.

**Recommendation:** Welsh Government works with private landlords to raise awareness of different types of migration status to mitigate any impacts of Right to Rent Checks in Wales.

### **Health, well-being and social care**

**3) Context:** Frequently our service users report that they are not offered interpretation support whilst accessing primary healthcare services which has impeded their ability to communicate their symptoms and understand the medical advice.

The delivery plan recognises the need to work with Public Health Wales to revise current guidance on language provision but despite sector advice that this action be incorporated under the section of physical health for all refugees and asylum seekers it was retained within the section for maternity and children. It is therefore confusing as to who exactly will be offered translation and who will not. All asylum seekers and refugees should be able to communicate their symptoms and medical history which, due to the nature of their arrival in the UK, is often inaccessible or missing. This would support diagnosis and treatment and reduce anxiety.

**Recommendation:** The Welsh Government to strengthen the guidance for health services to ensure that the availability of quality interpreting services is effectively communicated to target groups and consistently provided wherever required.

### **Education**

**4) Context:** Supported by Welsh Government funding, we provide contextualised basic to improver ESOL classes for refugee and asylum seeker women living in Newport alongside a free crèche facility to develop language skills and an understanding of living in Wales to improve integration. The demand for this type of tailored ESOL provision outstrips the availability, with classes constantly operating at capacity and waiting list a common occurrence.

Transport costs are a big barrier, especially for asylum seekers on very limited funds, impeding access to necessary ESOL classes, which, unlike many other community services, are often not available locally and require significant travel costs, especially for those on such a limited budget.

**Recommendation:** More formal provision at different levels (accredited and appropriate to qualifications and access to employment), starting at different times throughout the academic year, so that no asylum seeker need wait longer than a month for ESOL.

**Recommendation:** For the Welsh Government to increase the availability of provision which caters for gender based needs (e.g. childcare provision) and where necessary single-sex provision. This needs to include very low level community based provision with opportunities to practise in a social context.

Community based provision would allow for a more flexible and responsive approach to the needs of the learners.

**Recommendation:** The Welsh Government to work with local authorities to address barriers to access especially for those living outside urban areas, e.g. subsidised transport and more community based outreach courses in neighbourhoods where asylum seekers are dispersed.

### **Community Cohesion**

**5) Context:** Community cohesion can be severely hampered by forced family separation which reduces the coping mechanisms of the individuals affected and is compounded by a lack of social connectedness. We offer a means tested travel assistance programme, in partnership with the International Organisation for Migration, that can help pay the travel costs for the family members of refugees who remain overseas but have been granted a refugee family reunion visa to come to the UK.

Adult refugees have a legal right, under UK and international law, to be reunited with their children and spouse if they are still overseas, but since April 2013 legal aid funding has not been available for family reunion in England and Wales. Many refugees cannot afford to exercise their right to family reunion because they can't afford the legal representation needed. The UK Government withdrew legal aid for family reunification as it deemed it a straightforward process. However, our research report<sup>2</sup> shows that family reunion can be very complex and people face huge difficulties obtaining essential documentation, such as marriage certificates and birth certificates, when they have fled their home country. Without expert advice, difficult issues can stop or delay the reunion from progressing. This lack of legal support also leaves women and children, who are commonly the family members remaining overseas, extremely vulnerable, stranded in dangerous situations and at risk of exploitation and harm.

For many refugees, family reunion is another crisis point – when refugees are at a higher risk of destitution, homelessness or severe overcrowding at home<sup>iii</sup>. These risks place extra strain on families at a critical time, as they attempt to build a home together after what may be years of separation and disrupted family life.

#### **Case study:**

Mousa Al Sharki, his wife Rajaa and their four children lived in Aleppo, Syria. As fighting escalated they realised it was no longer safe and decided to leave. Aleppo has seen some of the conflict's most devastating bombing and fighting – often in residential areas.

Earlier this year, Mousa travelled to the UK, while a heavily pregnant Rajaa and their children went to Lebanon. It was here that she gave birth to baby Omar. Mousa sought refuge in the UK and managed to get a family reunion visa to bring his wife and children to Cardiff. But an error on baby Omar's passport meant it didn't match his birth certificate. He wasn't allowed to board the flight and Rajaa felt she was given no option by authorities but to go on ahead without him.

Distraught, Rajaa boarded the flight, leaving her eight-month-old son with her sister-in-law.

Omar's passport stated he was born in Damascus, rather than in Lebanon. That meant he couldn't re-join his family until the passport was changed. But the family couldn't afford to pay for the change. They turned to the British Red Cross for help.

We asked our colleagues in the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) tracing unit in Beirut to help. They made sure baby Omar got the exit visa he needed to come to the UK.

The Al Sharki family is now happily reunited and living in Wales.

**Recommendation:** The Welsh Government to look at ways to mitigate the adverse impacts of UK policy in Wales by enabling refugees to access the legal advice required for complex family reunion cases.

**Recommendation:** Often support focusses on the individual and the time between claiming asylum to receiving status. The Welsh Government Delivery Plan also needs to incorporate outcomes across departments, such as health, education and housing, that go beyond the 28 day move-on period with a wider focus on the well-being of the whole family by creating an integration pathway which adopts an early intervention and prevention response to family reunion.

**The Reunited Family Support Service** in Scotland is a service delivered by the British Red Cross. It is part of a wider refugee project that is run in partnership with Scottish Refugee Council and other organisations. It helps the families of refugees settle into Scotland after they have been reunited with their loved ones following the complex process of family reunion.

The service helps support and orientate people by providing practical help and assistance. It assists with applications for benefits, enrolling in English classes, accessing education, health and social care, and building social connections through lifeskills classes and group work activities.

It addresses social isolation, and provides people with opportunities to become active members of their communities and meet other families.

## **The pace and effectiveness of the Welsh Government approach to resettling refugees through the UK Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS)**

**6) Context:** By the end of June 2016, Local Authorities in Wales had resettled 112 refugees from Syria through the SVPRS. By the end October 2016, 17 out of 22 Local Authorities had welcomed Syrian refugees through the scheme, with all others preparing to do so by December 2016.

The Red Cross is working alongside local authorities and partners to support the families who have been and are being resettled in Wales. This has involved preparing for their arrival, welcoming the families and working with them individually to rebuild their lives and facilitate integration into their new homes and communities.

We have welcomed the proactive approach of local authorities to prepare for and support families from the point at which they arrive in the UK to ensure they are familiarised and settled into their new home and community.

However, this does contrast to the experience of people who have travelled independently of managed migration routes to seek sanctuary. They also face trauma which is compounded by the asylum system in the UK which is often subject to delays in decision-making, negative decisions resulting in prolonged appeals, and adverse implications of the 28 day move-on period once they receive their refugee status.

The bespoke support available to Syrian refugees arriving under SRVPS combined with the fast-tracking of administrative support is contributing to an emerging two-tier system of support for people in Wales at a vulnerable point in their lives. This has the potential to lead to tensions amongst Syrians and the wider asylum seeking and refugee communities.

**Recommendation:** Those areas taking part in the SVPRS provide an opportunity to explore best practice and learning from the first year of the project across Wales.

**Recommendation:** The Welsh Government to address the two-tier system by evaluating and replicating elements of the good practice delivered via SVPRS and extend to all people seeking asylum to ensure integrated, end-to-end support.

**Recommendation:** The Welsh Government should apply aspects of the support provided under the SRVPS to help refugee families integrate and settle in their new communities. Refugees need to



understand their rights, entitlements and responsibilities. They also need advocacy support to access complex services such as housing, benefits systems and schools.

**Recommendation:** Seek a commitment from Welsh Government to fund the refugee move on service on a long-term basis.

**Recommendation:** Requiring Welsh Government to extend the remit of the Taskforce and Operations Board to include all asylum seekers and refugees.

**Recommendation:** Ensuring Jobcentre Plus staff in Wales are required to increase their understanding, possibly through dedicated training, of the particular barriers faced by refugees in job seeking and supported on an ongoing basis to give specialist assistance to them.

**Recommendation:** Urging Welsh Government to vocalise the impacts of UK policy on people in Wales and actively seek to influence Home Office policy and practice:

- The Home Office should ensure that relevant documentation is received by refugees at the same time as they are informed of their status.
- Where an application has been made for welfare benefits within the 28 days move on period, the Home Office should not cease asylum support until the first payment has been made, including where that payment is a short-term benefit advance.
- The target time for processing an application for an Integration Loan must be less than the length of the move on period. When a newly recognised refugee has applied for an Integration Loan and has not yet received it, they should be allowed to remain in their asylum accommodation.
- UK Government guidance to banks should advise them what documents are issued to refugees and others with leave to remain in the country so that they are encouraged to recognise them as evidence of identity. Bank staff should also be familiarised with the types of ID refugees will carry.

**7) Context:** Welsh Government have been vocal about their support for the SVPRS in Wales. In line with our concerns about the development of a two-tier system for refugee welcome and support, we also have concerns that poor public understanding of the need for international refugee protection is being further eroded with an almost exclusive emphasis on SVPRS.

**Recommendation:** We would like to see Welsh Government demonstrate leadership and proactively promote positive public messages about all refugees being welcome in Wales, as well as the benefits of migration.

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i

<http://www.redcross.org.uk/~media/BritishRedCross/Documents/What%20we%20do/UK%20services/Greater%20Manchester%20destitution%20report.pdf>

ii

<http://www.redcross.org.uk/~media/BritishRedCross/Documents/About%20us/Not%20so%20straightforward%20refugee%20family%20reunion%20report%202015.pdf>

iii <http://www.redcross.org.uk/~media/BritishRedCross/Documents/About%20us/British%20Red%20Cross%20-%20Integration%20Experiences%20Report.pdf>

RAS 16

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Children Displaced Across Borders

Response from: Children Displaced Across Borders

**Response from the *Children Displaced Across Borders* project to the National Assembly for Wales' Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee's consultation on the pace and effectiveness of the Welsh Government approach to resettling refugees through the UK Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS); the effectiveness of the '[Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan](#)'; the support and advocacy available to unaccompanied asylum seeking children in Wales; and the role and effectiveness of the Welsh Government's Community Cohesion Delivery Plan in ensuring the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Welsh communities.**

<http://gov.wales/docs/dsjlg/publications/equality/160310-community-cohesion-plan-en.pdf>

## Introduction

This response to the Committee's consultation has been prepared drawing on insights from the project *Children Displaced Across Borders*. The project is an initiative of the Wales Observatory on Human Rights of Children and Young People (Swansea and Bangor Universities), the Centre for Migration Policy Research (Swansea University) and the Graduate College of Social Work, University of Houston.

A conference in Swansea and Houston **18 – 19 November 2016**.<sup>1</sup> This enabled people to come together from different disciplines, continents, organisations and groups to share knowledge and experience about displaced children and about responses to current trends and crises. It was a chance to learn from each other and to establish and strengthen links for research, education, advocacy and community engagement. While our focus was, and is, on displaced children, this necessarily involves people of all ages amongst their families, friends and communities and of course many issues apply to displaced people of all ages. We were delighted that **John Griffiths AM, the chair of the National Assembly for Wales' Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee**, was able to speak at our conference and to remind us of the Committee's and the Welsh Government's on-going work.

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<sup>1</sup> Supported by: a Bangor University ESRC Impact Acceleration Account (IAA) Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) Impact Grant; a Swansea University Research Grant Enabler (SURGE) Grant; the Swansea/Houston Strategic Partnership, and the Graduate College of Social Work, University of Houston.

A full list of contributors to date is at **Annex A**. The project partners are dedicated to growing and nurturing this informal 'international consortium for change'. The project partners are ready and keen to engage further with the Committee, including by providing a channel of communication, and supporting dialogue, with, our project participants and networks.

**This response has been compiled by Jane Williams, College of Law and Criminology, Swansea University, and represents the author's own distillation of discussions and key points raised at the conference. It does not necessarily reflect views held by all or any of the contributors to the conference nor has it been 'signed off' by them.**

### Themes emerging from our discussions

We learned that in the legal, geo-political and social environments of displacement and settlement, certain themes are ubiquitous and can be seen in the current crises, in different 'hotspots', diverse locations and in history. These are summarised in the **Table** below, with indicative sources of evidence from our work so far identified in footnotes. The fourth column of the table cross-refers to the foci of the Committee's current inquiry and suggests some questions the Committee might wish to ask the Welsh Government.

Table: themes, questions, possible solutions and WG scrutiny questions

Theme	Questions	Possible responses	Possible questions for the Committee to ask WG
<p><i>Perceptions and constructions affect responses<sup>2</sup></i></p> <p>There is a big gap between the media's narratives of displaced people, including children, and the empirical evidence.</p> <p>There is a general lack of awareness on refugees' and asylum seekers' countries of origin, and the root causes of their migration.</p> <p>False belief generated by misinformation sometimes produces popular support but often heightens popular fears.</p> <p>'Case studies' – involving telling and disseminating personal stories of trauma – help to get decision-makers' and popular sympathy and</p>	<p>Can anything be done to counter the narratives in so much of the media, which are often contradictory and adverse to people, including children, seeking sanctuary?</p> <p>Should we try to utilise 'sympathetic' images and narratives (e.g. girls and very young children, not adolescent boys)?</p> <p>Can we draw positive attention to displaced and settling people in other ways?</p>	<p>Encourage and support self-expression in a variety of forms including by supporting individual and group self-expression, community research projects and joint enterprise.<sup>4</sup></p> <p>Facilitate space and time for engagement within communities, organisations and all levels of government.</p> <p>Celebrate and actively promote outputs. One way to do that is to get large institutions and their media offices - including for example, NAW, WG, Welsh Universities, local authorities, museums and library services – to collaborate to generate press interest in these accounts, to counter-balance the 'problem</p>	<p><b>WG Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan</b> Action Area 5: Education; 7: Community Cohesion; 8: Arts Culture and Sport; <b>WG Community Cohesion Delivery Plan</b></p> <p><b>Questions for Welsh Government:</b> Will Welsh Government actively encourage and engage with other institutions in Wales to collect, disseminate, celebrate and promote positive and authentic narratives generated by and with displaced and settling people?</p> <p>Will Welsh Government consider how its powers relating to culture, sport and education might be exercised in ways conducive to</p>

<sup>2</sup> 'Press Constructions of the Migration Crisis in the UK, Spain, Italy, Sweden and Germany 2014-15', Dr Kerry Moore (Cardiff University School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies); Dr Rebecca Clifford's (Swansea University College of Arts and Humanities) comparisons with the narratives around the children who arrived in Britain post-war having survived the holocaust; examples from local experience (local authority, NGOs, case workers, individuals)

<sup>4</sup> Examples shared at CDAB Conference included Ethnic Youth Support Team's 'Chips, Curry and Cappuccino' <http://eyst.org.uk/ccc/>; Hafan Books' project which publishes creative writings by asylum seekers and refugees in Wales (inquiries to: [t.cheesman@swansea.ac.uk](mailto:t.cheesman@swansea.ac.uk); Tros Gynnal's 'Fair & Square' project; and the excellent practices supporting integration and community cohesion at Blaenymaes School, Swansea.

<p>support, but are often not good for their subjects, and can be dangerous.</p> <p>There are excellent materials and good practices which support better understanding and integration.<sup>3</sup></p>		<p>paradigms' of tragic child/heroic child/feral child/threat/invasion etc.</p>	<p>greater understanding and integration amongst displaced and settling people, host communities and the general public?</p>
<p><u>Advice and representation</u></p> <p>Applicable law and legal protection isn't applied in the same way to differently classified or differently placed or perceived individuals<sup>5</sup></p> <p>There is not enough support for case work and legal advice. Access to legal advice is much reduced following withdrawal of publicly funded representation from many stages of the asylum process.<sup>6</sup></p>	<p>How can we insist that the law applies equally and fairly to displaced people, including in the asylum system?</p> <p>How can we supply proper legal analysis in the absence of legal aid and lawyers for displaced children at all stages of process?</p> <p>How can we ensure that where the best interests requirement applies, it is properly understood as</p>	<p>Displaced people need lawyers! This includes children, especially if unaccompanied.</p> <p>Welsh Government cannot at present change availability of legal aid. But Welsh Government can encourage and support community advice services and could look at ways to incentivise the Welsh universities to develop clinical legal education which engages with these services, thereby supplementing sparse community</p>	<p><b>WG Refugee and Asylum Seekers Delivery Plan</b> Action Area 1: Housing and Advice Services</p> <p><b>Support and advocacy for UASC</b></p> <p><b>WG Delivery Plan Advice Services</b></p> <p><b>Intended Outcome:</b> Refugees and asylum seekers (including refused asylum seekers) to be able to access advice and organisations in mainstream services which are inclusive of refugees and asylum seekers. Actions include WG</p>

<sup>3</sup> Examples shared at the conference include the educational resource for 7 – 14 year olds, 'Education in a Diverse UK', by Jonathan Barnes and Alex Ntung (available from Migrant Help UK Education) and the practices and projects at Blaenymaes Primary School, Swansea (presented by Family Inclusion Manager, Helen Spencer)

<sup>5</sup> e.g. example of accounts of abuse routinely *not* believed by officials in asylum process when in other processes (e.g. criminal investigation, child protection) they would be taken seriously; lack of protection from poor housing standards by private contractors in the dispersal system.

<sup>6</sup> Accounts from practitioners and community support groups, including EYST (Ethnic Youth Support Team), Asylum Justice and legal practitioners

	<p>requiring consideration of <b>all</b> the rights of displaced children under the UNCRC, to which Welsh Ministers and those exercising functions under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 must have due regard?</p>	<p>resource and developing the skills of future lawyers in Wales.</p> <p>For children, consider a Guardian system – like in Scotland and as recommended by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.</p> <p>Training for social welfare workforce, local and Welsh Government officials and all legal professionals, including judges and trainee and practising lawyers in the field of immigration and asylum, should include specific focus on the right approach to best interests having regard to the ‘due regard’ obligation and to the interpretation set out in General Comment 14.<sup>7</sup> Welsh Government can ensure this is done for its own Ministers and officials, can use regulatory powers to ensure it is done for professional groups over whose qualification, training and practice WG exercises functions, and can exercise its duty under section 5 of the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 to promote knowledge and understanding of requirements of the UNCRC when engaging with asylum seekers and refugees.</p>	<p>supporting ‘open access through commissioning front line advice services, free advice services ...’ etc.</p> <p><b>Questions for WG:</b> Has this been done? How fast is it progressing? What is the take up and how is WG measuring reach and effectiveness?</p> <p>What more will Welsh Government do to promote a UNCRC-aware understanding of ‘best interests’?</p> <p>What will WG do to ensure urgent attention to the conditions of housing and accommodation for asylum seekers and in case of destitution, to support community groups which seek to connect potential hosts?</p> <p>Will Welsh Government give urgent consideration to introducing a Guardianship system for unaccompanied minors?</p>
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<sup>7</sup> CRC/C/GC/14 [http://www2.ohchr.org/English/bodies/crc/docs/GC/CRC\\_C\\_GC\\_14\\_ENG.pdf](http://www2.ohchr.org/English/bodies/crc/docs/GC/CRC_C_GC_14_ENG.pdf)

		<p>Academic researchers can conduct research in to the way in which best interests decisions are made by all officials including judges, and on the impact of the absence of legal representation. Lawyers and legal scholars in Wales can think creatively about the use of applicable law – human rights/basic common law/anti-discrimination law/other international provisions.</p>	
<p><u>'CHILDREN!!'</u></p> <p>Children are children: but are variously spoken of and portrayed: as victims, as agents, as positive, malign/migrants/threat, etc.</p> <p>Children, or certain categories of children, are absent from various discourses, including at key procedural stages<sup>8</sup></p>	<p>Are we scared of children? If so, why and how do we stop it?</p> <p>How can we ensure the information we have is the best and most robust it can be?</p> <p>How can we deliver a package of process and support to the person –the 'team around the child' approach?</p> <p>Who will take responsibility for ensuring that the child is seen</p>	<p>Welsh Government famously adopted the slogan 'Children First, Offenders Second' to signify its approach to juvenile justice. A similar approach is called for in relation to displaced children in Wales.</p>	<p><b>Support and advocacy for UASC</b></p> <p><b>Question for WG:</b> Will the Welsh Government clearly signify its commitment to 'Children First' to signify its approach to displaced children, whatever their status?</p>

<sup>8</sup> For example the absence of boys from much discourse on sexual exploitation (research presented by Jarrett David and Lucy Jordan); the absence of the child as child from discourse at several/all stages of the process of asylum; the 'tick box' approach to best interests determinations or consideration in the asylum process (research presented by Matej Blazek and James Esson (Loughborough University). See also the reference at fn. 2 above.



	holistically and responded to holistically – not in segments?		
<u>'Borders'</u>  There are many borders, lines, barriers: conceptual, physical, procedural, linguistic, cultural. Being displaced (in another country) is only one aspect of this.	How can we remove procedural barriers?  How can we help people to navigate these many borders?	Encourage dissemination of expert by experience (user or support person) knowledge to help people navigate the system: recruit these people to help, via support groups and networks  Investigate use of different modes of communication and dissemination of information.	<b>WG Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan</b> <b>Support and advocacy for UASC</b> Will Welsh Government take positive steps to help displaced people, particularly children, overcome the barriers that they face in accessing support and information?
<u>Accountability</u>  Several practitioners from law and social work reported anxious concerns about incidents of poor professional practice, especially but not limited to age assessment of young people.	How can we ensure rigorous enforcement of standards laid down in laws, regulations and adherence by practitioners to guidance?	Strengthen support for case work in the community (see ' <i>Advice and Representation</i> ' above)	<b>WG Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan</b> Question for WG: What more can be done to improve quality of professional practice regarding children in the asylum system?
<u>Resilience</u>  The experience of forced displacement generates multiple stresses requiring appropriate responses.  Recovery and resilience are aided by hearing, listening and engaging with the voices of those with lived	Is it enough to merely seek to enable displaced people suffering poor mental health related to displacement to access mainstream services?  What can we do to address the problem of interruption and	Education organisations, including higher education institutions in Wales, should respond to the educational needs of displaced people, to the maximum extent of their available resources (in the widest sense, including but not limited to financial support via bursaries etc.)	<b>Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan; Community Cohesion Delivery Plan; Support for UASC</b>  <b>Questions for WG:</b> Acknowledging the known stresses on mental health service provision in Wales, what will Welsh Government do to help

<p>experience and of those in current need.</p> <p>Lack of access to education and training is a major problem for people of all ages, but especially children and young people, in the asylum system</p> <p>Human connection is vital. Many very small and small local initiatives have emerged, in which the warmth of welcome and grass roots desire to help re-build lives and celebrate the diverse cultures and experiences brought by migration are very evident. But all such initiatives suffer from lack of resource and connectedness with each other.</p>	<p>stagnation of personal development and socio-economic engagement for people in the asylum process?</p> <p>What can we do to sustain and promote connectedness – between incomers and their communities of origin and between incomers and host communities?</p>	<p>Large established institutions-including Welsh and local governments should support networking and communications to help connect community groups.</p>	<p>ensure effective responses to the mental health needs of displaced people?</p> <p>Will WG consider what levers it could use to incentivise FE and HE institutions in Wales to offer more and a greater variety of education and training opportunities to respond to the needs of refugee and asylum seekers, especially young people?</p>
<p><u><i>The Critical Importance of Voice</i></u></p> <p>Failure to hear, listen and engage disempowers people – the opposite of what we say we want to achieve.</p>	<p>How can we enable the transformative effect of knowing the stories of displaced children on the host communities without</p>	<p>Give space and time (opportunity) for expression – and get the narratives and information to decision makers but also to the wider community (see</p>	<p><b>All aspects:</b></p> <p>Will Welsh Government promote training of professionals and service</p>

<p>Diverse methods of communication and expression are being used, with powerful effects.<sup>9</sup></p> <p>What displaced people want to tell us is (often) <b>not</b> about their own traumatic experiences.</p> <p>Support for interpretation and English language development is vital: community and informal methods play an important but as yet un-mapped part.<sup>10</sup></p>	<p>doing more harm or invading the privacy of the child?</p> <p>How can we protect children and not disempower them? (e.g. if they have been and are interpreters, by supporting rather than 'protecting' them by making them stop)</p>	<p>first point about perceptions and constructions)</p> <p>Encourage rights-respecting approaches in school – learn from Blaenymaes! (and others??)</p> <p>Training of interpreters to be culturally sensitive; respect and support for community interpreters.</p>	<p>providers to enable them better to engage with and deploy participative and rights-based methods to help identify and respond to need?</p> <p>Will Welsh Government engage with and support efforts to map and better understand the role of community interpreters, including children?</p>
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<sup>9</sup> For example, creative writing (fn. 2 above); Professor Marie Gillespie's (Open University) work using smart phones and playful participatory methods and performance to capture experiences and to communicate needs to service providers; Margie Cheesman's (Open University and University College London) work using digital technologies; insights from local experience from Cities of Sanctuary (Cardiff and Swansea) and several contributions by individuals and community groups with personal experience of settlement following displacement.

<sup>10</sup> Dr Tom Cheesman's (Swansea University) project on mapping community interpreters.

**Annex: Contributors to *Children Displaced Across Borders* Conference, 18 – 19 November, Swansea and Houston**

**Wales and EU:**

Jami Abramson, EYST (Ethnic Youth Support Team), Swansea and young people from the 'Chips, Curry and Cappuccino' project

Mona Bayoumi, Barrister at Civitas Chambers, Cardiff

Dr Matej Blazek and Dr James Esson, Loughborough University (Human Geography)

Emma Borland: College of Law and Criminology, Swansea University

Becc Buss and Bridget Ng'andu, Ruskin College and Social Work First

Hannah Bussicott, Business Development Manager for the Childrens Legal Centre (Wales)

Dr Anthony Charles, College of Law and Criminology, Swansea University

Margie Cheesman, University College, London

Dr Tom Cheesman, College of Arts and Humanities (Modern Languages), Swansea University

Rocio Cifuentes, Director of Ethnic Youth Support Team and the Think Project

Helen Clancy, City and County of Swansea

Dr Rebecca Clifford: College of Arts and Humanities Associate (History), Swansea University

Professor Elwen Evans QC: Head of the College of Law and Criminology, Swansea University

Lee Evans, Tros Gynnal and young people from the 'Fair & Square' project

Richard Eynon, Oasis, Cardiff

Professor Marie Gillespie, The Open University and Co-Director of the Centre for Research on Socio-Cultural Change

John Griffiths AM: Chair of the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee of the National Assembly for Wales

Anna Henry, Director of Policy at the Office of the Children's Commissioner for England.

Dr Tanya Faye Herring, Bangor University School of Law

Dr Simon Hoffman, College of Law and Criminology, Swansea University

Dr Alvaro Jarillo, International Law Department at the UNED University (Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia), Madrid

Shehla Khan, Manager of the Ethnic Youth Support Team, Swansea.

Mike Lewis, Director, Hawliau

Dr Tracey Maegusuku-Hewett, College of Human Health Sciences, Swansea University

Chloe Marong, Asylum Justice, Cardiff

Dr Yvonne McDermott Rees, School of Law, Bangor University.

Dr Kerry Moore, Cardiff University School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies

Ayrarun Nessa, Masters Student in Social Work, Swansea University and expert by experience

Alex Ntung: Head of Education, Inclusion and Participation at Migrant Help UK.

Siân Pearce: Solicitor at Asylum Justice and Consultant at Duncan Lewis.

Sam Parker: ESRC-funded PhD candidate in the School of Social Sciences at Cardiff University.

Helen Spencer, Family Inclusion Manager, Blaen y maes School, Swansea

Sophie Reid, Barnardo's Cymru

Sarah Richards, student (MA in International Child Studies).

Dr Sergei Shubin, Director of the Centre for Migration Policy Research (CAMPR), Swansea University

Professor Helen Stalford, Director of the European Children's Rights Unit, School of Law and Social Justice, University of Liverpool.

Professor Martin Stringer, Pro-Vice Chancellor (Academic), Swansea University

Professor Mike Sullivan, Vice President (Strategic Partnerships), Swansea University

Professor Fiona Verity, College of Human and Health Sciences at Swansea University

Eleri Williams, Displaced People in Action

Jane Williams, College of Law and Criminology, Swansea University

Sheona York, Kent Law Clinic

**International participants:** Wafa Abdin, Vice President for Immigration and Refugee Services at Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston; Felix Agbor Nkongho, Barrister and Executive Director of the Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa, Cameroon; Florence Lora Atim: Lawyer at the International Justice Mission in Gulu, Uganda; Berenice Hernandez Becerra: Evaluation of AVANCE-Houston's Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education Program (HMRE) serving disadvantaged Hispanics and African Americans in Houston and the surrounding community. Jodi Berger Cardoso: Assistant Professor, Graduate College of Social Work (GCSW), University of Houston Anne Chandler: Executive Director, Tahirih Justice Center's Houston office. Jarrett Davis: Independent social researcher and consultant on child and vulnerable person's rights; Katharine Gordon, Senior Staff Attorney, Young Centre Houston office; ATM Zakir Hossain: Executive director at, Jagrata Juba Shangha; Lucy Jordan: Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work and Social Administration at the University of Hong Kong; James T. Keel: President and Chief Executive Officer of The Children's Center, Inc. Melinda Lemke: Assistant Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy at the University at Buffalo; Ellen Marrus, Professor of Law at the University of Houston Law Center; Jacqueline Mercillott, Unaccompanied Children Program Coordinator at Refugee Services of Texas in Houston. Augustina Reyes: Professor, Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Houston; Liz Shields: Supervising Attorney, Kids In Needs of Defence (KIND), Houston; Andrew Trujillo: Social Responsibility Director, Post Release Services Program, YMCA International Services, Houston; Rosemary Vega: Clinical Supervising Attorney with the University of Houston Immigration Law Clinic; Shawna Warner: Senior Lecturer in the English Communication Department at Payap University in Chiang Mai

RAS 17

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Tai Pawb

Response from: Tai pawb



promoting equality in housing  
hybu cydraddoldeb ym maes tai

supported by



in consultation with Welsh Refugee Coalition

## Tai Pawb

**Response to the Inquiry into Refugees and Asylum Seekers  
in Wales conducted by**

**Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee's,  
National Assembly for Wales**

November 2016

For further information about this paper please contact:

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### **Who we are**

Tai Pawb (housing for all) is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. The organisation's mission is, "To promote equality and social justice in housing in Wales". It operates a membership system which is open to local authorities, registered social landlords, third (voluntary) sector organisations, other housing interests and individuals.

### **What we do**

Tai Pawb works closely with the Welsh Government and other key partners on national housing strategies and key working groups, to ensure that equality is an inherent consideration in national strategic development and implementation. The organisation also provides practical advice and assistance to its members on a range of equality and diversity issues in housing and related services.

### **Tai Pawb's vision is to be:**

The primary driver in the promotion of equality and diversity in housing, leading to the reduction of prejudice and disadvantage, as well as changing lives for the better.

A valued partner who supports housing providers and services to recognise, respect and respond appropriately to the diversity of housing needs and characteristics of people living in Wales, including those who are vulnerable and marginalised.

For further information visit: [www.taipawb.org](http://www.taipawb.org)

Charity registration no. 1110078

Company No. 5282554

## **1. Introduction**

1.1. This submission has been written in consultation with Welsh Refugee Coalition (comprising of 30 organisations representing, supporting and housing refugees and asylum seekers in Wales, of which Tai Pawb is a member). In preparation for this submission, we have also consulted Cymorth Cymru, the umbrella body for providers of homelessness, housing related support and social care services in Wales, who endorsed this document.

1.2. We welcome the opportunity to respond to this inquiry. The housing issues experienced by refugees and asylum seekers in Wales are substantial with many pockets of good practice from both public and third sector. We welcome the Welsh Government Refugees and Asylum Seekers Delivery plan and the government commitment to welcoming refugees and asylum seekers in Wales and supporting and enabling them to rebuild their lives and make a full contribution to society.

1.3 In May 2015 there were 2,355 people seeking asylum in Wales (source: Home Office) - under 0.1% of our population. This includes people from Eritrea, Sudan, Iraq, Iran and Syria, who have fled similar violence and persecution to those arriving under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS). They are waiting months or years for decisions on their applications, whilst living on a maximum of £36.95 per week each, with no right to work, and limited access to education.

## **2. Asylum accommodation**

2.1. Whilst we recognise that responsibility for asylum accommodation is not devolved to the Welsh Government, it is our view that some consideration should be given by the Welsh Government and Local Authorities as to their duties and role in ensuring accommodation is provided to appropriate standards under the Welsh law, especially in light of the duties related to safeguarding of children, young and vulnerable people.

2.2. Accommodation for asylum seekers in Wales is provided through a Home Office contract with Clearsprings, a large private landlord, through which it also runs the initial accommodation hostel in Cardiff. Organisations supporting people housed through this contract report that both the quality of housing and the services provided by Clearsprings are poor. There is no independent scrutiny on standards or independent means of complaint. This is a matter of grave concern.

2.3 Welsh Refugee Coalition, other refugee support organisations as well as civil servants working with asylum seekers through local authorities have raised issues relating to asylum housing within Wales at various levels for many years. Housing is a major problem for many

asylum seekers with reports that the housing provided is often inadequate, degrading, shameful and unhygienic, including some contravention to health and safety regulations.

2.4 Evidence provided by some organisations, included examples of a hotel in Cardiff where up to 3 women, including one with a 4month-old child, shared a room. Another example was given where a disabled father, mother and 22-year-old son all had to share a basement room.

2.5 Evidence previously collated by Coalition members demonstrates failings related to asylum housing in Wales including issues with:

- Standards of accommodation
- Size of accommodation and overcrowding
- Fixtures and fittings within the accommodation – including broken floors/ boilers not working/ inadequate furniture/ cookers not working
- Harassment and anti-social behaviour experienced in the accommodation from other tenants and members of staff
- A lack of maintenance and damp housing which can cause health issues
- Enforcing room sharing without appropriate assessment of risk, including children and vulnerable adults

2.6 It is not simply the physical condition of the properties provided by Clearsprings that are of concern for both service users and service providers. The standards of service provision are also a serious concern with a general feeling that the service provider has little appreciation of the difficulties faced by asylum seekers and their reasons for seeking asylum in the UK. Asylum accommodation is a source of worry and anxiety for people living there, aggravating pre-existing experiences of trauma, rather than providing a place of sanctuary.

2.7 Children and young people supported by members of the Welsh Refugee Coalition report problems with:

- Staff attitude
- Poor room conditions
- A lack of security and privacy due to no locks on doors allowing other people to walk in
- A lack of choice, quality and variety of food provided
- Issues around personal safety
- A lack of information on activities, organisations and the locality

2.8 There are clear issues around the appropriateness of Lynx House (an initial accommodation hostel) as accommodation for children and young people when the age assessment process is ongoing.

## 2.9 House sharing

Many organisations supporting asylum seekers report the need for more flexibility and sensitivity when allocating spaces in shared housing to avoid conflict. Conflict can occur for many reasons including cultural differences, mental health issues and issues related sexual orientation. In general, tenants in asylum accommodation are reluctant to complain for fear

of being seen as ‘trouble makers’, especially considering vulnerabilities related to the fact that their applications for asylum are ongoing. It would be helpful for example for housing providers to know if a client has a history of violence so that they can house them appropriately.

## 2.10 Scrutiny

We have serious concerns about the adequacy of scrutiny applicable to the COMPASS contracts and it is our strong recommendation that these are reviewed on a UK-wide basis to ensure that they are fit for purpose, meet the specific needs of those we have a public duty to protect and are good use of public money. The recent wristbands scandal (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-35397109> ) or red door scandal (<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/red-doors-of-asylum-seeker-housing-in-middlesbrough-repainted-range-of-colours-after-vandalism-and-a6834391.html> ) is symptomatic of the Home Office’s poor oversight of private contractors housing extremely vulnerable people.

2.11 It is unacceptable that asylum housing in Wales, particularly Initial Accommodation, is not subject to any independent scrutiny on standards and that provision is not subject to any independent means of complaint. Asylum-seekers are unlikely to complain because of a fear of retribution (from the Home Office or housing providers themselves). The result is that people are forced to endure housing which would not be of an acceptable standard for any other publicly funded accommodation. An independent advocacy service which enables refugees and asylum-seekers to raise issues of concern without fear of the consequences would be welcome.

## 2.12 Information provided

Very little in the way of useful local information or support is provided for asylum seekers in Home Office properties. People need very basic information about where they are living such as street maps, location of local post office, where is the nearest bus stop, location of supermarket/ food store and details of the Migrant Help line and local support services. This practical information preferably available in several languages would go a long way in reducing isolation and enabling better integration of people, some of whom will go on to become refugees moving towards settlement in Wales.

2.13 We would like to echo Welsh Refugee Coalition’s recommendation that the Welsh Government should prioritise finding ways of using its devolved powers to improve asylum accommodation in Wales. For example:

- Engage actively with the UK Visa & Immigration Asylum Accommodation and Support Transformation (AAST) stakeholder consultation on new contracts for asylum housing
- Insist that the quality of asylum housing is scrutinised by Welsh Government and/or local authorities
- Bring the next asylum accommodation contract into Wales, preferably on a non-profit basis, by supporting a bid from one or more Welsh housing associations, other third sector organisations or Local Authorities or negotiating with the Home Office to undertake the contracting process itself.

### 3. When refugee status has been granted

Tai Pawb and Shelter Cymru 2013 research report entitle Homelessness Amongst People from BME populations in Wales identified significant issues related to the so called ‘move on’ period. This relates to the period when a person seeking asylum is granted a refugee status and needs to vacate asylum accommodation. The report noted that “substantial evidence was obtained to highlight a specific issue regarding the accessibility of joined up move on support (...). The risk of homelessness for this population was evident at the point where a decision is made with regards to their immigration status and they were required to leave NASS accommodation. Stakeholders and service users told us that the reduced decision time, combined with the worsened economic circumstances, can affect a refugees ability to obtain suitable accommodation in time”. One participant of this research stated: *“I had to vacate NASS accommodation on the 6th of August, four days after being granted status. I was given a pillow and sent on my way. I was upset and very angry about it - where could I go? They gave me no time to try and sort out accommodation. (Servie user, Wrexham)”*.

The “move-on” period is currently 28 days from the moment a status is granted to the time when accommodation has to be vacated. There is a clear case for more partnership working and for Home Office to share information with Local Authorities as to the expected number of successful applications to enable the latter to prevent refugees from becoming homeless, especially in light of the new homelessness prevention duties introduced by the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. This approach would also help solve issues related to family reunion - refugees who are successful with family reunion expand the size of their family unit. Hence they experience renewed housing need some time after their original needs were met and there are reports that temporary accommodation is being overused in these cases.

The new prevention duties require local authorities to take reasonable steps to prevent homelessness by assisting someone who the authority considers is threatened with homelessness within 56 days. The move on period of 28 days represents a clear lack of parity of approach towards assisting those in general population compared to refugees. 28 days is not long enough to move out of Home Office housing considering vulnerabilities and awareness of service users, the time it takes for DWP to allocate NI/benefits, and the time the Local Authority needs to provide advice, assistance or housing. It is our view therefore that the move on period should be extended to at least 56 days.

Other approaches towards helping those threatened with homelessness should be promoted. For example, in Swansea, new refugees are often identified as part of a ‘vulnerable group’ and so placed on the priority housing list, but this is not so in other areas. We would like to echo recommendations made by the Welsh Refugee Coalition to the Welsh Government, including:

- consider issuing guidance to Local Authorities to class all new refugees as vulnerable (or strengthen the case for this) so that they are regarded as in priority need for housing;
- alternatively, provide adequate funding to local authorities and accompanying guidance to

enable newly recognised refugees who are not considered in priority housing need to benefit from rent deposit scheme

- consider increasing Supporting People funding for refugee assistance and ring-fencing that proportion of the fund for refugees
- ensure Local Authorities in dispersal areas have a dedicated housing resettlement officer; and provide additional training for existing staff.
- instigate a process for people successful with family reunion so that temporary housing is made available as soon as family arrive
- fund the refugee move on service on a long-term basis.
- ensure Jobcentre Plus staff in Wales are required to increase their understanding, possibly through dedicated training, of the particular barriers faced by refugees in job seeking and supported on an ongoing basis to give specialist assistance to them.

#### 4. Immigration Act 2016

Housing is also one area where the Immigration Act 2014 and the Immigration Act 2016 are likely to have an impact. The 2014 Act provides for 'Right to Rent Checks', making it compulsory for landlords to check the immigration status of all new adult tenants. We are concerned that these checks will lead to destitution and an increase in homelessness, putting more pressures and costs on already stretched local authorities.

The Immigration Act 2014, required landlords to carry out immigration status checks, and imposed financial penalties of up to £3000 on landlords who failed to check a potential tenant's 'Right to Rent'. The Immigration Act 2014 stipulates that these provisions apply to the whole of the UK but thus far they have only been brought into force in England.

The Immigration Act 2016 extends the scope of the 'Right to Rent' checks by creating new offences of renting accommodation to "disqualified" migrants (Section 39), giving landlords new powers to terminate tenancy agreements (Section 40) and obtain possession (Section 41) without judicial oversight.

Section 42 of the Immigration Act 2016 enables the Secretary of State "to make such provision" by regulations as s/he "considers appropriate for enabling any of the residential tenancies provisions to apply in relation to Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland." We know that it is the UK Government's intention to extend the 'Right to Rent' checks to Wales. During the committee stage of the earlier Immigration Bill 2015-2016, which put forth the 'Right to Rent' measures to Parliament, Tai Pawb submitted written evidence on the anticipated impact of the 'Right to Rent' provisions in Wales. (<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmpublic/immigration/memo/immigrationconsolidated.pdf>)

We raised concerns that the 'Right-to-rent' checks in Wales will lead to an increase in homelessness presentations and the number of No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) cases presented to social services.

A local authority's duties towards an individual presenting as destitute vary considerably according to their immigration status. Within Wales, the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, which came into effect in April 2016, introduced complex reforms to support available for destitute migrants. The eligibility rules for support under this Act are set

to change considerably due to the Immigration Act 2016's reforms to Section 95 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 and the introduction of the new Home Office regulated framework for local authority support to migrant families and children. These changes are expected to take effect in Spring 2017. The multitude of changes to support for destitute migrants are not yet well understood and present a high risk of misapplication due to their complexity.

Furthermore, of those whose properties are repossessed under Section 41, some undocumented migrants approaching local authorities for support would, with correct legal advice, otherwise be eligible for assistance, but are destitute as their irregular status has not been resolved. This includes victims of domestic violence, family members of someone living in the UK with leave to remain and some victims of trafficking.

Our submission on the impact of the provisions in Wales further noted that a lack of awareness about the Act's requirements amongst landlords in Wales, the majority of whom are small businesses with just one or two properties in their portfolio, meant that many Welsh landlords are poorly equipped to fulfil their tenancy management duties under the Act.

The threat of criminalisation places additional pressure on landlords, especially small-scale landlords who are private individuals, exacerbating their concerns of renting to anybody without clear immigration status or documentation and thus increasing unintended discrimination. Concerns have also been raised over the particular risk of discrimination for BME tenants. This was documented in the independent evaluation of the 'Right to Rent' checks pilot by the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI), who also noted that the policy has resulted in instances of discrimination against tenants who did have a 'Right to Rent' in the UK. This works against the measures in Housing (Wales) Act 2014 which allow Welsh local authorities to discharge the duty of homelessness prevention to the private rented sector.

A recent survey of 810 landlords in England by the Residential Landlords Association found that 43% of private landlords said that right to rent scheme has made them less likely to let to those without a UK passport (this represents roughly 17% of population). Two-thirds of those polled said they were worried they would make a mistake or be caught out by forged documents, and be unfairly fined. Only 13% said they had found a Home Office advice line helpful. Nearly two-thirds of private landlords said they were also less likely to rent to migrants who are legally in Britain, but only have permission to stay for a limited period, while 56% said they were less likely to rent to someone from outside Europe. ([https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/nov/14/british-citizens-without-passport-struggling-rent-property-immigration-checks?utm\\_source=Chartered%20Institute%20of%20Housing&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=7745664\\_News%20and%20views%3A%2016%20November%202016&utm\\_content=right%20to%20rent%20news%20and%20views%2016%20nov&dm\\_i=YRX,4M0LC,5SD9G0,H5E9P,1](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/nov/14/british-citizens-without-passport-struggling-rent-property-immigration-checks?utm_source=Chartered%20Institute%20of%20Housing&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=7745664_News%20and%20views%3A%2016%20November%202016&utm_content=right%20to%20rent%20news%20and%20views%2016%20nov&dm_i=YRX,4M0LC,5SD9G0,H5E9P,1)).

Further issues were identified with the provision of advice for landlords on the reforms, with a freedom of information request from a Member of Parliament revealing that only two people staff the Right to Rent helpline, leading to a call for additional resource and provision for Welsh language advice.

Cumulatively, these effects will drive a hidden rental market in which sub-standard accommodation is provided to those with no other housing options. This runs contrary to the Government's stated ambition to tackle rogue landlords and reduce overcrowding. There is also an unresolved conflict between the homelessness prevention duties and unprecedented new eviction powers for landlords created by the Immigration Act 2016, which could serve to reverse the great progress that Wales has made towards reducing homelessness.

We would recommend that the Welsh Government insists on developing and evaluating a pilot scheme in Wales, before legislation is brought in to extend the scheme in order to assess how we can prevent discrimination from occurring. The impact of potential new legislation should also be monitored so that mitigating action can take place should negative consequences be identified.

There is also a clear need to work with private landlords to raise awareness of different types of migration status to mitigate any impacts of Right to Rent Checks in Wales. We would also strongly recommend that there is a way for tenants to be able to report private landlords acting in a discriminatory way, perhaps through Rent Smart Wales.

## **5. Destitution and Homelessness**

There are increasing numbers of refused asylum seekers who are evicted from asylum accommodation and have no right to public housing, no access to public funds or benefits and no legal right to work. For example, The British Red Cross destitution services, which provide short term crisis support in the form of small amounts of cash, food, and clothing vouchers, in Newport and Cardiff provided financial support to a total of 1027 people in 2015 compared to 634 in 2014. A similar service exists in Swansea, where there is also the SHARE Tawe Voluntary Hosting Scheme, which provided 1700 bednights of accommodation to 17 destitute asylum seekers in 2015 and a similar amount in only the first nine months of 2016.

Such people may be detained and forcibly removed, but more often than not this does not happen and they are left destitute. There is an understanding that the decisions leading to this point are often not robust and open to challenge as evidenced by the fact that, given safe space and time to gather fresh evidence and find a good solicitor who will put in a 'fresh claim' for them, Asylum Seekers often succeed in proving their need for protection and are granted 'leave to remain' after all (8 of those accommodated by SHARE Tawe have done this since Jan 2015). In addition, increasing numbers of new refugees experience temporary destitution due to the inadequacy of the 28-day 'move-on' period, while destitution can also affect some vulnerable migrants including women with insecure immigration status experiencing domestic violence.

This desperate situation is the result of a failure of UK asylum and immigration policy to provide a safety net for some of the most vulnerable people in our society. The enforced destitution of vulnerable displaced people has no place in Wales and the prevention of destitution should be prioritised.

We welcome the possible inclusion of the organisation of voluntary support for destitute people seeking sanctuary in the Welsh Government's Inclusion Grant. However, there is also a need for direct financial assistance. In 2015, Northern Ireland introduced the OFMDFM (Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister) Crisis Fund, which is



intended to help minority ethnic individuals with no other means of support through emergency situations. The eligibility criteria include those who currently have no recourse to public funds, such as refused asylum seekers and other vulnerable migrants, as well as destitute refugees. A similar fund in Wales would prevent this form of avoidable destitution.

Welsh Government should consider expanding the eligibility criteria for the Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF) to include those who currently have no recourse to public funds (NRPF), such as refused asylum seekers and other vulnerable migrants including destitute refugees. To provide appropriate accountability there would need to be clear guidelines for the types and scale of assistance offered and expected short-term impact on individuals.

## **6. Local Housing Allowance Rates and SVPRS**

An issue that may require consideration is the impact of the introduction of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) maxima rates within social housing. We understand that the SVPRS will support full recoverable costs in the first year but not past that. LHA rates may be an issue in terms of people sustaining tenancies after the first year if costs are not fully recoverable. Further those who are single and under 35 will access the shared rate of the LHA rate under the changes to the LHA maxima. This is something that needs to be considered in terms of any single people in terms of support going forward post year 1 -5 of the SVPRS.

RAS 18

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Trefnu Cymunedol Cymru

Response from: Together Creating Communities



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## **National Assembly for Wales Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee**

### ***Inquiry on Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Wales***

Submission from TCC (Trefnu Cymunedol Cymru / Together Creating Communities).

#### **General**

As a member of the Welsh Refugee Coalition (WRC), TCC<sup>1</sup> supports the submission made by the WRC and wholeheartedly supports its recommendations. On the basis of its work in North East Wales, TCC would like to emphasise the following points, as raised in the WRC submission.

#### **Nation of Sanctuary**

TCC's work to date around refugee and asylum seeker support has been focused on working with local authorities in North East Wales to encourage sign-up to the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS) and working with one of the secondary schools within its membership to help them achieve School of Sanctuary status. TCC has also trained leaders from its member groups on communicating effectively and confidently with people around issues of immigration and asylum. TCC therefore encourages the Welsh Government to commit to the aspiration of Wales becoming a Nation of Sanctuary.

#### **Housing**

Working with Wrexham County Borough Council on the SVPRS showed that there are many considerations local authorities need to take into account when housing refugees and asylum seekers, particularly under the SVPRS. These include proximity to services and housing quality within the private rented sector. Conversations with our member groups who work directly with asylum seekers and refugees highlight concerns around the quality of housing provided to asylum seekers who qualify for support and whose claims are yet to be heard.



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TCC therefore particularly supports WRC's recommendation that the Welsh Government should act to offset discrimination against refugees in housing, for example through having a dedicated housing resettlement officer and working with private landlords to raise awareness of different types of migration status.

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TCC would like to thank the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee for the opportunity to comment on the inquiry.

Comments or questions on the response can be addressed to:

Sam Rex-Edwards, lead organiser.

[sam@tcc-wales.org.uk](mailto:sam@tcc-wales.org.uk)

<sup>1</sup> TCC (Trefnu Cymunedol Cymru / Together Creating Communities) has been community organising across North East Wales since 1995. TCC has 28 member groups (faith, schools and community organisations) and trains and works with community leaders to generate positive change.



Rhif cwmni / Company no: 4033853  
Rhif elusen / Charity number: 1086434

Tudalen y pecyn 123

RAS 19

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: UNISON Cymru

Response from: UNISON Cymru

## **UNISON Cymru/Wales response to the inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales**

- 1.1 In Wales we clearly have a duty to fulfil the humanitarian and legal responsibilities towards refugees and asylum seekers. The public sector needs the resources to support resettled refugees and asylum seekers.
- 1.2 UNISON is committed to the humanitarian support of refugees. UNISON believes that a caring and compassionate response to the refugee crisis requires Wales to receive and proactively assist more asylum seekers.

### **The pace and effectiveness of the Welsh Government approach to resettling refugees through the UK Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS)**

- 2.1 Whilst Welsh government has a strategic and coordinating role in supporting local authorities with the resettlement process the pace of the actual resettlement of families is dictated by the preparedness of local authorities. Some authorities have resettled very small number of refugees and we believe that more needs to be done. It is essential that local authorities have the necessary support mechanisms in place locally to give the families the best possible chance of a successful resettlement and welcome into our communities.
- 2.2 It is also important that the expectations of refugees are appropriately managed through effective communication and that there is consistency throughout services in Wales.

### **The effectiveness of the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan**

- 3.1 The eight points of the delivery plan appear to cover most elements of the refugees/asylum seeker needs and requirements. The plan

provides the foundation to assist councils with integration of families/individuals with the wider community.

- 3.2 The aspects of the plan that cover Gender Based Violence, Hate Crime, Modern Slavery and Community Cohesion are often areas that can be overlooked and if this plan is followed at a local level, it will assist in the protection of resettled families. It must be noted that statistics around hate crime, bullying and harassment of young people, trafficking, female genital mutilation, and violence against women have all increased.
- 3.3 Each local authority should appoint at least one refugee coordinator whose role addresses the issues outlined above. Welsh government should make funding available to enable councils to do this.
- 3.4 Additionally, there needs to be better cohesion and communication between agencies providing support for refugees.

### **The support and advocacy available to unaccompanied asylum seeking children in Wales**

- 4.1 Whilst there is a national operational delivery group assessing the support and advocacy requirement for unaccompanied children, progress has been limited with some of the barriers being lack of social worker capacity, mental health support provision and appropriate registered accommodation. We feel that a relaxation on the requirement to place 16/17 year old children in registered children's accommodation would allow local authorities a greater ability of securing supported accommodation which might be more appropriate at a local level.
- 4.2 There also needs to be greater access to interpreters, particularly for those from vulnerable groups.

### **The role and effectiveness of the Welsh Government's Community Cohesion Delivery Plan in ensuring the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Welsh communities**

- 5.1 The national delivery plan provides the basis for successful integration. To ensure this happens at a local level, the community cohesion officer plays a lead role in both the operational delivery of the resettlement process and beyond. For example, a link may be

maintained with the local police to help address any cohesion issues that may arise after resettlement.

- 5.2 Each local authority should appoint at least one refugee coordinator whose role addresses the issues outlined above. Welsh government should make funding available to enable councils to do this.
- 5.3 Additional resource will be required for public services to be able to respond to the additional demand put onto local services. Social services, mental health, pre and postnatal care are all areas that are likely to experience additional demands. The costs associated with translation will also be a factor needing consideration.
- 5.4 Public services are already suffering as a result of austerity. It is unreasonable to expect services to absorb more demand without additional finances to deliver – particularly as this would likely add to the negative public perception of refugees.
- 5.5 Furthermore, it is essential that our public sector workers are provided with the necessary knowledge and skills to enable them to respond to the needs of refugees with confidence.
- 5.6 There is currently a lack of funded English provision available to refugees. Refugees who have found safety in the UK want to rebuild their lives and be part of their new communities. They have a huge obstacle to restarting their lives, because there aren't enough English classes.
- 5.7 The barriers to integration into the community can be even higher for women as classes with childcare facilities are rare. This means they are at greater risk of becoming further isolated at home, rather than being able to get involved in their new communities and make friends.
- 5.8 ESOL classes should be publically funded and provided by the public sector, including through further education institutions across Wales.
- 5.9 In addition to English language, we need to ensure that refugees who settle in Wales are provided with the opportunity to develop the necessary skills to enable them to enter the workplace, including CV writing, work experience, and interview practice.
- 5.10 More widely, work needs to be undertaken to raise awareness and understanding within communities about the refugee crisis and the local impact. Public sector workers, and the public more widely, should be able to access the necessary support to enable people to

confidently challenge discriminatory behaviour and respond to prejudice.

- 5.11 UNISON has recently drawn attention to the dramatic reduction in spending on youth services in Wales. Since 2012 £6.1 million has been removed from these services, causing 360 jobs to be lost and more than 100 youth centre closures. It is obvious that young refugees and community cohesion would benefit from strong and sustainable youth services and we repeat our call for better funding here.





RAS 20

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Plant yng Nghymru

Response from: Children in Wales

## Consultation Response - Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee Inquiry into Refugee and Asylum Seekers in Wales

Children in Wales<sup>1</sup> is the national umbrella organisation in Wales for children and young people's issues, bringing organisations and individuals from all disciplines and sectors together. One of our core aims is to make the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) a reality in Wales. Children in Wales campaigns for sustainable quality services for all children and young people, with special attention for children in need and works to ensure children and young people have a voice in issues that affect them.

Children in Wales successfully developed and ran the Big Lottery Funded Including Families Project, producing resources to support professionals and community members - <http://www.includingfamilies.org.uk/en/> - and currently delivers training for professionals from a range of sectors on Cultural Awareness in Safeguarding Children - <http://www.childreninwales.org.uk/our-training/> . Children in Wales are inaugural members of the Welsh Refugee Coalition.

### 1. Overarching Comments

1.1 In our response to the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee's call for priorities<sup>2</sup>, we expressed support for the Committee to conduct an inquiry into 'refugee and asylum seekers in Wales' during the Fifth Assembly Term. We are delighted that the Committee has recognised the need for such an inquiry, and for prioritising an inquiry early in the Assembly Term.

#### **Asylum seeker and refugee children are children first and foremost.**

1.2 Unaccompanied children, separated from parents and relatives, remain amongst the most vulnerable groups of children in Wales, often at greater risk of exploitation, abuse, gender based violence and trafficking. The safeguarding, non-discrimination and best interest of the child principles enshrined in the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child** (UNCRC) and applied through legislation is applicable to all children and young people, including refugee and asylum seeking children, regardless of their country of birth or their current circumstances. Governments have an obligation to protect all children from violence and exploitation, to the maximum extent possible, which would jeopardize a child's right to life, survival and development.

1.3 The UN CRC General Comment No 6 (2005)<sup>3</sup> on the 'Treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin' provides timely guidance to support Governments in meeting their obligations under the UNCRC and to draw attention to the particularly vulnerable situation of unaccompanied and separated children.

1.4 The **United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child** in June 2016 issued a series of Recommendations (Concluding Observations)<sup>4</sup> in respect of asylum seeking, refugee and migrant children (pp20-21). These

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<sup>1</sup> For further information on the work of Children in Wales, please see [www.childreninwales.org.uk](http://www.childreninwales.org.uk) and [www.youngwales.wales](http://www.youngwales.wales)

<sup>2</sup> <http://senedd.assembly.wales/documents/s52695/SP%202033%20-%20Children%20in%20Wales.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/GC6.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://gov.wales/docs/ds/jlg/publications/cyp/160727-final-concluding-observations-2016-en.pdf>

recommendations reflected a number of concerns put forward by non-government coalitions<sup>5</sup> as part of the monitoring process, and included the

- lack of reliable data on asylum seeking children
- lack of access to independent guardians
- problematic nature of the 'age assessment' process
- the lack of access to basic services, and the
- high risk of destitution.

1.5 Whilst it is accepted that immigration policy itself is a reserved matter, the provision of the majority of services that refugee and asylum seeker children receive in Wales is the responsibility of the Welsh Government and other public bodies. There are a number of significant barriers to inclusion that exist here in Wales that we would wish to draw the Committee's attention to in line with the Committee's areas of inquiry.

## **2. The Support & Advocacy available to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children**

### The Call for Change

2.1 The Welsh Government's vision for refugee inclusion was set out in the Refugee Inclusion Strategy which was published in 2008<sup>6</sup>. The Strategy, and subsequent action plan, recognised the need for a specialist independent service for separated children and committed to work with partners to develop such a service. The need for a 'specialist' service was underpinned by a recognition that supporting and speaking up for asylum seeking children going through the asylum process was a task which required expert and specialist knowledge and understanding

2.2 This recognition followed the comprehensive and ground breaking report 'Uncertain Futures' in 2005<sup>7</sup>, which advised Welsh Government to consider how best it can provide accessible, and well-funded independent advocacy support for UASC in Wales, in addition to establishing a specialist system of guardianship for separated children.

The report, published by Save the Children (Wales), recommended that:

**'The Welsh Assembly Government....should consider how best it can ensure the provision and availability of accessible, specialist and well-funded independent advocacy support for separated (unaccompanied) children living in Wales (rec 4.2, pp 70)**

**'The Welsh Assembly Government should also explore the possibility of establishing a system of guardianship to ensure that the best interest principle is maintained and that separated children are supported through the asylum process' (rec 4.3, pp 70)**

2.3 This report was significant in that it also recognised the clear distinction between '**advocacy**' and the role of an 'advocate', to that of a '**guardian**' or 'system of guardianship'. The role of an independent professional advocate is issue based and helps an individual to speak up for themselves, to access their rights and entitlements and get something stopped, started or changed<sup>8</sup>. Advocates will ensure that an individual's views are accurately conveyed irrespective of the views of the advocate or others as to what is in their best interests<sup>9</sup>. The role of a Guardian would include providing advice, support, assistance and information, working within the guiding principles of what is in the best interest of the child.

2.4 The Welsh Government's initial response and commitment to develop a specialist service was welcomed, and some initial time limited funding was provided to the Welsh Refugee Council to appoint a part-time Child Advocacy Officer (a post which has long since come to an end)

2.5 The Refugee Inclusion Strategy and action plan made a commitment to put in place sustainable advocacy provision to support UASC 0-25, which we were advised, through the bi-annual update in June 2013, was 'on schedule'. The consultation document released in 2015 for the current Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan, noted that the '**Welsh Government will explore the need for a Guardianship model for Wales**'. However, the final revised Delivery Plan<sup>10</sup> issued in March 2016 makes no reference to any 'exploration' or commitment to an independent specialist service for vulnerable and at risk separated asylum seeking children.

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<sup>5</sup> All documents submitted to the UN Committee can be accessed via the website of the UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner - [http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=987&Lang=en](http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=987&Lang=en)

<sup>6</sup> <http://gov.wales/topics/people-and-communities/communities/communitycohesion/publications/refugeeinclusion/?lang=en>

<sup>7</sup> Summary Report - [https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/docs/uncertain\\_futures\\_summary\\_1.pdf](https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/docs/uncertain_futures_summary_1.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Welsh Assembly Government (2009) A Guide to the Model for Delivering Advocacy Services to Children and Young People <http://prp.gov.wales/docs/prp/socialcare/sc130724modelfordeliveringadvocacyservices.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Welsh Government: Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 Part 10 Code of Practice (Advocacy) <http://gov.wales/docs/dhss/publications/151218part10en.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <http://gov.wales/docs/dsjlg/publications/equality/160316-refugee-asylum-seeker-delivery-plan-en.pdf>

2.6 On the 3rd June 2016, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child issued a new set of Concluding Observations to the UK and devolved Governments setting out ways in which they can better meet their obligations to children and young people in respect of implementing their rights. The UN Committee were concerned to learn that

***'Not all unaccompanied children have access to an independent guardian or legal advice in the course of immigration and asylum procedures'.***

They recommended that all Governments:

***'Establish statutory independent guardians for all unaccompanied and separated children throughout the state party'*** [Section I, 76(b)]<sup>11</sup>

2.7 Worryingly, despite almost identical recommendations being made by the UN Committee in their earlier Concluding Observations of **2002** and **2008**, Wales still remains without a statutory specialist national independent guardianship service for some of the most vulnerable children and young people.

#### Current provision (advocacy)

2.8 UASC under local authority care are entitled to care and support as outlined in the Children Act 1989, now restated in the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act, and entitled to advocacy alongside other eligible children and young people subject to care and support arrangements. Statutory advocacy services for children and young people in Wales are provided by NYAS Cymru<sup>12</sup> and Tros Gynnal Plant<sup>13</sup> through commissioning arrangements with local authorities.

2.9 Both organisations provide advocacy support for UASC who have been accepted as 'children' by the local authority and eligible as having care and support status. For age disputed 'young people' however, there are gaps in the provision of advocacy services. Some services often play an important role within the age assessment process, despite the additional costs to consider, such as interpreters, and work with young people on a range of issues such as education, housing and legal matters including asylum claims, reunification with family and representation at LAC reviews.

2.10 It is recognised that there is a need for expert advice and training to support UASC which some current advocacy services and practitioners do not routinely have access to. More training should be made routinely available, and this training should be made available in Wales and tailored to the devolved policy context, to enable existing advocacy services and practitioners to access it.

#### The Case for Change (towards a complementary Guardianship Model)

2.11 Due to the circumstances within their country of origin and their often traumatic journey to Wales, asylum seeking children seeking a place of safety present with specific challenges on their arrival, which include identifiable significant physical, mental and emotional health needs<sup>14</sup>. Children who are separated from their parents are at heightened risk of sexual exploitation and they will require extra levels of care and protection due to trauma. They often face periods of uncertainty, isolation with little or no knowledge of their rights and entitlements.

2.12 Unaccompanied children in Wales have additional needs which can only be delivered by specialist intervention which would help to ensure that they receive accurate information, advice and support, and are properly safeguarded and not at risk of exploitation, trafficking or destitution.

**2.13 It is evident that separated children cannot be treated as though their needs and interests are the same as other children who are entitled to care and support arrangements under Part 10 of the Social Services and Well Being (Wales) Act 2014.**

2.14 The NAFW Children and Young People Committee, in their 2008 inquiry into 'Advocacy Services for Children and Young People in Wales' recognised this and considered there to be a need for **'commissioning (of) specialist advocacy services, for low incidence groups, such as children and young people seeking asylum, in addition to generic advocacy services'**

2.15 Until March 2016, Tros Gynnal Plant, ran the Fair and Square Project to create sustainable change in the approach to work with refugee and asylum seeking children and young people up to age 25<sup>15</sup>. The project, funded by the Big Lottery, served the Cardiff and Newport areas, and provided an independent service for a range of issues including helping asylum seeking young people to access legal services, help with age disputes, welfare advice,

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<sup>11</sup> <http://gov.wales/docs/dsjlg/publications/cyp/160727-final-concluding-observations-2016-en.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.nyas.net/nyas-cymru>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.trosgynnal.org.uk/>

<sup>14</sup> <http://welshrefugeecouncil.org.uk/resources/research/young-lives-in-limbo>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.trosgynnal.org.uk/page.php?Plv=2&P1=2&P2=19&P3=&id=>

education and training, to challenge decisions and help in understanding the asylum process. The End of Project Report considered that through continued individual and collective advocacy and engagement, children had been able to develop their confidence, self-esteem and an understanding of their rights and entitlement as asylum seeking young people. The service helped provide asylum seeking children with an understanding of the systems, broke down barriers and empowered them to represent themselves. Subsequently, children were able to highlight issues important to them to key decision-makers and instigate change.

To our knowledge, there are no longer any services akin to this in Wales.

2.16 Effective guardianship systems are key in helping to prevent abuse, neglect and exploitation and in protecting child victims of trafficking. Separated children should therefore have access to specialist guardians who can work with them as a key part of their journey to ensure they have fair access to the asylum process and are linked in with other appropriate services.

This has been recognised in **Scotland**, and has been acted upon.

2.17 The Scottish Guardianship Service<sup>16</sup>, is an award winning service run by the Scottish Refugee Council and Aberlour children charity, working with children and young people who arrive in Scotland unaccompanied and separated from their families<sup>17</sup>. Each child is allocated a 'Guardian' who provides dedicated and specialist help and support, empowering them to navigate their way through the asylum process. A guardian will speak up for the child, help them to address their immediate needs and situation, and help them make informed decisions about their future. The service was part funded by the Scottish Government and began as an initial 30 month pilot and subject to independent evaluation<sup>18</sup>. In 2015, it has been reported that the service was placed into legislation (Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act with a duty placed on public bodies to refer to the scheme<sup>19</sup>.

2.18 The Scottish Guardianship scheme is in place to help and support local authorities with the specific issues that separated children present with. If a similar service was adopted in Wales, such a service would play an important **complimentary role** to the more holistic functions currently provided by or commissioned by local authorities and other public bodies. The service should be at a pan-Wales level to help ensure there is consistency of provision and would help ensure that any children dispersed to other parts of Wales have continuity of service and engagement. Finally, whilst we recognise the problematic nature of accessing reliable data on asylum seeking children and age-disputed children, there is a consensus that the numbers will be relatively small. The cost therefore of meeting the UN Committee's recommendation and in providing an effective independent guardianship service to improve the outcomes for all unaccompanied asylum seeking children throughout Wales should not be too great.

**Our Recommendation:** Children in Wales call upon the Welsh Government to urgently implement the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recommendation and provide dedicated and sufficient funding which secures a specialist independent guardianship service with statutory guardians provided for all asylum seeking children and young people on a pan-Wales basis.

**Our Recommendation:** Once established, for all unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people to be automatically referred to the specialist independent guardianship service at the point of arrival in Wales, or as early as possible upon becoming known.

### 3. **The Pace & Effectiveness of the Welsh Government Approach to Resettling Refugees Through the UK Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS)**

3.1 We welcome the commitment to resettle Syrian refugees in Wales through the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme, and the progress made to date in resettling 112 refugees by the end of June 2016. We understand that by October 2016, 17 local authorities had resettled Syrian refugees through the scheme. Children in Wales have been an active member of the Children's Task and Finish Group, supporting and providing advice on the effective integration of children and their families.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/People/Young-People/protecting/lac/guardianship>

<sup>17</sup> [http://www.aberlour.org.uk/news/596\\_herald\\_society\\_award\\_for\\_aberlours\\_scottish\\_guardianship\\_service](http://www.aberlour.org.uk/news/596_herald_society_award_for_aberlours_scottish_guardianship_service)

<sup>18</sup> The pilot phase ended on 31 March 2013 and was evaluated independently by Profs Ravi Kohli and Heaven Crawley, both highly respected in the field of immigration issues surrounding children

<sup>19</sup> [http://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/how\\_we\\_can\\_help/advice\\_services/the\\_scottish\\_guardianship\\_service](http://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/how_we_can_help/advice_services/the_scottish_guardianship_service)

3.2 Whilst we welcome the leadership shown by Welsh Government and local authorities in Wales in responding to change, these developments will have significant implications for our communities and services, including health, education, housing, social services as well as in the successful delivery of overarching policy frameworks such as community cohesion. It is essential that the infrastructure is in place to aid integration given the expectation that Syrian refugees will be dispersed across all 22 local authorities, some of whom will be better placed and have more experience than others of resettling new arrivals. Earlier research has highlighted significant differences in knowledge and understanding between practitioners in dispersal and non-dispersal areas<sup>20</sup>. Long term planning and community cohesion has to be suitably considered and properly managed as more refugees arrive and are dispersed throughout Wales. Integration has to work effectively for the receiving community as well as for the arriving children, young people and their families.

3.3 Successful integration demands that new arrivals receive the welcome, support and quality services they deserve and are entitled to, which will enable them to be safe and to flourish, and to have their human rights secured. Local authorities and public bodies will need sufficient time to plan and prepare for new arrivals, to ensure that children and their families are properly safeguarded and receive access to essential health, housing, education, support and advice services to aid the transition and further the journey towards positive integration. There is also a need to ensure that those working in the public sector, including frontline professionals such as teachers, are properly equipped and have a full understanding of the care and protection issues as they relate to asylum seeking children and are able to access training and other professional development opportunities.

3.4 We recognise the investment and support that is being made available to new arrivals through the SVPRS and would welcome the learning from this response to be shared so as to inform any future crises. This should also include on-going engagement with new arrivals (including children), to help capture their thoughts and experiences of the process, as part of an inclusive participatory framework.

'Key to achieving inclusion is the participation of refugees in decisions about services and their delivery'<sup>21</sup>

3.5 We do however recognise the concerns raised by the professional community in respect of the contrast between the response to this group of arrivals to that of other asylum seeking children and families travelling independently, which is believed to be creating a 'two-tier system'. Asylum seeking children and families experience a number of barriers, often reliant on third and community sector projects who work tirelessly in supporting very vulnerable and traumatised families with legal, welfare, accommodation, health and financial matters. Separated and unaccompanied children seeking asylum are especially vulnerable and at risk of exploitation, abuse and trafficking. The Committee may wish to seek commitments from the Welsh Government to respond to the claims that a 'two-tier system' has emerged and seek assurances that all children and families seeking asylum, regardless of their country of origin, have access to advice, support and essential services, and for this to be available in all parts of Wales.

#### **4. The Effectiveness of the Refugee & Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan.**

4.1 Children in Wales welcomed the opportunity to inform and respond to the consultation on the revised Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan in December 2015 and its subsequent release in March 2016. The timing of this consultation was unfortunate given its publication on the same day as the First Minister's Summit in response to the refugee crisis hitting Europe. We called for the Delivery Plan to take account of this and to ensure that there was reference to the actions which Welsh Government and public bodies as partners would be delivering as a consequence of these unprecedented developments. The SVPRS and the actions undertaken were not included in the published Delivery Plan, thus reinforcing a sense of a two-tier response to supporting and integrating Syrian refugees from that of other refugees and asylum seekers.

4.2 We expressed hope that the Delivery Plan, if effectively implemented and supported by adequate resources with sufficient capacity within existing services at an operational level led to an improvement in the lives of asylum seekers and refugees throughout Wales. However, we are yet to be reassured that there is indeed sufficient capacity and resources in place at a national level to ensure that the Plan is delivered equitably and consistently across Wales to a standard that we would all expect and which is required. Whilst we welcome the Welsh Government proposed budget for priorities they would wish to see undertaken through the Refugee, Asylum Seeker & Migrant component of the Inclusion Fund from April 2017, the sufficiency of funding being made available to deliver the objectives, continue to cause some concern amongst the professional community. We are unclear if a Child Rights Impact Assessment has been undertaken on this budget in line with existing duties placed on Ministers<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> Save the Children, Agenda for Action

<http://www.wsmg.org.uk/documents/wsmg/Asylum%20Seeking%20Children/Reports/Agenda%20for%20Action.eng.Dec.08.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Ministerial Forward - <http://gov.wales/dsjlg/publications/communityregendevlop/refugeeinclusionstrategy/strategye.pdf?lang=en>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/mwa/2011/2/contents>

4.3 Whilst there are some excellent services being delivered locally by dedicated, passionate and specialist individuals and agencies, the picture across Wales is patchy with there being a danger that vulnerable groups will continue to fall through gaps in service provision or become wholly reliant on grassroots services where demand outstrips supply. The financial climate suggests that Wales may well continue to lose many vital face to face services in the immediate future. There is a requirement to meet the UN Committee's recommendation that Welsh Government 'provide sufficient support to migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking children to access basic services' [(f)]<sup>23</sup>, and that there is fair and equitable access to services<sup>24</sup>.

4.4 We noted the absence of any performance measures, milestones or timescales for completion of actions and suggested that an Outcome Measurement Framework was produced alongside Performance Indicators to help provide the necessary evidence base for Welsh Government to be able to determine if lives and well-being outcomes have improved and the impact this Plan has had in achieving this. Unlike previous action plans and recent Welsh Government delivery plans in other policy areas, there is no end date for the Plan or commitment to report progress on an annual or bi-annual basis. We are unclear how the Plan is being monitored and actions evaluated. Whilst there is reference in the Ministerial Forward to the Well-Being of Future Generations Act, it is not apparent how the actions in the Plan map across to the wellbeing goals of the Act.

4.5 Our preference would be for the Delivery Plan to be reviewed and brought in line with more recent legislation and refreshed to take account of the points made above and to ensure full compliance with the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child Concluding Observations. The revised Delivery Plan should be forward looking and set out a programme of action for the next 5 years, with clear actions, timescales, outcomes, monitoring framework and appropriately resourced.

#### Other issues to raise

- There is a lack of reliable data on separated children (UASC and age-disputed children) living in Wales.
- There is a lack of access to legal support from solicitors and legal representation in respect of the age assessment process for children and young people. There are also calls for a thorough review of the age assessment process in Wales, which leads to actions and positive outcomes for young people going through the process.
- The All Wales Child Protection Procedures are presently being reviewed to take account of recent legislative changes and to ensure they are aligned to the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act. There will be a requirement for Welsh Government to ensure that as part of the review, that Safeguarding Childrens Boards include a refresh of the All Wales Protocol on Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.
- Whilst asylum accommodation is a non-devolved matter, concerns have previously and repeatedly been raised, most recently by MPs, in respect of the quality and standard of initial accommodation services. What is the role of Welsh Government and local authorities in helping to ensure that new arrivals are safe, secure and living in accommodation which is in line with expected housing quality standards?
- Good access to free, quality ESOL provision in aiding the learning of a new language is essential to drive forward integration, progression and help improve education and employability outcomes. We are aware that there continues to be barriers which can frustrate take up of provision where this exists, including transport and childcare availability. We need to ensure that existing provision is in the right place, at the right time and is sufficient to meet current and future need. Given the importance of ESOL to enable asylum seekers and refugees to access FE, employment or training, this should continue to be a priority area for Welsh Government
- Mental health support, tailored for the specific challenges and additional needs often presented by asylum seeking children, has to be in place as a matter of priority across all parts of Wales. The Welsh Government has recently issued their 'Together for Mental Health Delivery Plan 2016-19', and significant attention is being invested in this policy area which children and young people, including those we work with through our Young Wales project, repeatedly identify as a key priority. It has been reported that waiting lists are too long, and access to more specialist provision being particularly problematic.
- Echoing the concerns raised in the response of the Wales Refugee Coalition, we would wish the Committee to consider the implications and potential impact of the **Immigration Act 2016** in Wales.

#### **5. The Role & Effectiveness of the Welsh Government's Community Cohesion Delivery Plan in ensuring the Integration of Refugees & Asylum Seekers in Welsh communities.**

<sup>23</sup> <http://gov.wales/docs/dsjlg/publications/cyp/160727-final-concluding-observations-2016-en.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.wsmg.org.uk/documents/wsmg/Asylum%20Seekers/Manifesto%20eng.pdf>

5.1 Further consideration should be given to how Wales responds to incidences of hate crime as they impact on children, young people and their families in Wales. We were particularly concerned to learn from our member organisations of a rise in incidences of hate crime on children and young people following the outcome of the EU Referendum in June this year. Solutions should focus on helping people to recognise and report hate crime, ensuring that all professionals, particularly teachers and other school based staff who work with vulnerable children, including asylum seekers and refugees, have the necessary knowledge and tools to properly listen, hear and respond appropriately, taking into account the wishes and feelings of the child and their right to be safeguarded and protected.

Hate crime is a crime and should always be recognised as such.

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**‘Breaking the cycle of disadvantage and inequality will continue to underpin everything we do, so that the way we govern has the most effective impact on making society fairer and more inclusive’** Welsh Government – November 2016 – Taking Wales Forward (2.7)

Children in Wales would wish to acknowledge the contribution of NYAS Cymru and Tros Gynnal Plant in informing our response to existing provision of advocacy services for UASC.

We would also wish to draw the Committee’s attention to the submission of the **Welsh Refugee Coalition**.

RAS 21

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: City of Sanctuary

Response from: City of Sanctuary



# City of Sanctuary

## **Senedd Committee on Equality, Local Government and Communities - Inquiry on Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Wales**

**Submission from City of Sanctuary (Joint submission from City of Sanctuary UK & Ireland<sup>1</sup> and Wales Cities of Sanctuary project<sup>2</sup>)** – compiled by Siân Summers-Rees, Chief Officer, City of Sanctuary, Tel: 07376 075303, [sian@uk.cityofsanctuary.org](mailto:sian@uk.cityofsanctuary.org)

### **1.0 Introduction**

1.1 This joint submission includes information derived from consultation with people seeking sanctuary and City of Sanctuary groups across Wales. It also relies heavily on the experience of staff who have worked in the refugee sector for a number of years. The response mainly addresses how the Welsh Government (WG) can support our vision of providing a welcome and building a culture of hospitality for people seeking sanctuary from violence or persecution. Additionally, we are part of the Welsh Refugee Coalition and wholeheartedly support the recommendations made within their submission.

### **2.0 About City of Sanctuary**

2.1 City of Sanctuary is a grassroots movement dedicated to [building a culture of hospitality](#) and welcome, especially for people seeking sanctuary from war and persecution. Our growing network of over 80 groups includes [towns, cities and rural areas across the UK](#) and Ireland. They bring local people together with refugees with the aim that, wherever refugees go, they should feel safe and valued, find people who welcome them and understand their situation, and develop a sense of belonging. They mobilise support from local individuals, groups and organisations, offering the chance to meet and work together with refugees, including volunteering to provide practical help, and supporting improvements in service accessibility and inclusion.

2.2 The City of Sanctuary UK and Ireland organisation seeks to support the network. In Wales, it currently supports the 'Wales Cities of Sanctuary' project, which is co-ordinated by Displaced People In Action (DPIA) and is funded by the Big Lottery Fund. This project works primarily in Swansea and Cardiff, which have the largest populations of dispersed asylum seekers. It seeks also to spread the City of Sanctuary vision throughout Wales, with the aim of Wales becoming a 'Nation of Sanctuary'. The project outcomes are:

- a. The welcome of people seeking sanctuary will be improved across Cardiff and Swansea through the City of Sanctuary movement.

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<sup>1</sup><https://cityofsanctuary.org/>

<sup>2</sup><https://swansea.cityofsanctuary.org/>



- b. Community relations will be strengthened through an increase in the understanding of refugee and asylum issues in the receiving community.
  - c. The lives of people seeking sanctuary will be improved reducing isolation and increasing integration.
  - d. There will be an increase in access to services and an improvement within services in order to meet the needs of people seeking sanctuary.
- 2.3 Over the past year, in response to the biggest refugee crisis since the Second World War, the movement has grown considerably. In Wales, the network of City of Sanctuary groups has grown from two to 10, to include Hay Brecon & Talgarth, Neath Port Talbot, the Valleys, West Wales, Wrexham, Knighton, Bangor and Abergavenny as well as Swansea and Cardiff, with interest in forming groups in Newport, Montgomery and elsewhere.
- 2.4 With the exception of specific but limited resettlement schemes such as the Syrian Vulnerable People Relocation Programme, UK government support for asylum seekers and refugees is continually being cut back, while policy is aimed at creating a more hostile environment for undocumented migrants generally. As Maurice Wren, CEO of the (British) Refugee Council, has pointed out, it is no longer feasible within funds available to provide a comprehensive professional support service to meet the needs of asylum seekers and refugees. It is therefore necessary to create partnerships with grassroots support organisations and networks, of which City of Sanctuary is a prime example, in order to mobilise voluntary effort to enhance the limited professional resources available.
- 2.5 This submission is written with the commitment of the Welsh Government to becoming a 'Nation of Sanctuary' very much in mind. What is central to this concept is the principle that "refugee inclusion begins on day one of arrival", as outlined in WG's Refugee Inclusion Strategy, and we welcome WG's ongoing support for this principle. In order for Wales to become a 'Nation of Sanctuary' WG needs to be working proactively to support the City of Sanctuary movement to build a culture of welcome and hospitality across all spheres of society in Wales. Throughout this submission, and in dealing with the terms of reference outlined by the committee, we have outlined a number of recommendations which would help to realise that vision.

**Recommendation 1 – WG should work with City of Sanctuary to build a culture of welcome and hospitality across all spheres of society in Wales so that Wales can truly become a 'Nation of Sanctuary'.**

### **3.0 The pace and effectiveness of the Welsh Government approach to resettling refugees through the UK Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS)**

- 3.1 WG's coordination role with regards to the SVPRS is to be very much commended. However WG should take a more proactive approach to the scheme by promoting best practice and disseminating information about what works well. For example, City of Sanctuary groups across the UK have undertaken activities to support local authorities to welcome people seeking sanctuary and promote a culture of welcome in their communities. Unfortunately some City of Sanctuary groups in Wales have experienced low engagement from local authorities. *"Professionals and agencies can sometimes appear to discourage rather than facilitate the contribution of voluntary individuals and groups. Yet, as [the local authority] has repeatedly stressed, the goodwill and involvement of the*



*community is crucial for the settlement programme to be successful”.*

- 3.2 One of the key ways that City of Sanctuary groups can support the SVPRS is to increase the opportunities for relationships to develop between local people and those seeking sanctuary. For example, the Neath Port Talbot group has been approached to act as a conduit to local communities and organisations, which can thereby be encouraged to include people seeking sanctuary in their activities. This is particularly important in areas which have not received people seeking sanctuary before. Through focusing on activities that bring people together, City of Sanctuary groups promote community cohesion and inclusion. As these groups are run by volunteers they offer good value for money. It is also better value to provide activities for all people in the community, compared to projects aimed specifically at supporting asylum seekers and refugees.
- 3.3 We recognise local authorities’ duties with regards to safeguarding and data protection City of Sanctuary groups are able to DBS check lead volunteers, recognise that personal details cannot be given out and are mindful that the safety of these families is paramount. City of Sanctuary is working on a ‘Top Tips’ toolkit which aims to address the issues that have arisen thus far and promote best practice examples.

**Recommendation 2 – WG to promote the involvement of City of Sanctuary groups across Wales to support resettled refugees arriving through the SVPRS and to increase opportunities for relationships between local people and those seeking sanctuary.**

- 3.4 A major concern is that there is now a two tier system of support for people seeking sanctuary, which causes a very real risk of division in the asylum seeker and refugee community. Syrian refugees are given bespoke support as they are welcomed at their arrival point, taken to their housing, supported with cash for their first few weeks until benefits start, accompanied to health and education related appointments and supported to find employment. This is in stark contrast with the support other refugees receive. Asylum seekers waiting for a decision on their asylum claim are not allowed to work and have to live on just over £5 per day. If the claim is successful they are given only 28 days in which to ‘move on’ to the mainstream benefit system (or a job) and find their own accommodation. During this 28 day period administrative delays with National Insurance numbers and benefit claims often result in people becoming destitute.
- 3.5 Whilst there is some specialist 'move on' advice funded by WG, it is limited due to capacity and there is no specialist education and employment advice. We would draw the committee’s attention to the previous Refugee Integration and Employment Service. In addition to advice this service also offered mentoring which we believe is essential to support integration. Swansea City of Sanctuary has a very successful scheme offering both mentoring and orientation for asylum seekers on dispersal. This service often leads to relationships being formed with members of the local community, and to the participant taking on a volunteering role themselves which further helps them integrate in the local community. This seems particularly critical under the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, through which WG has committed to putting cohesion and equality at the heart of how Public Bodies deliver policies and services in the future.

**Recommendation 3: As far as possible the good practice in terms of support to refugees in the SVPRS should be replicated for all those seeking sanctuary. Similarly, the good practice being developed in mentoring asylum seekers should be used as the basis for mentoring services aimed at new refugees.**



3.6 Please note also Recommendations 6, 8 and 13 below, on Housing for New Refugees, on Education and Employment Advice and on refugee awareness training for advisers in mainstream employment and education organisations. We would draw attention to the pilot underway between UKVI and DWP in England which is providing specialist JobCentre Advisers to speed up the 'move-on' process. If successful in preventing homelessness and destitution we would welcome the roll-out of this initiative in Wales as soon as possible.

#### **4.0 The effectiveness of the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan**

The City of Sanctuary response here will focus on five main areas: Housing, Healthcare, Education, Employment and Volunteering.

#### **4.1 Housing**

##### **4.1.1 Asylum Accommodation**

4.1.1.1 Housing is one of the primary concerns that the City of Sanctuary movement has identified. We have enough evidence to state with confidence that the quality of housing provided by Clearsprings (Home Office contractor in Wales) is often very poor. We receive frequent reports of boilers or cookers not working, inadequate furniture and carpets. There is a lack of maintenance and the housing is often damp which can cause health issues. In one case a lack of running hot water contributed to the young boy in the family becoming ill and missing a week of school. The parents' concerns are now compounded by a penalty notice issued by the school for non-attendance.

4.1.1.2 When housing concerns are being addressed (usually after a considerable length of time), it is often without due respect for the privacy of the occupants. In another report from an asylum seeker who is also a Swansea City of Sanctuary volunteer, an electrician called out by Clearsprings to fix her cooker arrived late in the evening and in conversation with her was very disrespectful to people seeking sanctuary.

4.1.1.3 Perhaps most worryingly, people frequently report fear that highlighting maintenance issues will result in being moved out of an area where they may have only just been able to settle. Although Swansea City of Sanctuary has a very high number of asylum seekers volunteering with them, none were prepared to give named accounts of the issues with housing they have experienced for this reason.

4.1.1.4 Although asylum accommodation is not devolved, there are ways in which WG can use its powers to seek to improve this dire situation. Action to address the quality of housing for people seeking sanctuary is imperative, not least because of the links between housing and physical and mental health.

#### **Recommendation 4 – WG must do all in its power to improve the quality of asylum accommodation in Wales, including:**

- actively engage with the UK Visa & Immigration (UKVI) Asylum Accommodation and Support Transformation (AASST) stakeholder consultation on asylum housing;
- call for the quality of asylum housing to be scrutinised by Welsh Government;
- ensure that any new contract for asylum housing in Wales brings housing quality standards, complaints procedures, monitoring and enforcement in line with Welsh Quality Housing Standards.

##### **4.1.2 Destitution and Homelessness among Refused Asylum Seekers**

4.1.2.1 City of Sanctuary is aware of increasing numbers of refused asylum seekers who are



evicted from asylum accommodation and have no right to public housing, no access to public funds or benefits and no legal right to work. Some City of Sanctuary member organisations are working to mitigate the effects of this UK policy. For example, in Swansea the SHARE Tawe voluntary hosting scheme provided 1700 bednights of accommodation to 17 destitute asylum seekers in 2015 and reached similar figures in only the first nine months of 2016.

4.1.2.2 City of Sanctuary asserts that the enforced destitution of vulnerable displaced people has no place in Wales and the prevention of destitution should be prioritised.

**Recommendation 5 - WG expands the eligibility criteria for the Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF) to include people seeking sanctuary who are 'Appeal Rights Exhausted'.**

4.1.3 Housing for refugees

4.1.3.1 As noted above, the 28 day 'move on' period often proves to be insufficient for refugees to register for housing benefit and mainstream benefits. Whilst families will be regarded as 'priority need' and allocated temporary housing, many single vulnerable refugees experience homelessness and destitution. In Cardiff, the City of Sanctuary worker reports that some hostels report 30% occupancy by refugees. We would call for a unified approach to assessing whether a refugee is in 'priority need'. Consideration should be made of their circumstances and experiences in their country of origin, journey to the UK, time spent in the UK and language difficulties. In Swansea quite often single refugees are found to be in 'priority need' for housing.

**Recommendation 6 – WG to issue guidance to local authorities on the priority need assessment for housing for refugees.**

4.1.3.2 City of Sanctuary is concerned that the implications of The Immigration Act 2016 contains provisions 'Right to Rent Checks' will lead to increase in discrimination against refugees and result in rise in homelessness.

**Recommendation 7 - WG to work with private landlords to raise awareness of different types of migration status to mitigate any impacts of Right to Rent Checks in Wales.**

4.2 Health, Wellbeing and Social Care

4.2.1 Swansea benefits from a proactive Health Access Team which works in partnership with City of Sanctuary through referring people seeking sanctuary to its 'Welcome to Swansea' mentoring programme. We call for this best practice and partnership working to be emulated across Wales.

4.2.2 City of Sanctuary nationally has prioritised work on maternity services, supporting asylum seeking women who have experienced these services to speak at conferences and workshops. Maternity Workshops have been held in both Swansea and Cardiff within the past year, attended by health board staff, students and third sector. These cross-sector workshops identified a number of issues, ranging from cultural awareness to access to finance. The Wales Cities of Sanctuary project aims to facilitate further collaboration between the sectors in Swansea, with a view to increasing awareness of the services available, cultural considerations for maternity professionals, and joining up the organisations working with new mothers or mothers-to-be. We would welcome the opportunity to support research and action funded by WG in this area.

4.3 Education



4.3.1 From experience, City of Sanctuary can evidence the need for interventions to improve accessibility to education and training. We are acutely aware that people seeking sanctuary have different levels of education and training, so it is impossible to generalise about needs. The training and skills needs of refugees and asylum seekers may include language skills, other basic skills training, access to further and higher education or professional 'refresher' training courses. Our experience has been that people seeking sanctuary face additional difficulties in accessing education and training opportunities that are not addressed within the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan.

These may include:-

- Poor knowledge of entitlement and training opportunities
- Prohibitive fees and transport costs
- Limited access to childcare
- Lack of good written and spoken English
- Lack of recognition of overseas qualifications or prior learning
- Lack of knowledge of entitlements by the actual education providers

4.3.2 A specialist advice and advocacy employment and education service is needed to address the barriers to education and training asylum seekers and refugees face. This is no longer available in Wales. Previously DPIA's specialist advice service using an action planning approach was designed to overcome the challenges refugees and asylum seekers face when seeking to access employment, education, training and volunteering. Asylum seekers and refugees are often furthest away from the labour market therefore a specialist action planning approach is essential. There was sector-wide acknowledgement that 'dabbling' in areas of advice requiring specialist legal knowledge (e.g. welfare benefits during the current period of rapid reform) can lead to poor advice and increase the problems of the advice seeker.

4.3.3 There is lack of knowledge around the process of transferring skills, experiences and re-qualification in relation to particular professions by both statutory and third sector advice organisations.

4.3.4 NARIC (National Academic Recognition Information Centre) is the national body responsible for validating qualifications attained from countries of origin. However, it does not cater for individuals who have years of experience, skills and knowledge in vocational trades but no formal training, or for refugees who fled their countries of origin without certificates of their qualifications. Previously WG tasked Welsh Refugee Council, in partnership with DPIA, to raise awareness of Credit and Qualification Framework Wales and explore pathways for the recognition of prior learning for new arrivals in Wales. DPIA then led a successful pilot project using the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) as a method of identifying recent and relevant learning or experience which could be recognised and accredited. Unfortunately, no further work was undertaken.

**Recommendation 8 – WG to fund a specialist advice and advocacy employment and education service and build on its previous work on the RPL process within the CQFW.**

4.3.5 Due to the various kinds of status given to refugees, and the differing situations of asylum seekers depending on where they are in the asylum process, there is complexity around entitlements to education and training. People seeking sanctuary are too often wrongly advised by further and higher education institutions and advice providers about funding for courses. This is evidence of the need for a specialist advocacy service.



4.3.6 The delivery plan fails to address the fact that there is insufficient accredited ESOL provision at the range of levels required (including ILETS, required for qualified professions). Swansea City of Sanctuary states that the only accredited centre is Gower College Swansea, who are consistently oversubscribed. People seeking sanctuary arrive at all times of year, so there is a need for courses to start throughout the academic year.

4.3.7 Transport costs limit access to all means of inclusion but especially to education and training. Even discounted travel passes available to some students are not affordable for asylum seekers as they require an upfront cost (asylum seekers receive only £5 a week asylum support).

**Recommendation 9 - The Welsh Government should work with further education colleges to offer a transport subsidy scheme for asylum seeking students.**

4.3.8 With a very small level of funding, groups are able to develop conversation clubs and other informal provision. For example, Brecon Hay and Talgarth have assisted with English conversation classes. They identified 8 tutors, of whom 7 have ESOL qualifications. Sessions were delivered by pairs of tutors, in the local library, and we supplied an Arabic/English pictorial dictionary for each family that has been described as 'very helpful'.

**Recommendation 10 – The Welsh Government to provide a small amount of funding to bolster the provision of informal English provision.**

4.3.9 Due to local government cuts, local authorities are not always equipped to deal with the language needs of asylum seekers and refugees. In November 2016, Swansea City of Sanctuary was able to offer voluntary support to a school in the city as the local authority did not have any access to an interpreter in the language required.

**Recommendation 11 – Welsh Government must ensure there is sufficient funding for local authorities to support sanctuary seeking children e.g. for an Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant.**

#### **4.4 Employment**

4.4.1 The Wales Cities of Sanctuary project has identified the need for greater focus on employability throughout a person's asylum application, preparing them for work should their application be successful. We have found that people seeking sanctuary face various barriers which are not addressed within the delivery plan. These include:-

- Unfamiliarity with UK system and complex job application procedure
- Confusion over entitlements
- Qualifications not recognised
- Lack of UK experience
- Lack of English language skills
- Skills need upgrading

4.4.2 There is a huge variance in the levels of literacy and other skills amongst people seeking sanctuary. Skilled refugees often have great difficulty in establishing the transferability of their skills and qualifications to the UK labour market and the process of requalification. We therefore reiterate our call for the Welsh Government to fund a specialist education and employment advice service and re-visit the previous work started on the RPL and CQFW (recommendation 8).



- 4.4.3 Readiness for work training sessions which are suitable for asylum seekers and refugees who may have never accessed learning at all or have not undertaken any learning activities for a long time are also essential. This tailored training has previously proved to be an important stepping stone to further learning for many people seeking sanctuary e.g. CIEH Level 2 Food Safety & Health and Safety and Basic First Aid. These types of activity are hugely beneficial as they improve skills whilst increasing confidence and motivation.
- 4.4.4 Support for job search training workshops, job coaching including support with CVs, job application and interview techniques would be invaluable in assisting a smooth transition for refugees into the labour market.
- 4.4.5 Employers can greatly benefit from employing skilled refugees particularly in light of the cap on migrants from outside the EU which is causing shortages in many sectors e.g. care sector. City of Sanctuary offers pledged organisations refugee awareness training and encourage them to develop work placements for refugees and volunteering opportunities for asylum seekers. It is extremely important for people working with refugees and asylum seekers to understand how the experiences that have led them to flee to the UK might affect their behaviour, or their responses to the help offered.

**Recommendation 12 – The Welsh Government should promote the City of Sanctuary movement to encourage more employers to take on refugees for work placements.**

**Recommendation 13 - The Welsh Government should support refugee awareness training for advisers in mainstream employment and education organisations e.g. Job Centre Plus and Careers Wales staff.**

## 4.5 Volunteering

- 4.5.1 City of Sanctuary groups encourage pledged organisations to offer volunteer placements. This helps to create opportunities for relationships between local people and those seeking sanctuary. Volunteering in a range of settings provides opportunities for members of the receiving community to meet and form relationships with refugees and asylum seekers, which greatly contributes to community cohesion. City of Sanctuary has evidence to show that volunteering is particularly important for asylum seekers as most of them are unable to work for long periods which contributes to a process of de-skilling and can lead to diminishing mental health. Opportunities to volunteer are critical in remaining ready to transition into employment. Unfortunately, through our experience of supporting asylum seekers and refugees to volunteer, we have identified many barriers to doing so.
- 4.5.2 There is confusion over the volunteering entitlement and conditions for asylum seekers, exacerbated by Home Office guidance. Organisations in all communities need to be aware of best practice in inclusive volunteering, which would also support other groups at risk of social exclusion eg. disabled people, prison leavers, care leavers. For example, the Swansea Centre for Voluntary Service recently won a Sanctuary Award for the way they work with Swansea City of Sanctuary to open up volunteering opportunities to asylum seekers and match them with roles appropriate to their skills and learning requirements.

**Recommendation 14 - The Welsh Government should issue its own guidance which clearly states that asylum seekers are entitled to volunteer no matter what the status of the claim, and that asylum seekers are allowed to volunteer in the public sector, as well as for non-profit organisations and charities.**

## 4.6 Additional comments



4.6.1 All specific organisations and actions mentioned in the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan are Cardiff-centric, compounded by the restructuring of the Welsh Refugee Council, reducing its presence outside of the capital. All future funding must take into consideration the numbers of sanctuary seekers in Swansea, Newport and Wrexham, and be able to support the 'Nation of Sanctuary' concept across Wales. City of Sanctuary contributes to delivery of many of the outcomes in Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan and would encourage the Welsh Government to support and promote the movement.

## **5.0 The support and advocacy available to unaccompanied asylum seeking children in Wales**

5.1 We support the Welsh Refugee Coalition recommendation that the Welsh Government should fund a Welsh Guardianship Service to work with children and young people who arrive in Wales unaccompanied and separated from their families.

5.2 City of Sanctuary groups can play a support role through activities to bring children seeking sanctuary together with children in the receiving communities. For example, Northampton Town of Sanctuary is facilitating away days with mixed groups of youths e.g. taking the young people around the county visiting places of interest and enabling access cinema, theatre, swimming and other leisure pursuits.

## **6.0 The role and effectiveness of the Welsh Government's Community Cohesion Delivery Plan in ensuring the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Welsh communities.**

6.1 The Wales Cities of Sanctuary project contributes to delivery of the outcomes of the Community Cohesion Delivery Plan, particularly regarding improved community relations and cohesive communities, and inclusive notions of citizenship, identity and belonging. There are several examples of how the project enhances community cohesion in the evidence above.

6.2 In order for Wales to become a 'Nation of Sanctuary', wherever people seeking sanctuary go they should find people who will welcome them. So that communities are better prepared, WG should do more to raise awareness, challenge myths and stereotypes and promote the positive contribution of people seeking sanctuary. Raising awareness is essential to community cohesion generally. However, it is particularly important to ensure positive messages are heard in relation to the welcome of those on the SVPRS in places which previously had little experience of refugees.

6.3 We would like to see communities encouraged to take pride in offering a place of safety for people whose lives are threatened, and celebrating their contribution to our towns and cities. City of Sanctuary groups can support this work through offering refugee awareness training, bringing communities together with people seeking sanctuary and facilitating initiatives such as the Sanctuary Speakers team (run by Swansea City of Sanctuary).

**Recommendation 15 - WG to demonstrate leadership by promulgating positive media stories and other public messages that all people seeking sanctuary are welcome in Wales. This should include stories about the welcome provided by communities receiving refugees through the SVPRS.**

**Recommendation 16 - WG to work with City of Sanctuary to support better dissemination of information, positive stories about people seeking sanctuary, and –**





**most important – training for people seeking sanctuary to speak directly to community groups, businesses and other organisations, and opportunities for them to do so.**

6.4 In addition, access to leisure and cultural sites would assist with community cohesion. It is commendable that the majority of Cadw sites are free for asylum seekers and refugees. However, transport costs are prohibitive, particularly in Swansea.

6.5 Support for City of Sanctuary groups could help to overcome this barrier. Through the Sanctuary Breaks initiative, the Brecon, Hay and Talgarth group has facilitated breaks in various small towns and villages. The breaks have allowed people seeking sanctuary to have a fun day whilst creating the opportunity for local people to meet them. The group commented “It is especially lovely when children who have been apprehensive about what they have learnt about people seeking refuge from the media have actually met people and realised that they are not unlike themselves”. This shows that City of Sanctuary is actively building and contributing to community cohesion and would welcome further support from WG to develop and promote the movement further.

## **7.0 Conclusion**

7.1 We acknowledge that many of the most important policy issues affecting asylum seekers and refugees are outside the areas of devolved competence of WG. However, the Welsh Government should be concerned about the impact of these issues.

**Recommendation 17 – WG to monitor any adverse effects of UK immigration policy and either lobby for changes or to seek ways within its competence to mitigate these, including the impact of the new Immigration Act 2016 in Wales.**



1. The NASUWT welcomes the opportunity to submit written evidence to the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee (ELGCC) Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales.
2. The NASUWT is the largest teachers' union in Wales representing teachers and school leaders.

### **GENERAL COMMENTS**

3. The NASUWT acknowledges that the *Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan 2016-2019* (the Delivery Plan) seeks to present a holistic approach to supporting refugees and asylum seekers and welcomes the statement in the Ministerial Foreword that it contains:

*'...the collaborative actions which will enable asylum seekers and refugees to have the opportunities to learn, thrive and contribute to the economic, environmental, social and cultural life of Wales.'*

4. The NASUWT views those collaborative actions as vital to supporting schools and colleges to meet the needs of refugee and asylum-seeker children and their families.
5. The Union maintains that schools and colleges must be resourced and funded effectively around all necessary aspects of the integration of refugee and asylum seeker children and families into the whole school community and that cross-agency working related to the eight areas of collaboration identified in the Delivery Plan, which in itself must be funded

**NASUWT**

***The largest teachers' union in Wales***  
***Yr undeb athrawon mwyaf yng Nghymru***

appropriately, must be available to school and college communities who are often the first point of contact for refugee families.

6. The NASUWT produced a position statement, *Children, Education and the Refugee Crisis*, on the global refugee crisis in July this year. In this position statement (a copy of which is attached as Annex A), the profound concerns of the Union are highlighted and 15 areas where specific action is needed by both the UK government and government administrations across the UK are identified.
7. The NASUWT urges the ELGCC to assess each of the four points under scrutiny in this inquiry against these 15 areas.
8. By way of example, the ELGCC should seek to establish if the commitments given in the Delivery Plan in relation to the protection of children and young people have been supported by the robust and accurate monitoring of the number of hate-related incidents targeting refugees in schools and colleges, as identified at point eight of the NASUWT position statement. The Union notes that the *National Community Cohesion Delivery Plan Progress Report 2015* references that schools in the Caerphilly Local Education Authority are required to complete and return termly reports on hate-related bullying. However, it is unclear whether this approach is replicated across Wales and/or how it is to be aligned to the refugee crisis.
9. In acknowledging the merit in the Delivery Plan of building on existing programmes of support for children and young people from minority ethnic backgrounds, the NASUWT suggests that the ELGCC should consider, possibly in conjunction with the Children, Young People and Education Committee (CYPEC), whether sufficient thought has been given to the need for contingency planning in circumstances where these programmes may not meet the specific needs of schools and colleges, and the refugee families they are working to integrate, such as addressing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

10. The NASUWT notes that reference is made to the establishment of Ethnic Minority Achievement Services (EMAS) in all local authorities and the role they are able to play in assisting schools with the integration of refugee and asylum seeker children and young people.
11. Although it is acknowledged that EMAS is an essential aspect of the programme of support which schools will need to draw on to facilitate the successful integration of refugee and asylum-seeker children and young people, the NASUWT questions seriously whether the Education Improvement Grant (EIG) will prove to be an effective vehicle for funding EMAS, as the discrete Minority Ethnic Achievement Grant (MEAG) has been amalgamated into the EIG.
12. The NASUWT has recently provided written evidence to the CYPEC to assist in the *Inquiry into Education Improvement Grant: Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, and Minority Ethnic Children*. Amongst other things, the Union expressed grave doubts over the transparency and accountability of the EIG and suggested that the CYPEC should request sight of the Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) which the Welsh Government and local authorities are required to carry out in relation to the Equality Act 2010 and the corresponding Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) (a copy of the NASUWT written evidence to the CYPEC is attached as Annex B).
13. The NASUWT notes that the Delivery Plan has been equality impact assessed at Welsh Government level but suggests that the ELGCC request sight of the EIAs undertaken at local government level to assist in the deliberation of the points under scrutiny.

### **SPECIFIC COMMENTS**

14. The NASUWT offers the comments and observation which follow on the points under scrutiny by the ELGCC.

***The pace and effectiveness of the Welsh Government approach to resettling refugees through the UK Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS)***

15. Although it is recognised that the publication of the Delivery Plan and the *Community Cohesion National Delivery Plan 2016-17*, both in March 2016, present comprehensive packages of measures and initiatives to assist in resettling refugees and, as such, evidences the urgency and pace of the Welsh Government approach, the NASUWT is concerned that the effectiveness of the approach may be compromised by the amalgamation of the MEAG into the EIG as referred to elsewhere in this written evidence.

***The effectiveness of the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan***

16. The Union recognises that, as constructed, the Delivery Plan demonstrates a commitment to meet many of the specific action points referred to in the NASUWT position statement. However, the information and details about the funding and the resources available to schools, especially where they may be integrating refugees for the first time, is noticeable by its absence.

17. The Union draws the attention of the ELGCC to the thirteenth specific action point on the NASUWT position statement which, amongst other things, calls on governments to recognise and respect the skills and qualifications of refugee teachers who are undocumented and recognise them as a precious and valuable resource.

***The support and advocacy available to unaccompanied asylum seeking children in Wales***

18. The NASUWT acknowledges the essential nature of providing support and advocacy to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC), not least, since it reflects the provision of article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

19. Although the NASUWT has no experience of the services which are provided to UASC and is therefore unable to comment on the quality or effectiveness of the provision, it is an area where the Union suggests that the ELGCC should seek to establish if data in relation to the number of UASC using these services is being collected on a regular basis by local authorities and subsequently collated by the Welsh Government.

***The role and effectiveness of the Welsh Government's Community Cohesion Delivery Plan in ensuring the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Welsh communities.***

20. As stated previously in this written evidence, the NASUWT acknowledges that the *Community Cohesion National Delivery Plan 2016-17* evidences the urgency and pace with which the Welsh Government is attempting to ensure the successful integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Welsh communities.

21. However, the Union asserts that the effectiveness of this plan will depend on the sufficiency and adequacy of the additional resources available from the Welsh Government to assist those organisations and services, especially, but by no means exclusively, schools and colleges charged with this responsibility.

22. Against this background, the NASUWT reminds the ELGCC that schools and colleges need to be resourced sufficiently around all necessary aspects of integration of refugee children and families into the whole school and college community.

23. The Union suggests that the ELGCC should consider whether the *Community Cohesion National Delivery Plan 2016-17* has identified the need to:

- recognise the school or college community context and the additional support needs arising from this in terms of addressing the integration of refugee and asylum-seeker children into communities in Wales; for instance, whether the school or college is in a homogenous community where local cultural attitudes may need to be challenged;
- consider whether placement schools and colleges have experience of working with refugees, or whether the school is integrating refugees for the first time;

- make available a significant pool of support resources and promote these to teachers in schools and colleges integrating refugees;
- provide access for schools and teachers to appropriate resources and specialist support when helping children who are experiencing PTSD.



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**National Official for Wales**

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## CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND THE REFUGEE CRISIS

### QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL

The continuing impact of the global refugee crisis on the world's children and young people is of profound concern to the NASUWT.

There are over 60 million refugees and displaced people worldwide. Half of the world's refugees are aged under 18, many travelling unaccompanied. More than half of the refugees from the Middle East and North Africa – some of whom are seeking safety and security in the UK – are below 18 years of age.

Refugees are protected in international law under the 1951 United Nations (UN) Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol. The 1951 Convention establishes the principle that refugees should not be expelled or returned to situations where their life and freedom would be under threat. This includes the right to safety, access to asylum procedures that are fair and efficient, and basic human rights to allow them to live in dignity and safety.

Worldwide over 60 million children, mainly girls, are denied the right to education. The failure to secure the right to education represents one of the greatest threats to global peace and security today.

The 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child confirms the rights of all children and young people to shelter, protection from abuse, access to healthcare, freedom from violence, and to high-quality education.

The NASUWT believes that education transforms lives and life chances. Schools develop and realise human potential, they keep children safe from abuse and they represent a vital investment in children's futures and in the future of our communities and of our planet. The NASUWT advocates for quality education as an essential part of the global response to the challenge of securing a sustainable future for all.

In September 2015, the international community committed to the Global Goals for Sustainable Development. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim to end extreme poverty, fight inequality and injustice and tackle climate change. The NASUWT supports the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The global goal for education (or SDG4) aims to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030.' SDG4 requires governments around the world to invest in quality education and ensure that all children and young people, including the world's refugee children and young people, have access to such education.

The SDGs apply to everyone, including refugees and migrants. All governments have a critical role to play in delivering the 2030 agenda, working together with civil society organisations, including trade unions. The UK is a signatory to the SDGs.

### NO ROOM FOR COMPLACENCY

The NASUWT welcomes the commitment by the UK Parliament to invest 0.7% of GDP in international development. But we should not be complacent. A key priority for the UK Government should be to ensure that all refugee children and young people living in the UK are provided with access to education, care and other forms of support.

- a. 25% of the world's children are now living in crisis situations, according to Unicef;
- b. many child refugees are denied fundamental rights in practice;
- c. one in six – or 75 million – children from pre-primary to upper-secondary age (3-18) living in nations affected by crises are classed as being in desperate need of educational support;<sup>1</sup>
- d. only two per cent of global humanitarian appeals are spent on education;
- e. many refugee and displaced children have been exposed to violence as a consequence of schools in their countries of origin being occupied and used for military purposes;
- f. many child refugees continue to live with the trauma of rape, sexual violence and armed conflict, without access to appropriate and timely mental and emotional support.

The NASUWT looks to the UK Government and government administrations throughout the UK to play their full part in securing the right to quality education for refugee children and young people.

<sup>1</sup> Overseas Development Institute (2016), *Education Cannot Wait*.



## **SECURING TANGIBLE PROGRESS TOWARDS 2030**

The NASUWT believes that specific action is needed to secure the rights of refugee children and young people, including:

1. continuing to support the needs of the world's refugee children and young people both at home and abroad. This includes ensuring that the UK welcomes refugees and those fleeing violence and persecution;
2. actively complying with international conventions and treaties on refugees and human rights, and on sustainable development (including the UN commitment to secure quality education for all children and young people by 2030);
3. ensuring investment in infrastructure and support programmes to assist refugee children, young people and families living in the UK;
4. ensuring that refugee children and young people in the UK have access to the full range of educational support, mental health services and resources they need to help them achieve and succeed;
5. ensuring that schools and colleges in the UK are provided with appropriate information, guidance and support to meet the needs of refugee children and young people. This should include information about the rights of refugee children, and guidance to dispel myths and to help protect refugee children and young people from abuse;
6. supporting UK schools and colleges in challenging anti-refugee prejudice, racism and religious intolerance and to advance equality and human rights in the classroom;
7. ensuring that the public narrative about refugees and migrants demonstrates dignity and respect, and taking action explicitly to confront anti-refugee sentiments and negative and sensationalist reporting about refugees and migrants. Given trends in the level of recorded hate crimes, this should take the form of a positive 'refugees welcome' commitment to which all political parties should be invited to be signatories;
8. ensuring systems for recording and reporting the number of hate-related incidents in schools and colleges, including monitoring of incidents targeting refugees;
9. promoting awareness in schools, colleges and communities of modern-day slavery, human trafficking and sexual violence, including the particular risks faced by refugees;
10. ensuring that all refugee children and young people have access to free, high-quality education and examining, specifically, the progress of refugee pupils in relation to their education participation, attainment and outcomes/destinations;
11. reviewing and expanding the provision of specialist support services for refugee children and young people, including those with special/additional educational needs. Government/administrations should consider the need for additional investment, given the range of demands on existing services for children and families;
12. recruiting additional specialist staff in schools to assist the inclusion and integration of refugee pupils and to help overcome barriers to participation;
13. recognising refugee teachers in the UK as a valuable resource in the education of all children, including refugee children, and in the context of promoting knowledge and understanding on global issues. It is vital that the skills, experience and rights of refugee teachers in the UK are recognised and respected. This should include recognising and respecting the skills and qualifications of refugee teachers who are undocumented;
14. continuing to support international education and assistance programmes for children and young people living in refugee transit camps overseas;
15. committing to work with international bodies to ensure that all schools are safe sanctuaries, free from militarisation, military occupation and targeted violence. This should include active consideration of endorsing the Unicef Safe Schools Declaration.

## **FURTHER INFORMATION**

If you would like to discuss any of the issues contained in this briefing, please contact us at:

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#ActForRacialJustice

**Children, Young People and Education Committee  
Inquiry into Education Improvement Grant: Gypsy, Roma and Traveller,  
and Minority Ethnic Children  
18 November 2016**

1. The NASUWT welcomes the opportunity to submit written evidence to the Children, Young People and Education Committee (CYPEC) inquiry into the impact of amalgamating the previously ring-fenced grants from 2015/16 into the Education Improvement Grant (EIG) on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, and Minority Ethnic Children (the EIG inquiry).
2. The NASUWT is the largest teachers' union in Wales representing teachers and school leaders.

**GENERAL COMMENTS**

3. The NASUWT maintains that the development of effective provision to support the progress and achievement of minority ethnic pupils and those with English as an Additional Language (EAL) and/or Welsh as an Additional Language (WAL) would provide a hallmark in Wales for a genuinely inclusive education system in which all children and young people are given the fullest possible opportunity to make the most of their potential as learners.
4. The Union asserts that while levels of funding made available to support ethnic minority achievement and EAL and WAL services are an essential aspect of an effective programme in this area, evidence also makes clear that securing good-quality provision in practice depends on the establishment of mechanisms that seek to ensure that resources made available to support such services are used for the purpose for which

they are intended and are not diverted to support other areas of activity. For example, the removal of dedicated funding for EAL services in Northern Ireland following funding reforms introduced in 2005 led to significant deterioration in the extent and quality of provision across the greater part of the education system.

5. The NASUWT is concerned that the decision to amalgamate the previously ring-fenced grant for specific areas relating to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, and Minority Ethnic children into the EIG in Wales could result in problems similar to those experienced in Northern Ireland.
6. NASUWT members working in these service areas, and other related services, have expressed strong opposition to the decision to amalgamate the Minority Ethnic Achievement Grant (MEAG) and the Gypsy and Traveller Grant into the EIG, as it is felt that the lack of ring-fencing of these grants is seriously compromising the effectiveness of support for the intended learners.
7. The Union notes that in March 2014, the Minister for Education and Skills stated:

*'Unlocking every child's potential is at the heart of the Welsh Government's strategy for education and reflects article 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. We have high aspirations for all learners, and are committed to supporting the success of students from all backgrounds. This vision is equally true for our minority ethnic pupils who may need English and/or Welsh language support, or face risk of underachieving for other reasons. I recognise that some pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds may need additional support to fully embrace the educational opportunities in Wales. That is why we have continued to provide Minority Ethnic Achievement Grant and the Gypsy and Traveller Education Grant – discrete funding through which, we ensure pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds needing our support are provided with it, to reach their potential.'*

8. The NASUWT asserts that the discrete nature of the funding referred to in this statement has been lost because the EIG is now distributed through the Consortia/local authorities and has then been devolved directly to schools to be used at they see fit. This has led to a reduction in the number of centrally employed staff who can be deployed on a needs basis.
9. In addition, the Union maintains that the identification of discrete, ring-fenced funding provided a greater degree of transparency and accountability over the money provided by the Welsh Government for the MEAG and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller learners each year.

### **SPECIFIC COMMENTS**

10. The NASUWT offers the comments and observations which follow on the three areas under scrutiny by the CYPEC.

***How the Welsh Government monitors the way local authorities use the Education Improvement Grant and how the new, amalgamated grant supports Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, and Minority Ethnic children, with specific reference to improving educational outcomes.***

11. The Union is not sure how the Welsh Government monitors the way the EIG is used by local authorities but the perception of NASUWT members working in related services is that the Consortia hold the purse strings and, as such, influence how each local authority uses the EIG.
12. The NASUWT maintains that, under the terms of the EIG, the specialist teachers, previously employed to provide support for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, and Minority Ethnic children, are having to change, or have changed, to new models of support which distance them from directly supporting these children. The focus on outcomes within the EIG has diminished the nurture that was provided previously.

13. The CYPEC should note that the EIG has only been in place for two years. Consequently, the NASUWT suggests that any correlation between the outcomes achieved through the EIG and previous outcomes would lack security as children may have already received specialist support which could have impacted positively on their education under the previous grant support system.
14. The NASUWT reminds the CYPEC that the Welsh Government and all public authorities have a legal duty to demonstrate how they are meeting the Equality Act 2010 and the corresponding Public Sector Equality Duties (PSED).
15. The PSED make clear that public authorities are required to demonstrate how they are eliminating unlawful discrimination, advancing equality and fostering good relations for groups with protected characteristics. The educational outcomes and support for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, and Minority Ethnic children fall within the remit of these duties as groups with a protected characteristic.
16. Consequently, in assessing how local authorities monitor the use of the EIG, the NASUWT suggests that the CYPEC should considered how the Welsh Government met its statutory equality obligations under the Equality Act 2010.
17. The Union believes that the CYPEC would be assisted in this endeavour by requesting sight of the Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) that have been, or should have been, undertaken in relation to the decision to amalgamate the previously ring-fenced grants into the new EIG, and those that have been undertaken subsequently by local authorities on the use of the EIG, as these should demonstrate, or otherwise, that 'due regard' has been given to the Equality duties in terms of the move to, and distribution of, the EIG as it applies to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, and Minority Ethnic children.
18. The NASUWT maintains that scrutiny of the EIAs should enable the CYPEC to contextualise the experiences of NASUWT members working

in the related services referred to here, and elsewhere in this written evidence.

***The effectiveness of other Welsh Government policies and strategies for supporting the education of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, and Minority Ethnic children.***

19. In acknowledging that it could be argued that other funding streams - for example, the Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG) and/or Fresh Start - may address particular needs for some Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, and Ethnic Minority children who are eligible for free school meals (eFSM), the NASUWT asks the CYPEC to note that those needs are not specific to all the learners within these areas, and that these initiatives do not address the very specific needs of these learners generally, such as language acquisition, or of those who fall into the eFSM categories because they are asylum seeker or refugee children.

***Any key issues arising from the amalgamating the other previously separate grants into the Education Improvement Grant.***

20. The NASUWT maintains that the EIG does not lend itself to addressing appropriately and adequately the huge variation in need in relation to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, and Minority Ethnic children across the Consortia regions. Furthermore, the Union questions seriously the understanding within the Consortia of the needs of these learners and maintains that they are not prioritised in the way envisaged by the Minister for Education and Skills in March 2014.



Rex Phillips

**Wales Organiser**

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RAS 23

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Hawliau

Response from: Hawliau

## **Consultation response by Hawliau Consultancy to the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee Inquiry into Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Wales.**

### 1 Introduction

I am pleased to respond to this formal consultation by this committee. A brief overview of the work of Hawliau can be found at the end of this submission.

### **The pace and effectiveness of the Welsh Government approach to resettling refugees through the UK Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS)**

2 It could be argued that all areas of Wales should support this initiative however much of the practice is focused on quick and easy answers rather than a considered approach to refugee integration. Wales has a well-established history of refugee integration which has been successful over many years. However, this focus upon all of Wales providing homes for Syrian refugees whilst laudable does require further exploration. Because of the continued short term thinking by UKVI (part of the Home Office) funding focusses upon supporting refugees to integrate and not about supporting the broader development of support mechanisms and systems within the dispersal communities across the 22 authorities in Wales.

3 As an example many of the homes provided will be in areas with no immigration solicitors. This is a postcode lottery in the current 4 dispersal areas in terms of effective access to legal advice. Who then is going to provide information, advice and assistance in a few years' time when people dispersed in 2016 need to further apply for a continued right to remain in the UK. As there is currently not enough supply of legal advice this is one example of lack of clarity by key agencies. I also assume that once the Brexit negotiations start then many migrants in Wales will want to explore their legal options again increasing the need for good quality legal advice. Advice on integration seems to have focused upon the 'here and now' not on the ongoing dimensions of community support which are needed to work with migrant and non migrant communities in geographical areas.

4 As mental health services are often overwhelmed in Wales again I would be concerned that specialist services do not exist. Moving from Post-Traumatic Stress to Post Traumatic Growth needs significant support and resources. We know that access to key mental health and legal services is already of concern in Wales. Whilst we know that migrants have a positive impact upon schools, for example by using surplus places in schools or learning the Welsh language to strengthen community's language profile. We are also aware that whilst generally migrants have good physical health there will be issues of demand when people have survived torture



and have ongoing physical health issues as a result. Again these are long term issues which need to be addressed .

5 Asking the Non-Governmental sector to tender for refugee support at a time when they are already overwhelmed with demand will prove challenging. This will ensure that short term pragmatism is the focus rather than the significant support which refugee integration require. The committee should be interested in the level of support already provided in Wales which will often mean that demand outstrips supply (as already discussed) but also where Grassroots activity is becoming stretched and I see signs of unsustainability within some of the refugee sector in Wales.

6 Although Wales did not respond when the Yugoslavian crisis was happening in the early 1990 's crisis dispersal was managed in a more focused way which ensured that refugee needs were understood before they were placed into local communities. Paucity of information and placement which does not use Full Cost Recovery has meant that people's needs are often not addressed effectively. This has placed additional burdens on the refugees themselves, local agencies (statutory and non-statutory) and local communities. It is as if the considerable research agenda which is built up in the UK has been ignored when it comes to the experience of Syrian refugees under the current UK programme. <sup>1</sup>

7 From my observations of asylum processes over nearly 20 years I believe that UKVI processes are often damaging and of poor quality. There is considerable anecdotal and research evidence about the poor quality of asylum accommodation and decision making as just two examples of a poor and damaging process. Anything the NAFW can do to address this two tier system for asylum seekers in Wales should be undertaken as systems which can destroy people's humanity in Wales have no place and should end.

8 Whilst Home Office competency is outside the committees remit from my experience it can often make the situation worse and seems driven by short term political priorities rather than the use of a meaningful and clear evidence base. I therefore would like to see all migration decisions made by an independent agency in the UK. This should be underpinned by a commitment to basic human rights and a legal interpretation of the Refugee Convention 1951.

9 As will be clear I think there needs to be identification and adoption of an evidence base when making decisions about migration and its future direction in Wales. Politicians I would argue have the responsibility at a number of levels to evidence their statements rather than provide comments which sometimes appear to be knee jerk reactions rather than being considered and thoughtful. As part of its commitment to community cohesion it would be useful if the NAFW explored how it could develop an evidence based migration narrative in Wales.

### **The effectiveness of the Refugee and Asylum Seeker delivery plan**

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/migration/research/integrationcitizenship/refugeeresettlement>  
<http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/protection/operations/52403d389/new-beginning-refugee-integration-europe.html>

10 Whilst the plan has some laudable objectives it needs to be refreshed and rewritten and explore the broader migration experience in Wales. Any objectives need to move from aspiration to deliverable outcomes with a clear monitoring framework and resourced effectively. If it is felt that a separate strategy is needed, then the Scottish Model should be considered and I would urge the committee to hear evidence from Scotland to influence its work in Wales. They in my opinion have combined political leadership with practical support based on deliverable outcomes.

11 This is far from the situation in Wales where funding has been fragmented and reactionary rather than focused on building a sustainable and co ordinated sector in Wales. There should also be consideration of an equivalent to the One Scotland<sup>2</sup> campaign being implemented in Wales . This should be supported by a clear research agenda which evaluates and comes from a what works perspective. As we live in a Volatile , Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous VUCA<sup>3</sup> world our policy responses need to actively address this . This will mean government being proactive not reactive and supporting its own civil servants and other parts of civil society to understand what the key issues are and how agencies should respond. Whilst a commitment to funding is important Wales needs a long term strategy to address all migration issues which sets the political and policy tone for the next ten years .

### **The support and advocacy available to unaccompanied asylum seeking children in Wales**

12 I am going to be broadly critical of support for asylum seeking children in Wales. As long as I have been working on this issue there have been perverse incentives built into the system. From my experience when Welsh Local Authorities had small numbers of asylum seeking children they were able to provide positive and humanitarian solutions in their practice and would often give younger people the benefit of the doubt in terms of accommodation and support. As numbers have increased this unfunded mandate has often led to a hardening of attitude and reduced support. This in my view means that children are not getting the protection they deserve and legally entitled to .

13 Providing best practice within this area is challenging when no financial and resource support is available. Clearly not using advocacy in the age assessment process is of concern and shows how biased the system is against young people . In September of this year for example one local authority did an age assessment in a police cell . This surely cannot be right especially as the one assessor was male and the young person was female . This was not a legal assessment yet it was still viewed as being 'good enough ' for this young person and led to them being placed in the adult asylum system.

14 I must emphasize that whilst there is lots of good practice in Wales it is often 'patchy and inconsistent ' . From my experience the age assessment process is often a 'farce' in Wales. Effective advocacy if it existed would often address some of these issues. I would therefore like to see CSSIW inspecting local authorities on these

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<sup>2</sup> <http://onescotland.org/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://hbr.org/2014/01/what-vuca-really-means-for-you>

issues as both workers and organizations have some fundamental concerns about the way the system operates and has little attention paid to it.

This is for a number of reasons

- Assessment being linked to resources
- Lack of legally competent assessments
- Poor practice in the use of interpreters and the assessment process
- No monitoring of the outcome
- Lack of effective legal solutions in Wales
- Clear examples of poor cultural assessment and effective safeguarding processes
- Poor practice around Section 55 of the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2002<sup>4</sup>
- In my professional opinion the age assessment process is unfit for purpose. Any rewrite in Wales needs to be led by agencies which have no investment in diluting its effectiveness. It should comply with the duties of the UNCRC measure so it is fit for purpose in Wales.

15 In terms of Advocacy under Part 10 of the Social Services and Well Being (Wales) Act 2014 we have no equivalent of the Scottish Children's Guardianship Service<sup>5</sup> and all the evidence suggests that this should be developed as a part of a commitment to children's safeguarding and the principles of the UNCRC .

16 When I work with agencies and individual professionals I am left with a sense of sadness as broadly there still seem to be concerns about the way we respond to young people who have been trafficked and criminalised and not protected in Wales. The committee would I hope therefore explore how agencies work in this situation so that we build protection into the system. When I worked at the Welsh Refugee Council we were aware that Park Prison held 30 plus young people who had been trafficked and treated as criminals and not victims of trafficking. All of the relevant agencies e.g. Police / Local Authorities and Home Office treated them as criminals and no protection was offered. Whilst I am aware that this was in 2012 I am also aware from talking to professionals on the ground that this is still an area of concern.

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<sup>4</sup>[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/431346/Section\\_55\\_v12.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/431346/Section_55_v12.pdf)

<sup>5</sup>[http://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/how\\_we\\_can\\_help/advice\\_services/the\\_scottish\\_guardianship\\_service](http://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/how_we_can_help/advice_services/the_scottish_guardianship_service)

17 The committee could if it chooses explore how advocacy is offered in this situation as there is a strange perversion in the decision making. That is if agencies do not ask for advocacy then there is no independence in the system and children are not protected. The Scottish Guardianship project has addressed these issues. I therefore celebrate work on the UNCRC by the last National Assembly for Wales. However I would like to see that policy statement embedded in practice especially where the evidence suggests that vulnerable children are not being protected.

### **The role and effectiveness of the Welsh Government's Community Cohesion Delivery Plan in ensuring the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Welsh communities.**

18 A plan is only as good as the people, agencies and resources behind it. Please see my comments about the Refugee and Asylum Seeker delivery plan.

### **Conclusion**

19 In conclusion I am more than pleased to provide this submission and hope it raises a number of key issues relevant to the work of this Inquiry.

In all my speeches given on Migration over the last ten years I have always ended with the quote by Aldous Huxley, who said.

'Facts do not cease to exist because they are ignored '.

I am pleased that the committee has chosen to explore some of these facts and hope that it makes recommendations which have a positive impact upon people's lives. As you will be aware asylum seekers and refugees are some of the most vulnerable citizens in Wales. Any actions which improve their well-being is to be welcomed and supported.

Diolch yn Fawr

### **About Hawliau**

20 By background I am a social worker and am registered with the Care Council for Wales. I have extensive experience of working in Public Services in Wales since 1984. My experience within migration includes being CEO of the Welsh Refugee Council (2007 to 2013), acting as expert witness to the Immigration Tribunal (2016), supervising social work students within the Welsh Refugee Council (2008-2013), (2014- 2016), teaching migration at Cardiff University to social work students (2007 – 2016) and being Visiting Lecturer at the University of Lapland (2014-2016) where I teach a module on Migration and Social Protection.

In addition to my work on migration Hawliau also works in the fields of social care, leadership and equality and human rights.

Mike Lewis  
Hawliau Consultancy  
22<sup>nd</sup> November 2016

RAS 24

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Stonewall Cymru

Response from: Stonewall Cymru

## Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

### Stonewall Cymru's response

#### Background

Stonewall Cymru is the all-Wales lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) equality charity. Stonewall Cymru was founded in 2003, and we work with businesses, public bodies, schools, the Welsh Government, the National Assembly for Wales and a wide range of partners in communities across Wales to improve the lived experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people.

#### Response

1. Refugees and asylum seekers who are lesbian, gay, bi or trans (LGBT) are some of the most marginalised people in Wales. Stonewall's research into the experiences of LGBT asylum seekers ([No going back](https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/No_Going_Back__2010_.pdf)<sup>1</sup>, 2009 and [No safe refuge](https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/no_safe_refuge.pdf)<sup>2</sup>, 2016) reveals that acute mental health problems, including depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder are widespread among LGBT asylum seekers. This is both due to the extreme persecution and violence individuals have faced in their countries of origin and also as a result of traumatic experiences in the UK asylum system, and particularly poor conditions in UK detention centres ([No safe refuge](https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/no_safe_refuge.pdf), 2016).
2. These intersecting stigmas attached to LGBT refugees and asylum seekers as LGBT people, as refugees and asylum seekers and, often, as people with mental health problems, create a unique set of barriers to LGBT asylum seekers and refugees settling in Wales.
3. The Committee should actively seek to hear the views and experiences of members of the support groups that exist for LGBT refugees and asylum seekers in Wales in this inquiry, namely Hoops and Loops in Cardiff, hosted by Race Equality First, and No Going Back! in Swansea, hosted by the Unity LGBT Centre. Individuals with direct experience of the problems they have faced as LGBT refugees and asylum seekers are best placed to inform work on supporting the social inclusion of LGBT refugees and asylum seekers.
4. We believe that the Welsh Government's Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan would be strengthened by recognition of the multiple barriers faced by LGBT refugees and asylum seekers, and inclusion of specific actions designed to tackle those barriers. We outline some of the issues and possible steps to tackle them in this response.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/No\\_Going\\_Back\\_\\_2010\\_.pdf](https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/No_Going_Back__2010_.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/no\\_safe\\_refuge.pdf](https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/no_safe_refuge.pdf)

### **Health, wellbeing and social care**

5. LGBT refugees and asylum seekers have significant mental health needs that may stem from traumatic experiences such as disownment, violence, rape, death threats and other forms of persecution. Furthermore, many are often 're-traumatised' and their mental health issues exacerbated by their interactions with the asylum system in the UK (*No going back*, 2009 and *No safe refuge*, 2016). As such, it is essential that all health services are fully inclusive of all refugees and asylum seekers, and that professionals are trained on the specific needs of LGBT refugees and asylum seekers: for example, some LGBT refugees and asylum seekers may be reluctant to disclose issues relating to their sexual orientation or gender identity to figures of authority.
6. Trans refugees and asylum seekers will have often had aspects of their transition (e.g. hormone therapy) interrupted when they arrive in Wales. Healthcare services should ensure that trans refugees and asylum seekers know what options are available to them for treatment in Wales, and ensure their needs are met. Interrupted transition can be a significant cause of psychological distress and undermines individuals' ability to participate fully in their communities.

### **Hate crime**

7. Individuals who face abuse due to multiple aspects of their identity are not only more vulnerable to hate but also experience hate crime in unique ways.
8. For example, LGBT refugees and asylum seekers may be especially reluctant to report instances of hate due to their unfamiliarity with laws protecting victims or their experiences of persecution at the hands of law enforcement in their countries of origin.
9. Public awareness campaigns should continue to raise awareness of the protection and support that will be offered to victims – and especially LGBT victims – if they report hate.

### **Gender-based violence**

10. Asylum seekers can be at high risk of gender-based violence due to dependence on partners and family members in contexts where individuals are isolated from wider community networks, and couples or families make asylum claims together. This risk is exacerbated further for LGBT asylum seekers.
11. It is therefore important that there are organisations which provide support to victims that are trained both in the issues facing LGBT victims and victims who are refugees and asylum seekers, and that the Welsh Government continues to prioritise raising awareness of these organisations, and their inclusivity of LGBT people, in appropriate settings.

### **Housing**

12. Shared housing arrangements, such as in Home Office accommodation, can make LGBT asylum seekers vulnerable to homophobic, biphobic and transphobic abuse from other tenants.

13. Local authorities and housing services should encourage refugees and asylum seekers to report abuse and inform them of their right to alternative accommodation in such circumstances.

### **Young people**

14. Children who arrive in the United Kingdom as refugees are required to reapply for asylum when they turn 18. LGBT young people may base their case to stay on their fear of persecution on the grounds of gender identity or sexual orientation in their country of origin.
15. These young people are highly vulnerable and need personalised support to deal with their complex needs. Beyond the pressures put on all young people reapplying for asylum, for LGBT young people this process may 'out' them to their friends and family and jeopardise support networks they might otherwise rely on.

### **Spaces for LGBT refugees and asylum seekers**

16. One of the most effective tools for supporting LGBT refugees and asylum seekers are groups specifically for LGBT refugees and asylum seekers, and community spaces that are fully inclusive of LGBT refugees and asylum seekers.
17. Our research (*No safe refuge*, 2016) found numerous testimonies to the difference charities and support groups had made to people's lives, both in terms of the material support they provided, and the psychological benefits of having a space to be listened to, seek advice, find friendship and build communities.
18. Refugees and asylum seekers receive limited financial assistance from the state and having left their country of origin are dislocated from traditional networks of support, a dislocation which is exacerbated by experiences of being detained. This makes many heavily reliant on support from networks of co-nationals and other refugees and asylum seekers.
19. Many LGBT asylum seekers do not wish to disclose their sexual orientation or trans status within these networks because they fear homophobic, biphobic or transphobic abuse if they do. However, in applications for asylum on the grounds of persecution due to sexual orientation or gender identity, asylum seekers are expected to provide evidence that they are, in fact, lesbian, gay, bi or trans. This puts pressure on LGBT asylum seekers to be highly active members of the LGBT community.
20. These pressures, which pull in opposite directions with much at stake at either end, can isolate LGBT asylum seekers from the few social networks they are left to rely on. In this context, spaces that are sensitive to the needs and experiences of LGBT asylum seekers are essential in empowering and supporting individuals. However, knowledge of the existence of these groups within the fragmented community of LGBT asylum seekers is low.
21. All service providers working with asylum seekers and refugees should communicate clearly that they are LGBT-inclusive, should ensure that LGBT

asylum seekers and refugees are aware of legal protections against discrimination and signpost them to further sources of support where appropriate.

22. Welsh Government should engage proactively with those groups providing specific services to LGBT asylum seekers and refugees in order to ensure that their needs are taken into account in the delivery of the work outlined in the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan.

### **Further information**

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RAS 25

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol Aneurin Bevan

Response from: Aneurin Bevan University Health Board

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments with regard to the Committee's inquiry into the above. I should be grateful if you would find below the Health Board's response to the key questions which form the Committee's enquiry, which are outlined below.

- The pace and effectiveness of the Welsh Government approach to resettling refugees through the UK Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS);
- The effectiveness of the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan;
- The support and advocacy available to unaccompanied asylum seeking children in Wales;
- The role and effectiveness of the Welsh Government's Community Cohesion Delivery Plan in ensuring the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Welsh communities.

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The Health Board would like to make the following comments:

- It is considered that the organisation of the Syrian Resettlement Programme (SRP) in Wales has been well supported by the National Delivery Group and Wales Strategic Migration Partnership.
- In relation to the SRP we would like to suggest an amendment to the Home Office Statement of Requirements, which would require local

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Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol Aneurin Bevan yw enw gweithredol Bwrdd Iechyd Lleol Prifysgol Aneurin Bevan  
Aneurin Bevan University Health Board is the operational name of Aneurin Bevan University Local Health Board

authorities to routinely notify health boards of any referrals. This would ensure that health boards are able to clinically review the Medical Assessment Forms received from the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) to ensure that the specialist healthcare needs of refugees can be met. It would also facilitate appropriate and timely registration and assessment of refugees within primary care on arrival to Wales.

- There appears to be a difference between the post arrival support offered to Syrian refugees arriving through the SRP and the support offered to other refugees and asylum seekers. As part of the Home Office Statement of Requirements local authorities are required provide suitably furnished accommodation and a case worker service for Syrian refugees arriving through the SRP. The case workers ensures that families receive timely advice and assistance with registering for mainstream benefits and services (e.g. GPs, schools, Job Centre Plus, etc.) and signposting to other advice and information giving agencies. It is suggested that this case worker support approach would also be valuable to asylum seekers.
- There is a need to ensure that specialist mental health services are available for asylum seekers that have experienced torture or organised violence. We welcome the inclusion of this as a specific action within the *Together for Mental Health: Delivery Plan* (2016), indicating that Welsh Government (Health and Social Services) will issue a care pathway, to ensure access for refugee and asylum seekers to general mental health and specialist Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) provision by January 2017.

We are aware that the charity *Freedom from Torture* have regional centres in Glasgow, London, Manchester, Birmingham and Newcastle, which provides individual and group support for mental health professionals and other practitioners who work with asylum seekers and refugees that have survived torture and organised violence. We would like to suggest that consideration is given to establishing an equivalent regional centre for Wales. It would also be helpful for a review to be undertaken to ensure that appropriate access to interpreters and translation services is

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available to asylum seekers and refugees accessing psychological therapies in Wales. This review should also consider the psychological well-being and support available to interpreters as part of de-briefing process.

- Following the implementation of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 the Home Office designated four areas within Wales as dispersal areas for asylum seekers: Cardiff, Swansea, Newport and Wrexham, although

asylum seekers are located in other parts of Wales. As part of the GMS Contract in Wales 2008-09 an *Enhanced Service for Asylum Seekers and Refugees Specification* was developed for health boards to assist them when commissioning primary medical services for asylum seekers and refugees in their area. This Enhanced Service aims to ensure equitable access to general medical services by overcoming barriers such as language and allowing extended consultation time to address complex issues. The Welsh Government *Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan* (2016) highlights the need for training in a number of areas. This includes the provision of training for medical students and standardised, accredited units on a variety of issues, including Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), Honour Based Violence (HBV) and Forced Marriage. It also highlights the need for generic training for all frontline services about how to 'ask and act' appropriately, along with specific training for maternity services and first responders. We would therefore welcome the development of a national training framework for NHS staff to cover the diverse and complex needs of asylum seekers and refugees. This could include the training required by primary care staff providing the Asylum Seeker and Refugee Enhanced Service, the healthcare response to routine recommendations from the Asylum Seeker Key Worker Nursing Service (e.g. patients with unknown or incomplete vaccination status, blood borne viral hepatitis, tuberculosis) as well as for those providing more specialist services (e.g. patients that have experienced sexual violence, FGM or survivors of torture).

- The Wales Strategic Migration Partnership (WSMP) has produced an *Age Assessment of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children: All Wales Multi-Agency Toolkit* (2015) which was commissioned by UK Visas & Immigration (UKVI) and financially supported by Welsh Government. The toolkit includes a section on multiagency working and the consideration of medical reports (including paediatric assessments) as part of the assessment process. However, it is unclear whether there has been paediatric contribution to the age-assessment process and/or formulation of the toolkit. If there has not been paediatric involvement, we would suggest that this is considered in future iterations. We note that the WSMP welcomes comments and feedback on the toolkit, which will be updated annually.

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I hope these comments are helpful. If you require any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Judith Paget

Tudalen y pecyn 170

**Judith Paget**  
**Chief Executive/Prif Weithredwr**

RAS 26

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

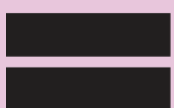
Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Comisiwn Cydraddoldeb a Hawliau Dynol

Response from: Equality and Human Rights Commission

# Not just another statistic

Life in Wales for asylum seekers and  
refugees



Comisiwn  
Cydraddoldeb a  
Hawliau Dynol

Equality and  
Human Rights  
Commission

Tudalen y pecyn 173

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## Who we are

The Equality and Human Rights Commission aims to reduce inequality, eliminate discrimination, strengthen good relations between people, and promote and protect human rights.

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# Introduction

**“We came here because of what we faced in our country and the only way to save ourselves and our families was to come here...we want to be a good part of this society, we want to serve this country, we don't want to just take and give nothing”**

In October 2008 the Equality and Human Rights Commission in Wales published **Who do you see?** This was a report based on the first major survey of attitudes in Wales towards race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, transgender, age, disability and human rights.

The survey revealed a Wales that is largely comfortable with people from different backgrounds. But it also found significant pockets of negative attitudes and prejudice. The most persistent negative attitudes centred around four groups of people - one of these groups were asylum seekers and refugees.

In responding to this the Commission in Wales undertook qualitative research to explore the real life experiences of asylum seekers and refugees. This focused on the areas of life where asylum seekers and refugees experience being treated unequally and to understand the impact of both actual and anticipated discrimination.

These findings have provided a fascinating insight into the lived experiences of asylum seekers and refugees and how they are treated by society in a number of different settings.

## Participants

Twenty asylum seekers and refugees participated in the research in total. Sixteen were seeking asylum at the time of interview and four were refugees who had been granted leave to remain in the UK.

All the respondents came to the UK from African nations including Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Algeria, Nigeria, Cameroon and Eritrea and one was from Eastern Europe. All interviews were conducted in pairs and of these, eight took place in Cardiff and two in Wrexham.

The aim of this report is to provide an overview of the individual experiences of asylum seekers and refugees. Given the in-depth and qualitative nature of the research, the sample is not intended to be representative of the composition of the participant groups. Instead it is intended to be broadly reflective of the different circumstances faced by asylum seekers and refugees living in Wales.

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# Experiences of asylum seekers and refugees

This section explores in some depth, the experiences of asylum seekers and refugees and the impact of the discrimination they experience, often on a daily basis.

Many asylum seekers and refugees told us they have had positive experiences in their communities and described Wales as a very welcoming place. However, some asylum seekers and refugees described a sense of resentment from some people within Wales and Welsh society. Some told us they felt negative attitudes were often reinforced by media coverage depicting asylum seekers and refugees as living off benefits and taking up housing, health and education services.

All the asylum seekers and refugees interviewed, said they were frustrated by the rules preventing them from working, paying taxes and contributing to the society they now lived in.

Participants spoke of the harassment, bullying and abuse they sometimes experienced in their day-to-day lives and the devastating impact this has had on their self confidence and feelings of self worth. There was also a feeling of being trapped in poverty and having little power to do anything to improve the situation. This often had an impact on children who also experienced the poverty, suffered inequality in school, and had their own expectations and ambitions limited by their parents' experiences.

## Public services

### Asylum system

**“And I felt like there was discrimination... when they say asylum seekers can't work because, why can't we work really? How are we supposed to eat? Because all they give us is like vouchers and you can't really live off Tesco's vouchers”**

During the interviews, most passion was roused by the asylum system itself as asylum seekers and refugees felt angry and frustrated with the damaging impact of this on themselves and their family. Criticism centred on the treatment of children, how families could be split up, as well as instances of alleged bullying and aggressive behaviour by public officials.

The asylum-seeking process was described as having a devastating impact on children, as families are often forced to move from one area of the country to the other. Parents felt this caused huge disruption to their children's lives, leaving them unable to settle, make friends and enjoy the benefits of continuous education in the same school. Furthermore, there were reports of children being split up from their parents and placed apart in different areas of the country, causing a huge amount of anxiety and distress for the families involved.

### Length of process

**“Because you don't really know. They don't send you letters...and they can take you any time, just do anything really”**

Where applications were refused the length of the appeal process was felt to be unnecessarily long and this increased the stress for individuals.

For some people it can take years to get a final decision. The majority of asylum seekers we spoke to had been living in the UK and pursuing asylum appeals for between four and six years. While there was an understanding of not expecting to be accorded full legal status immediately, it was certainly felt that the appeal process was unnecessarily lengthy. This prevented many respondents from making a full contribution to their new community and society.

Our findings show how not having a decision about status, and not knowing when the situation would be resolved had an inevitable impact on making plans for the future. This left many individuals with a sense of constant uncertainty, anxiety and insecurity.

Some participants felt this put their lives on hold, especially as the asylum process prevented them from working. Many described themselves as asylum seekers arriving in Wales with useful skills and qualifications but due to the lengthy asylum appeal process, were unable to use them for many years. For some people, this has resulted in loss of skills but also the UK losing out on the benefits individuals can offer.

**“But it really matters... you know why? Because you don’t know your future...our life is in limbo”**

**“If you’ve got [refugee] status it will be better...we can work, we can pay tax, we can do everything, we can go to college, university, which is my wish...”**

**“Everyone is missing out”**

## **Bullying and harassment**

**“...he will walk into my house without ringing my bell, without knocking on the door. I called him one day and I said ‘You are entering this house to check this house without knocking.’ I said ‘You don’t have that right’...”**

Some people told us how the uncertain status of themselves or family going through the asylum-seeking process made them vulnerable to bullying and harassment by public officials.

One woman reported being repeatedly visited by an official from the housing department of the local authority, who had twice let himself into her house without her permission. She decided to challenge him and explain that he was not allowed to enter her house without her permission.

Although he had not threatened her, she was disturbed by his behaviour. She contacted the housing department about him and found out that on the second time he had admitted himself to her home, he had been on annual leave. This frightened her and made her feel vulnerable and unsafe in her own home. She complained to another member of the department and since then, he had not visited her again.

Another female asylum seeker felt she had been victimised by a social worker. She described having received donations of furniture from the church and yet she felt this official had singled her out because she had nice things in her home. He visited her repeatedly and made an inventory of her possessions. Ultimately, she said he rescinded her entitlement to accommodation from the local authority and she was left homeless until someone from the housing department offered to help.

Another participant told us a manager from her local council had subjected her to intimidating treatment. She said that he came to her home and sat on her sofa phoning the UK Borders Agency and telling them that her application had failed a long time ago and he did not understand why they had not deported her.

The woman said she had made queries and discovered the official was having family problems. She felt that he was looking for someone to take his frustrations out on and that he picked on her because she was a Black Zimbabwean.

The impact of the experiences described left people feeling lacking in confidence and afraid to challenge behaviour, particularly from officials and organisations.

**“You know he had a spare key to my house and that is what he came. He didn’t come from the office, he left his house with the key to come to my house. I don’t know what he is coming to do, which is unfair”**

**“...He came to our house and was like ‘for asylum seekers you should not have all of these, I think you need to go back home because you’re living a really nice life here’...”**

**“He had nothing to do with the asylum team, he was a manager, but every time I went to the council he would make time to come and see me”**

## **Fear of repercussions**

**“You wouldn’t complain to the police ... You don’t know where it might lead with your asylum claim”**

Asylum seekers and refugees spoke of the complexity of the asylum and appeal system itself as a barrier. It was felt that complaining about unfair treatment could jeopardise their asylum claim and therefore most felt reluctant to do so.

Many participants reported a lack of confidence in the asylum system to be able to address their issues. There was also a sense of lacking the knowledge of their rights and the systems available to offer support.

**“Once you are outspoken...many people would actually start attacking you ... probably your case would be decided ... the repercussions are huge. I have seen it personally. I think I’m very unlikely to speak out from now”**

**“Even if you go to the police what is going to happen? What are you going to expect from the police?”**

**“It’s about knowing who to approach because if you know your rights you can in some way enforce them”**

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## Benefit payments and the card system

**“We are among the poorest families living on that small amount of money. And the government says in their manifesto ‘every child matters’ regardless of status or appearance. I am sure that we are not on the list”**

None of those who were still seeking asylum were eligible to work in the UK and most were receiving benefits. Each week respondents received £35 which was topped up directly onto their debit card. Many of the stories articulated the poverty and disadvantage resulting from this low level of benefit, but most complaints centred on the budget top-up card system itself.

The top-up mechanism was seen as very unfair. Participants described how they would not get their full £35 each week if they had not spent all the money received the week before. This meant that it was impossible to save even a small amount each week to pay for larger items and a number of people explained how the range of shops at which the card could be used was extremely limited.

**“...for my friends, sisters, neighbours who are single the balance on the top-up card is not carried over. So when they take your vouchers... thirty five pounds per week, if you are single you must spend everything, all the money, before the next week...”**

**“...why do I have to buy maybe a pushchair in Tesco when it is fifty pounds and they might have it in the charity shop for ten pounds?”**

**“I am from Africa and what I eat I don’t always get in Tesco; I get them in the small shops in the street but they don’t take budget top-up card from me... sometimes I do cry...”**

# Transport

**“People don’t want to sit near you”**

Some participants described discrimination when using public transport by drivers and passengers. One asylum seeker living in Cardiff had been racially abused by a bus driver but did not report it. Others described how some bus drivers ignored them if they asked a question, but spoke to other passengers.

One woman felt that she had been negatively treated because of her head scarf. She described an incident of standing inside a very crowded bus. When another woman got onto the bus and was not wearing a scarf and a man moved to offer his seat.

**“That’s why some people have a bad opinion about Muslims. They think that every woman that is scarved or a boy with a long beard, they are bad...”**

# Housing

**“I was literally left almost destitute, living in one room with two children for months”**

Some asylum seekers and refugees we spoke to were critical of how they were housed, very often the accommodation was too small or of inadequate quality. There was lack of clarity about how decisions are made about where to house asylum seekers and refugees.

Single men described the impact of living in shared accommodation with other single men from different cultures. With cramped conditions and very little privacy, one group described how they had converted a dining room into a bedroom themselves, in order to give themselves some sort of privacy and space.

Others gave examples of where some regulations and standards of social housing were not being followed.

The system of dispersal for asylum seekers was seen as intimidating and gave the lives of participants an added sense of uncertainty. Asylum seekers could be taken from the place where they lived (and may have lived for a number of years) and transported to another area of Great Britain.

One mother from Zimbabwe described how she had been housed in the Midlands for two years before moved to Southern England. Her teenage daughters joined her but she was then moved to Cardiff and forced to leave them behind. Although reunited, this experience was described as destabilising the family and causing them much distress and anxiety over several years.

**“The rules you know that say we are over five people here, then we should have two bathrooms. But that’s never going to happen is it?”**

**“I find my area very interesting because I think it’s the council’s little ghetto to be honest. It’s a whole load of council estates and council housing which they have decided to allocate to BME people and in itself I think it’s discriminatory”**

## Education

**“Because you don’t have status, you can’t do anything. I’ve tried with many universities but I failed”**

Most of the asylum seekers and refugees included in the research were not in education but many of them expressed a desire to study and do well.

It was felt that asylum seekers and refugees were being excluded from having access to educational opportunities because of costs. Asylum seekers are not entitled to free university education and as they are not allowed to work they have very little money to pay for fees, let alone the everyday cost of living. This lack of access to education increased the feeling of isolation and reduced opportunities for active social engagement.

Being unable to study at university or college meant that asylum seekers felt they were unable to achieve their ambitions to join higher education and obtain qualifications that could increase their life chances.

A few noted that positive steps had been made by some Welsh universities in agreeing to admit asylum seekers, though none were attending these.

Others of those we spoke to had been to school in Wales and their experiences were generally positive. One woman had children who were currently at school in Wales and she was happy with the way here children were treated.

However, another participant told us she had received racist abuse from a boy at her school. On reporting this, the school supported her and took action to ensure this did not happen again.

**“When I applied for university I got the place... but then a few weeks before I could start I was told that I couldn’t go because of the tuition fees”**

**“There was this day when I was in school and this boy just came to me, he said ‘you n\*\*\*\*’. I was really, really upset, so I cried”**

**“I went and told the teacher... I told my friends, of which they were white, they were all very upset, they were on my side... the racist boy got disciplined and then the school told him to say sorry to me and not to do it again...”**

## **Media portrayal and social stereotypes**

**“The media has contributed a lot I think. That is what I understand, especially the likes of the Daily Express and the Daily Mail...”**

Asylum seekers and refugees all spoke of negative media portrayals being unhelpful. It was felt that the media focused on stories about asylum seekers and refugees ‘jumping’ social housing queues and receiving preferential welfare treatment over British people.

Participants felt that because the media portrayal is hostile towards asylum seekers and refugees, it is often difficult to get their voices heard. Those interviewed said this made them feel unsure of their rights and how to exercise them, increasing their feelings of powerlessness.

Asylum seekers and refugees also told us of the lack of awareness amongst the public. In particular it was felt that there was very little understanding of why someone might need to leave their home country to come to Wales. There were also strong feelings that the media did not attempt to provide this information to clarify the situation. For some these attitudes increased feelings of isolation and lack of belonging. Others felt that political rhetoric and campaigning heightened misunderstandings.

**“We believe that there is bad press”**

**“People don’t realise the risk you put yourself when you come to this country... and for them to be like you’re nothing... and we don’t want you in this country, it’s like, where am I supposed to go?”**

**“We are here only to save ourselves from our country, dangerous or something else. Some of them, they take it and some of them don’t believe”**

**“Most of the Welsh they thought that asylum seekers are taking things from them... we want to save our life... that is the reason they don’t like us, that we are coming to get benefit only”**

**“They are like, those people should go back home... they shouldn’t be here.....and they’re scrounging off our tax money. And you feel so bad because you can’t help being like that”**

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**“You feel left out... like you’re an outsider and nobody wants to know you. Or you’re not a person”**

**“Sometimes they wouldn’t invite us to things just because they knew we didn’t have money... so you’ll feel left out...”**

**“How does that make you feel? Illegal - that’s the word I can find... you feel like just being you is something wrong. And you have no right to be... like you’re on a lower level than anybody else. That’s how I feel”**

**“...because you can’t help the situation. You can’t expect other people to understand because they don’t go through the same things as you do. So even if they go like ‘oh I understand what you’re going through’- they don’t”**

**“...when there is elections coming they should actually be sensitive enough... when they raise issues like immigration. They should be sensitive you know because... when you are on the media, when you are on the TV screen you are speaking with millions. You are speaking to millions... but make sure you know it was the most vulnerable people”**

## **The Community**

**“I like the people here, they are very friendly”**

Many asylum seekers and refugees have positive experiences in their communities and describe Wales as a very welcoming place to be.

Some spoke of confusion about their religion, beliefs and culture which sometimes led to misunderstanding, resentment and disadvantage.

**“I think the Welsh people really are fantastic people”**

**“There is a freedom here and they accept other cultures and religions”**

**“...sometimes people, when they talk to me, they don’t think I’m Muslim because most people here think that Muslim people, it means scarved...”**

**“I think the public has the idea that to be a Muslim means to appear a certain way for both women and men”**

**“The good Muslims are different, the main point in our religion is peace with everybody and I think that we are not different than the Christian people, everybody wants peace...”**

## Street level abuse

**“...they’ll be shouting out like ‘Go back to your country, we don’t want you here’ and start cheering ‘BNP’ and it makes you feel really insecure”**

There was a wide range of street-level abuse and violence reported during the interviews which asylum seekers and refugees said made them feel unwanted and inhuman.

One woman told us of having an egg thrown at her as she walked to her home in Cardiff. She believed it was racially motivated but was unable to identify the culprit so did not report it to the police.

Another family living in Cardiff described having the windows of their home broken and sensed that this was racially motivated. In describing the impact of this treatment participants described feeling ashamed about sharing their experiences.

Two younger women described experiencing a number of threatening and intimidating incidents when out and about in their local neighbourhood. These two women also told us of intimidation from men following them along the street and racist name-calling from children in the local area.

Another women told us of two or three women in her area who had been moved simply because they had worn headscarves and suffered abuse from the local community.

For asylum seekers and refugees these experiences had an onward impact on their families. One woman felt unable to wear her scarf and so wore a hat or hood to hide the fact she was a Muslim. As a mother, she was particularly concerned that her son would suffer teasing at school unless their religion was hidden.

The findings revealed that the impact of these experiences meant that asylum seekers and refugees anticipated abuse on a regular basis. This was not only because of their actual experiences but fear of an unprovoked attack at any time. As a result a number of participants feared going out, especially at night. They said they felt powerless and unable to challenge people over their behaviour for fear of reprisal.

**“You just feel like being you is something wrong. And you have no right to be”**

**“I think it’s the colour [of our skin] because most of them wouldn’t even know our status here”**

**“...my window was smashed... I just reported it to the council and nobody acted. Just took the council more than a year to ask, to move me somewhere else”**

**“And I just feel ashamed, even when I walk through the streets of Cardiff, because you know... I didn't think things would go that way, I thought it was important to share our own experiences”**

**“When I first came here...we were walking to my house...this car started slowing down and then they chucked alcohol on us and then they just drove off and were laughing”**

**“The other day I was walking from my house to town and there were boys walking and they just started swearing at me for nothing, I didn't do anything. I was just walking...it's not acceptable”**

**“Where I live there are loads of little kids and when they see me around they are like ‘n\*\*\*\*, n\*\*\*\*’ and it doesn't really get me upset because they are still young. But then it gets me thinking where did they hear this from and it's obvious that it's coming from their parents, and I live around these people”**

**“You're just scared because you don't want to make the situation any worse than it is. Like if you were to confront them they'll think ‘Oh, she's putting up a challenge’ and most of them like a challenge... if they decide to attack you and you're on your own then that's a really stupid thing to do. It's better to walk away and leave it”**

**“I think I was with my mum and these two lads were walking really, really close to us. My mum was like ‘walk faster, walk faster’ and I thought ‘why should I walk faster?’ Then we got to the traffic lights and they got really, really close and I turned around, and as I turned around he was like ‘what are you looking at’ and I said ‘well, you're walking close to me so I'm getting worried’ and he's just like ‘well, you shouldn't be in this place anyway’...”**

**“They had the BNP supporters come here so we just had to stay away, the whole weekend... and you do come across them, especially at night-time. Like if you're walking around they'll just start shouting out things at you and you just feel really, really, really unsafe because there's loads of them and there's only two of you, and they're male and you're female”**

# Shops

**“They really don’t explain these things to you [promotions] and I get the feeling it is because of the colour of your skin”**

For some asylum seekers and refugees simply using their local stores and supermarkets presented problems. Many described negative attitudes such as being followed by security or staff for no apparent reason.

One woman explained how cashiers at the checkout tended not to offer any help or tell her the amount she owed for her shopping. Instead they expected her to read the amount on the till herself. These attitudes were seen to be more prevalent in smaller stores.

Many asylum seekers had no choice about where they shopped and were only able to buy food at large supermarkets, such as Asda and Tesco because of the credit card benefit system. For those not living near a big store, buying food required a long journey across town with the bus fare paid from very limited resources.

**“I would rather go into big supermarkets rather than risk going into smaller ones to be discriminated against, which I feel happens a lot”**

**“I need to go to Tesco far away because ... you will not find a Tesco in the cities... so it took me almost one hour to walk, come back with the milk just to feed the children ... put these children at risk just for thirty five pounds”**

# Banks and post office

Banks and post offices also seen as difficult places to access advice and services. One woman told us how staff would suddenly go on their breaks or the close the counters when she reached the front of the queue. She described a recent experience of talking to a man behind her in a queue about the slow service. She explained this was because she was Black, so she left him go first. The man didn’t believe her until he was waved over to a cashier desk straight away. This was described as being a very common occurrence among our participants.

# The workplace

**“I did not understand why with Cambridge qualifications and a degree, I would be signposted ... for a job in a factory”**

Many of those who had made successful applications for asylum were now officially resident in the UK and in work. While not everyone felt they had faced any discrimination in the workplace, some did. One woman had successfully claimed asylum but when she first looked for work, the Jobcentre had signposted her to low paid jobs in factories, requiring no qualifications. In Wales the qualifications which she had worked hard for and received in her own country were worthless and did not account for anything.

Finding work herself inside the customer contact centre of a major national bank this woman experienced further discrimination both inside and outside the organisation. Although, she described being grateful to the bank for taking her on and for offering her additional training, she faced prejudice from some of her colleagues. She told us they didn't believe or recognise her skills or qualifications because of her background and accent.

Her performance was identified as very good, she received monthly bonuses and was ranked within the top three members of staff for processing customer applications quickly. But despite this, she said she faced a number of complaints from customers who believed she was based in a foreign call centre because of her accent.

She also felt unable to challenge the behaviour of either her former colleagues or customers as she felt this might impede her progress within the organisation. It also had a negative effect on self esteem and confidence.

This made it difficult for her to progress at the bank and she has since left to work for a charity.

**“There were different individuals...customers...you had to speak to who found it very unnerving to speak to someone with a foreign accent and in that sense they were very discriminatory”**

**“I think probably they think you don't have the skills. They underestimate you...”**

## Access to justice

**“And I just feel ashamed even when I walk through the streets of Cardiff ... you know, I didn’t think things would go that way. I thought that it was important to share our own experiences. If we don’t speak it out, who is going to speak it out? That was my expectation was ...but I think I was wrong”**

Asylum seekers did not appear well informed of their rights or how to challenge behaviour, either on the street or at a more official level.

Many of them spoke of being scared of increased violence or victimisation if they took action, feeding further isolation, disempowerment and feelings of shame and disappointment.

Asylum seekers and refugees also spoke of the complexity of the asylum system itself as a barrier, and were afraid that their asylum claims might be jeopardised should they take action.

**“There are people you know ... the few who shout a lot will shout. Being in the right does not mean you have the power. They still dominate the majority”**

**“As soon as I sought sanctuary things totally changed...things totally changed... mind you I am lucky to come to the United Kingdom, but I always regret coming here, you know”**

**“So the expectation was a lot, getting the recognition, integrating into the society you know and the way of life there and then living a decent life. That was the expectation but years have gone and everything is ruined and no, I just have no future I could say, I foresee nothing, nothing positive”**

**“You wouldn’t complain to the police ... You don’t know where it might lead with your claim”**

## Practical measures and solutions

**“Yes, like if they strength their law...like for discrimination and everything...that might help”**

As the people we talked to described the prejudice they encountered on a daily basis, solutions also emerged. Significantly the ideas on what needs to change match closely with priorities identified by many other groups the Commission has engaged with other the past three years. Tudalen y pecyn 189

Clear, simple information was seen as a critical first step in increasing awareness and improving relationships between people. Participants described the need for awareness raising to change attitudes and behaviours towards asylum seekers and refugees. One individual suggested using programmes on the television to educate people, for example through soap storylines.

Overall, people wanted there to be large scale and high impact awareness campaigns. Such campaigns would change attitudes and behaviours and this was seen as the key to better lives for everyone in the future.

Several solutions were suggested for helping people to have better access to justice. This included the government telling people clearly where to turn for advice and who to approach for help in accessing rights but also having a better understanding of rights. Others suggested strengthening the law to prevent discrimination happening and enforcing discrimination law with more and bigger fines or sanctions.

**“It’s about knowing who to approach because if you know your rights you can in some way enforce them”**

**“It’s how they’ve been brought up...Because when you get to know them they’re just the same as you”**

## Next steps

The evidence gathered in this research gives a voice to people who are seldom heard and paints a vivid picture of life for those experiencing prejudice and negative attitudes on a daily basis.

Despite the challenges everyone we spoke to suggested improvements that could be made, how attitudes could be changed and what steps could be taken to make lives better.

As a top priority everyone highlights the need to change attitudes and behaviours through awareness-raising and through education. People feel that changing public perceptions of the issues is a task for a wide range of players.

These include the media, government, public service providers and employers. Making a concerted effort to promote positive images in all of these areas would transform lives.

People spoke about the good stories that could be told about the contributions they make to society and how these are rarely promoted. They spoke about the media and the workplace as key areas where this could make a difference.

Personal contact is seen as the key to building understanding, trust and better relations within communities.

Most people talked about how important staff attitudes are in relationships with public services. They said that simpler systems acknowledging one size doesn't fit all would be a big step forward.

Many people spoke about the role of advice and advocacy as a life-line in coping with everyday tasks and in understanding rights.

Finances are very stretched for everyone. Nevertheless, there are opportunities for a broad range of individuals and organisations to take actions and make significant progress in achieving the positive next steps highlighted by those who participated in our survey.

The Commission's priorities are evidence based and outcome focused. The Triennial Review, 'How Fair is Britain' will underpin all of our future work and the findings from this research add to our evidence in Wales and will contribute to shaping our priorities.

We will use our regulatory powers under equality and human rights law and this includes promoting understanding and effective practice.

We will be sharing the findings from this research with a wider audience. We are organising conferences and events with specific audiences, such as the media, to promote change.

But the solutions that emerge do not necessarily lie in the Commission's hands. In many areas it is for other organisations and individuals to make the small changes necessary to tackle these issues. Together these will enable us all to make progress towards a fairer Wales – a Wales where everyone is confident and treated with dignity and respect.



# Appendix 1

## Methodology

GfK NOP conducted individual interviews with 20 asylum seekers and refugees.

Interviews took place between 7 January and 10 February 2010 in various locations across Wales. All interviews were conducted face-to-face. Where it was appropriate, a paired interview approach was used. The interview approach encouraged open and honest responses and was best suited to the hard-to-reach nature of the sample.

Interviewees were recruited via organisations working with the different participant groups in Wales. Some of these organisations were activist in nature and some were support groups. Researchers made contact with these organisations and set up interviews with the participants through them.

Given the in-depth and qualitative nature of the research, the sample was not intended to be representative of the composition of the participant groups. Neither was it intended to reflect their geographic dispersal. Rather, it was intended to be broadly reflective of the different circumstances faced by people from each of the participant groups.

Participant Group	Location		No. interviews
Asylum seekers and refugees	South	Cardiff	8 paired
	North	Wrexham	2 paired

Given this method of recruitment, researchers were limited in the quotas they could set on the sample, 12 male and 8 female.

All of the asylum seekers and refugees had arrived in the UK from African countries including Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Cameroon, Nigeria, Algeria and Eritrea, except one participant who was from Eastern Europe. A good spread of ages was achieved across the sample, as shown in the following table.

Participant Group	TOTAL	Age				
		16-21	22-34	34-49	50-64	65+
Asylum seekers & refugees	20	4	5	6	3	2

A discussion guide was used in all interviews to direct the conversation and ensure key questions and areas for discussion were covered. This guide was developed by GfK NOP and the Commission and is included in appendix 2.

All participants were provided with a £35 incentive for taking part in the research. This was intended to thank them for their time and to cover any travel costs incurred in attending the interview. During the interviews, all participants were provided with an information sheet directing them to support services should they require these. This is also included in the appendix 2.

GfK NOP and the Commission would like to thank the following organisations for their interest in this project and the support they offered throughout it:

- **Welsh Refugee Council**
- **Swansea University**
- **Refugee Voice in Wales**
- **Displaced People in Action**
- **Wales Strategic Migration Partnership**

# Appendix 2

## Discussion guide

### 1. CURRENT CIRCUMSTANCES 10mins

(Aim: to introduce the subject and find out about the respondent)

#### Moderator

- Thank respondents for taking part in the research, introduce self and GfK NOP
- Interview will last 1 hour, explain purpose of research:
  - > *GfK NOP are carrying out research for the Equalities and Human Rights Commission Wales to explore your real life experiences of discrimination and prejudice as well as your thoughts on solutions.*
- Reassure re: confidentiality, recording and MRS Code of Conduct
- Explain importance of being able to say what they think, no right or wrong answers, need for honesty, validity of opinions, any questions?
- Reassure that it's OK to say if they don't understand a question and to ask for it to be said differently.
- Provide recognition that this is a sensitive area and if you want to stop interview / need to take a break, this is absolutely fine.

#### Respondent

- Name, are you working or not working at the moment, what are your main activities during the day (if not working) , interests, where do you live?
- Tell me about living in this area – what do you like/not like about living here?
- Tell me about the things that are important to you at the moment?

Prompt: events, relationships, activities, interests, housing, education, money, work, etc

## 2. EXPERIENCE OF DISCRIMINATION AND PREJUDICE

15mins

### Understanding

As you know, this research is to explore your real life experiences of discrimination and prejudice. Thinking about this:

- What do you understand by discrimination and prejudice?
  - > How would you describe discrimination and prejudice?
  - > Where does discrimination and prejudice happen?
  - > When does it happen?
  - > What type of people face discrimination?
- *Moderator: Show Card B*
  - > What do you think of these definitions?
  - > How would you change them?
- Do you believe you have ever experienced discrimination and/or prejudice?
  - > Tell me about these situations – what happened, where did they take place?
  - > How often does this happen?
  - > Why do you think this happened?
  - > How did this situation affect you?
  - > What impact did it have on your life?
  - > *Moderator: Show Card A*
    - Have you experienced discrimination and/or prejudice in any of these areas of life?
    - Question as above...

### Impact

- Thinking about the impact of discrimination and prejudice, how has being discriminated against and/or experiencing prejudice made you feel?
  - > How has it affected you?
  - > In what ways does the worry of being discriminated against and or facing prejudice stop you from doing things you want to do?
  - > In what ways does it make you do things differently?
  - > To what extent has this ever made you:
    - Do things you would otherwise not have done?
    - Not do things you would otherwise have done?
- Does the thought of being discriminated against and/or experiencing prejudice worry you?
  - > If yes, in what situations / which areas of your life?
    - *Prompt using Show Card A if necessary*

Tudalen y pecyn 195

- > If no, in what situations might being discriminated against and/or experiencing prejudice worry you?
  - *Prompt using dartboard / Show Card A if necessary*

### 3. OUTCOMES OF DISCRIMINATION AND PREJUDICE 20mins

- Thinking about the situations where you experienced discrimination and prejudice:
  - > Did you tell anyone?
    - If yes: Who did you tell? Why them? What happened?
    - If no: Why didn't you tell anyone? What made it difficult to tell someone? What would make it easier?
  - > What action did you take? (What action did the person you told take on your behalf?)
    - If took action:
      - What prompted you to take action?
      - What was the result of this?
      - How happy were you with this result?
      - What result would you have wanted?
      - How could you have got this result?
    - If did not take action:
      - What prevented you from taking action?
      - What could have helped you take action?
      -
- How can people who are treated unfairly because of who they are get the result they want?
  - > What would have been the result you wanted?
  - > How could you have got the result you wanted?
  - > How confident would you have been in being able to get the result you wanted in that situation? What would have stopped you?
  - > If you were in the same situation again, what would now prompt you / prevent you from trying to get the result you wanted?
  - > What would prompt you to take action in future? What might prevent you from taking action in future?

### 4. PRACTICAL MEASURES & SOLUTIONS 15mins

- Thinking about the situations where you experienced discrimination and/or prejudice :
  - > What could have been done to prevent these arising in the first place?

- In each situation, what could have helped you to challenge the discrimination and/or prejudice?
- How could it have been made easier for you to challenge the discrimination and/or prejudice and got the outcomes/result you wanted?
- *Moderator: read out Show Card C:*
  - > What action would you advise this person to take?
  - > How would you advise them to get the result they want?
  - > What should the result of this situation be?
  - > What do you think you would have done?
- Why might people not challenge the discrimination and/or prejudice they experience?
  - > What might prevent them from doing this?
  - > What concerns might they have?
- What action could the following people have taken:
  - > Those behaving/treating you unfairly
  - > You (the one being treated unfairly because of who you are)
  - > The law / courts
  - > The government
  - > Any other individuals / organisations involved
  - > Citizens Advice Bureau
  - > Employer
  - > School, college etc
  - > Shop
  - > Other

## 6. **SUMMARY**

**5mins**

- Overall, how fairly do you think people in Wales are treated today?
- Overall, how fairly do you feel you are treated at the moment?
- Is there anything else you would like to say before we finish?
- Check whether respondent would like details of local support organisations. Leave card with details in case they want to add anything or get in touch

**THANK & CLOSE**

## Contact us

You can find out more or get in touch with us via our website:

[www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com)

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Textphone: 0845 604 8820

Fax: 0845 604 8830

[waleshelpline@equalityhumanrights.com](mailto:waleshelpline@equalityhumanrights.com)

RAS 27

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Cyngor Sir Caerfyrddin

Response from: Carmarthenshire County Council

1. Carmarthenshire County Council is committed to welcoming 60 households over a five year period from April 2016. Council members voted unanimously in favour of participating in the Home Office scheme, and this has received firm backing of Executive Board, with the Deputy Leader of the Council taking a personal interest and involvement in the success of the scheme.
2. The scheme is co-ordinated by a multi-agency steering group, which meets monthly. Chaired by the Deputy Leader of the Council, it has high-level representation from Hywel Dda Local Health Board, Education, Housing, Dyfed Powys Police, Communities First, Job Centre, Coleg Sir Gâr, Carmarthenshire Association of Voluntary Services, the Project Manager and our support agency, Ethnic Youth Support Team.
3. The Council sources suitable homes through our in-house social lettings agency (soon to be re-named Simple Lettings). The properties are all well-maintained, carpeted and decorated to a high standard by the property owner. Furnishing is paid for by the Council, but arranged by the support agency. Rents are paid at Local Housing Allowance level. Simple Lettings charges a management fee from this, and the remainder is passed on to the property owner. Simple Lettings arranges minor repairs, heating maintenance and so on once the tenant is in the property.
4. So far, three families have arrived in Carmarthenshire, with a total of 15 family members. Four more families are due to arrive in November and December, and a further six properties are due to come into the scheme in the next few weeks, ready for occupation early in the New Year. We are therefore on target for more than 12 families in the first year of the scheme in the County.
5. Our Project Manager checks that any properties that are proposed to be brought into the scheme are suitable. This includes that the location has a good range of local facilities; that there are available places in local schools and that there is availability in the local GP practice. Dyfed Powys Police checks that there is no known reason why the property might be unsuitable from the perspective of crime or social cohesion. Where there is a shortage of school places for particular ages of children, we inform the Home Office of this, who try to match a family with the property in the light of this information.

Robin Staines BA (Hons.), MA, MChE

Pennaeth Tai & Diogelu'r Cyhoedd  
Adran Cymunedau

3 Heol Spilman, Caerfyrddin, SA31 1LE.  
Tŷ Elwyn, Llanelli, SA15 3AP.

Neuadd y Dref, Heol Iscennen, Rhydaman, SA18 3BE.

Head of Housing & Public Protection  
Department for Communities

3 Spilman Street, Carmarthenshire, SA31 1LE.  
Tŷ Elwyn, Llanelli, SA15 3AP.

Town Hall, Iscennen Road, Ammanford, SA18 3BE.



BUDDSODDWYR | INVESTORS  
MEWN POBL | IN PEOPLE



6. A local panel, drawn from 5 representatives on the steering group (Education, Housing, Mental Health / Learning Disabilities, Health, Project Manager) checks that Carmarthenshire is able to provide for the needs of the family nominated, based on biographical and medical details from United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, passed on via the Home Office's secure website, Movelt. Liaison with Home Office has been good, with swift responses to our requests for information and advice.
7. The Coleg Sir Gâr representative also represents Syria Sir Gâr, a voluntary support group which has been set up to provide informal support to the refugee families, which is over and above what can be provided through the Home Office scheme. Syria Sir Gâr has held open meetings in areas where refugees are about to arrive. This allows members of the local community to ask about how the scheme works and to have their questions answered in a relatively informal setting. It also informs local people about how they can get involved in supporting the families.
8. This has proved very successful, with Syria Sir Gâr being able to put out a call for things that are needed by the families, such as a bicycle for a teenager, or homework support after school. It can also reduce the amount of inappropriate support being offered.
9. Syria Sir Gâr also organises social events for the local community, to which the Syrian families are invited. This helps to introduce the families to local people, and it is fun too! The last social event had another spin-off benefit, as one local couple decided to offer their property for rent to the scheme.
10. Carmarthenshire County Council awarded the support contract to Ethnic Youth Support Team (EYST) on a five year contract. Two experienced and dedicated staff provide the day-to-day support. This starts before the family arrives, by ensuring that children are registered in advance with local schools and GP practices. As mentioned above, EYST also furnishes the property, ensuring that beds and bedding are appropriate for the specific family. EYST arrange transport from the airport and ensure that a welcoming meal is provided. An appointment will have already been made for the family to see the GP and the Job Centre in the first two days after arrival. The schools where the children are registered are also visited as soon as possible after arrival. EYST has a number of volunteer Arab interpreters, who are needed most in the first few weeks after arrival.
11. Adults attend bespoke English lessons three times a week, which start the week after the family arrives. Sessions are being organised in different parts of the County, as the families are not all in the same part of the County. A local nursery is provided to look after pre-school children so that the adults can participate fully in these classes. To date, we have not provided Welsh language tuition, although this will be offered to the families at the right time. This is particularly important as some of the families will be living in areas where Welsh is the main language of the local community.
12. The families have been receiving a good service from local GPs. Dental appointments have been arranged as necessary also. Emergency hospital treatment was also needed for one refugee. One adult refugee is

unfortunately still waiting for an appointment with a specialist surgeon to treat a bullet lodged in his neck. The referral was made by the GP surgery shortly after arrival in Wales in June 2016. The adult concerned is unable to look for work, as the bullet is causing extreme pain, and it could be dangerous to engage in manual work as it is close to the spinal cord, so this is affecting the person's job prospects.

13. We have not experienced any significant social tensions to date, although we remain vigilant about this. With all the partners working together closely, we are in a position to react quickly and appropriately to any issues that may arise.
14. Welsh Government 'Welcome to Wales' packs have been provided to all the families in Arabic and English, and in adult and child-friendly versions. Carmarthenshire has also provided a local supplement in Arabic and English, which covers the basics about local services and how to access them.
15. Carmarthenshire has few facilities for Moslems, as there is only one mosque, which is part time. There are no halal food shops. The families tend to make a once a week trip to Swansea on the bus, where they can attend Friday prayers and stock up on halal food. After the first couple of weeks, they have been travelling on their own. As we re-settle families further away from Swansea, we will be taking extra measures to enable the families meet their cultural and religious needs. For instance, we will be providing a larger freezer, so that halal food can be stored. Although bus transport is available, we are ready to work flexibly with the local community to help our families where needed. We are looking into alternative arrangements for sourcing halal food without a trip to Swansea. We believe that these issues should be recognised and tackled, but they should not be used as a reason not to help refugee families.

**16. Summary** Carmarthenshire has set up and delivered an effective support system for the Syrian families, and is well-placed to meet our commitment of receiving 60 families within five years. We have compensated for a lack of experience in this area of work by bringing all the relevant agencies together, and a willingness to learn from others. There will undoubtedly be challenges ahead, but we are ready to face them successfully, for the benefit of people who are in urgent need.

Yours sincerely

**Matt Miller**  
**Arweinydd Anghenion Tai / Housing Needs Lead**

RAS 28

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Dinas a Sir Abertawe

Response from: City and County of Swansea

***the National Assembly for Wales' Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee's consultation on the pace and effectiveness of the Welsh Government approach to resettling refugees through the UK Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS); the effectiveness of the '[Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan](#)'; the support and advocacy available to unaccompanied asylum seeking children in Wales; and the role and effectiveness of the Welsh Government's Community Cohesion Delivery Plan in ensuring the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Welsh communities.***

***<http://gov.wales/docs/dsjlg/publications/equality/160310-community-cohesion-plan-en.pdf>***

The City and County of Swansea (CCS) has reviewed the response from the WLGA which it supports but would like to add a few additional comments, bullet pointed below:

**The pace and effectiveness of the Welsh Government's approach to resettling refugees through the UK Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS)**

- Initially the WG took some time to recognise that LAs come from different starting points and one size doesn't fit all and different LAs need different levels of support. Some LAs will already have some things in place
- Education, as devolved in Wales, could be an area where the WG could offer greater meaningful support. English language support in schools is under more pressure with greater demand and less resources. In the long term this pressure on resources could have a negative effect on the educational development of all children regardless of language need.
- Supportive funding for migrant/refugee/asylum seekers is often offered on a strategic level including training or mapping whereas actual support services on the ground are still sparse
- More resources and focus on training/upskilling refugees is mentioned in the WLGA's response. To add to this, there is a lack of properly qualified interpreters in Wales, despite having a pool of multi-lingual residents. Financial support for training in this area could only be a long term asset for Wales and provide employment for many migrants and refugees

**The effectiveness of the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan**

- CCS is in agreement that the Plan is weak and has no substance/resources behind the actions or obligation by the WG to assist in delivery (some of which are already happening) /are vague or irrelevant.
- In addition to more funding in devolved areas such as English language support in statutory education as above, funding for English for Speakers of

Other Languages (ESOL) has also been cut which has resulted in insufficient English classes for asylum seekers and refugees (an essential skill for integration into life in Wales).

Health Services are also feeling the strain and more resources could be offered to GP Surgeries which support new migrants, who tend to have complex/high needs and require interpreters; and Health Access Teams who support asylum seekers when they first arrive and, in Swansea, are feeling the strain as numbers increase and the turnover is faster

### **The support and advocacy available to UASC in Wales**

- As above in terms of need for more qualified interpreters

### **The role and effectiveness of WG's Community Cohesion Delivery Plan in ensuring the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Welsh communities**

- In Swansea the Community Cohesion Coordinator has not been used directly on the asylum seeker and refugee programmes as there is already an officer in place who has been doing the work for some years. However, the community cohesion coordinator has linked with other related agendas such as hate crime and trafficking and thus has provided integrated support in this way.
- Because of the WG's Community Cohesion Plan, there has sometimes been confusion over responsibilities such as Social Services which has ultimate responsibility for safeguarding and in terms of asylum seeker and refugee resettlement/integration agendas. Clarity on overall responsibilities for these areas and the importance of safeguarding needs to be stressed in the Plan.

It is therefore the view in CCS that LAs could have more autonomy over where they feel the best focus for community cohesion would be in their area and that the message that LAs have the ultimate responsibility needs to be reinforced in the Plan.

### **Additional/Overall Comments**

- The work that WSMP has carried out in relation to asylum seeker and refugee agendas in Wales is commendable. From this work, good partnership work has developed between local authorities across Wales.

RAS 29

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Llywodraethau Lleol Conwy, Gwynedd ac Ynys Môn (Gogledd-orllewin Cymru)

Response from: Conwy, Gwynedd and the Isle of Anglesey Local Authorities (North West Wales)

## **Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee Inquiry into Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Wales**

**Joint Submission on behalf of Conwy, Gwynedd and the Isle of Anglesey Local Authorities (North West Wales).**

### **Introduction:**

The three Local Authorities in North West Wales have agreed to send the following joint response to the inquiry into Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Wales by the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee.

This inputs within this report are offered without prejudice to any particular Local Authority since there exists similar but slightly different delivery mechanisms within each Local Authority boundary, each with it's own strengths and particularities.

It is acknowledged that due to the various conflicts throughout the World, that the UK has made a pledge to support the millions of people displaced or evacuated from the various conflicts in the Middle East and surrounding areas, which has subsequently led to the increase of asylum seekers and refugees arriving in Wales and the United Kingdom.

This response is therefore opportune in that progress across the three Local Authorities in North-West Wales can be reported on, in the theme of evolving and developing schemes which may bring about further consistency towards a common delivery approach within the different regions of Wales.

The need for consistency, quality of support, delivery standards and stability in terms of managing expectations has been paramount in building the foundations to go on for the next five years, and to ensure that refugees have a good chance of success in terms of integration, feeling safe and being able to make a positive contribution to the areas in which they have been re-settled.

It must also be acknowledged that there are no current Home Office designated dispersal areas in North-West Wales – Wrexham is the only official dispersal area in the region and is located in North-East Wales.

The North Wales Region has a long and successful history of successfully regionalising projects - some projects and workstreams are ripe for regionalisation, however others are more suitable for close collaboration with local management and delivery structures. The schemes which will be reported on in this paper have been delivered with excellent Regional Collaboration, reporting up to National (All-Wales)

committees but being locally operationally managed under cost effective local structures.

The diversity of the population in North-West Wales is very low compared to other areas of Wales and the UK, and so capacity in terms of the number of 'regular' or third sector organisations and support agencies who may be involved and with experience to support refugees is very much lacking compared to larger conurbations.

Creative solutions have therefore had to be sought e.g. additions to existing support contracts, searching for suitably qualified and experienced staff and building new relationships with Mosques etc. in order to expedite effective delivery.

#### **A. The pace and effectiveness of the Welsh Government's approach to resettling refugees through the UK Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS):**

Since the initial summit hosted by the First Minister in Wales, and the initial Briefing Paper circulated by the Home Office in October, 2015, Local Authorities have worked diligently to co-operate on this scheme. The WLGA and the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership have also played an important role in liaising with Local Authorities to promulgate the scheme throughout Wales under the stewardship of the Welsh Government and the Home Office.

From the initial engagement with Council Leaders and Chief Executives to ascertain an initial position statement, there has been support for the need to have a co-ordinated approach to respond to the humanitarian crises presented by the plight of the refugees arriving from Europe, and Local Authorities have recognised their obligation to play their part in the scheme.

There is a recognition that whilst overall co-ordination must be planned on a National basis taking account of the immediate and longer term requirements of the refugees, including financial commitments and deployment of resources such as housing and access to education, then local arrangements needed to be expedited in line with available local structures and resources.

Following the initial approach from the WLGA and the Department of Communities and Local Government / Home Office, the Welsh Government organised an 'All-Wales' conference in Llandrindod Wells through the 'Fairer Futures' division. This event was **the catalyst** required to move up a gear in Wales, and following the excellent grounding received by key stakeholders at that event, a series of regional briefings were held to go through scheme requirements and expectations in a more robust manner.

There was also a need across all Local Authorities to seek political ratification for the scheme and its deliverables which required bilingual reports and portfolio member briefings. The requirement to seek cabinet/council approval may have caused some initial delay, but in the medium to long-term the Authority from above has allowed a fully corporate approach to be taken by each Local Authority which has proved beneficial. Local Government Departments have reviewed their likely contribution

and the impact such a demand would have on service continuity (particularly in the current climate of dwindling budgets and austerity measures).

Local Authorities already have day to day structures and processes which would ensure an appropriate and humanitarian response within such a national programme, however this client group raised new challenges in respect of potential language barriers e.g. the need to provide transportation, an initial induction, and to establish basic requirements which were not typical of the local population e.g. biometric details, new bank accounts, new registration for health support and fast-track access to benefits etc.

The Welsh Government developed a useful 'Welcome to Wales' guide in English and Arabic as part of the 'understanding Wales' pack. They also developed a helpful booklet for young people on the same topic in an 'easy to read' format. However in terms of orientation, there is a need to have access to an induction toolkit (An All-Wales version?) to assist with the settling in process. Latterly some of the scheme guidance issued by the Home Office has helped with defining key agency roles and responsibilities, however a Wales version would be preferred.

It was advantageous for key lead officers from North Wales to join the previously established South Wales SVPRS Operational Delivery group (Chaired by the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership), but it soon became apparent that as several members of that group had been selected to be the initial UK pilot areas, it was necessary for North Wales to go through a phase of 'catching-up'. This necessitated the establishment of North Wales' own sic-county Regional SVPRS Group to find common ground and to learn from each other's experiences.

Whilst the initial links within Local Authorities and other key agencies were established through the Regional Community Cohesion Co-ordinators, Local Authorities have now nominated key lead officers to host meetings, prepare minutes and agendas. The two Regional Community Cohesion Co-ordinators for North Wales now attend the All-Wales meeting and provide updates as well as feedback on all Regional matters (*more effective use of everyone's time*).

From the outset, there have also been local delivery groups in each Local Authority area and after the initial take-up of the scheme. County groups have facilitated the development of collection, reception and support arrangements, and the lead officer status has been transferred from Community Cohesion Co-ordinators to managerial posts in Housing etc. with close support from Education, Social Services and other key partners like the Police, Health and the Department of Work and Pensions.

The approach in all areas has been handled sensitively, ranging from sourcing suitable accommodation, be it within the private or social rented to liaising with local services to ensure refugee families were able to integrate. As with such complex matters, the timeframe for families arriving in the UK has varied considerably and the needs of what Local Authorities can offer varies depending on what can practically be offered at specific locations, particularly in respect of rurality and transport links.

To date the settlement areas have been carefully chosen in order to maximise the chances of successful integration, i.e. access to schools, good access to Public Transport, prayer facilities, specialist food outlets, access to peer support networks and Health Facilities etc. however in future refugees will need to be settled in different areas where there is adequate capacity and support. One factor that has needed some input is the management of the geographical expectation i.e. especially when families have left a large city and are being re-settled in a different landscape. In future this will require further work up-front so that expectations are as realistic as possible and the Home Office has promised that clients will receive an up-front briefing in order that expectations are fair and reasonable.

Local Support Providers have worked closely with each Local Authority to develop a trusting relationship within County SVPRS Steering Groups and case officers, however there appears to have been a deficiency in the information content shared or presented to families prior to their arrival in the UK. It is important that there is consistency in respect of UK Law, Citizenship and what refugees can reasonably expect after arrival, and that comparisons are not made with facilities offered in other countries.

Similarly the definition of 'vulnerable persons' may have been taken out of context originally in terms of the varying medical conditions suffered by the refugees. In several cases, there have been significant health issues which has necessitated additional resources and support and even those cases were classed Nationally by the Home Office as 'low vulnerability families'.

The support from local residents, community leaders and voluntary groups has been excellent – they have been keen to offer their services and donate to the scheme with local events being arranged to welcome the families and individuals. Some counties have organised special volunteer/third sector briefing meetings to keep everyone up to date but taking care not to breach any data protection issues.

There has been a continuous tirade of press and media enquiries, which has needed careful handling in order to protect vulnerable families and to give them every opportunity of success.

Support from Education and local Colleges has been excellent, however in some counties there is a shortage of pupil availability capacity in schools which are deemed to be in areas suitable for settlement. In one school on Anglesey, the Local Authority even match-funded an application for additional capacity in order to meet a shortfall.

Whilst the provision of ESOL has been arranged locally, there have also been opportunities for young people within the scheme to attend an intensive Welsh Language Learner's Course in a Welsh Language Centre in one county.

Operational toolkits like the one prepared by the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership (WSMP) has also played a key co-ordination and supportive role in assisting authorities in developing arrangements. They have also hosted the All-Wales Local Authority Delivery Group and have enabled the sharing of information and good practice. It is understood that the WSMP have recently appointed an All-



Wales Refugee Resettlement Co-ordinator to co-ordinate the arrival of families under the Programme which will be of further assistance across Wales.

Overall, after a moderate start, the scheme continues to gather momentum and the foundations have been laid to support a robust and dynamic scheme to assist Vulnerable Syrian Refugees.

## **B: The effectiveness of the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan**

The general consensus reading the Welsh Government's 'Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan' is that many aspects of the plan have yet to be achieved.

For the plan to be effective, there needs to be a more active campaign of awareness raising the objectives and the actions within the plan need further ownership in terms of being responsible for the deliverables.

It is therefore fair to report that the plan has had limited profile or impact across Local Authorities to date, but that further work needs to be done to raise its profile.

In the light of the recent work undertaken with the SVPRS scheme, it might be a worthwhile exercise to review the content and re-engage with key partners so that expectations can be more realistic and achievable given that there are more pressures on dwindling resources and staff.

Aspects of the plan need to be owned by a specific group or groups, be that local or regional to track progress and to be clearer on monitoring mechanisms.

The range of organisations mentioned in the plan in the context of Community Cohesion mentions references to Housing, Education, Health & Social Care, Young People, Employment, Crime (Hate Crime, Modern Day Slavery, FGM, Domestic Abuse, Sexual Violence), Communities first, Flying Start, Families First, Arts, Culture & Sport – a very wide and diverse range of activities which would require input from a multitude of sources – yet the plan does not allocate the objectives to specific organisations or partnerships.

The plan makes several references to 'dispersal areas' and meetings have taken place with the Home Office in North Wales to explore the need for further designated areas, however discussions with this respect are at an early stage of development and due to other more immediate requirements i.e. SVPRS and UASC, progress on discussions on potential future dispersal areas has been stunted, however the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership have recently been tasked by the Home Office to meet Local Authorities on an individual basis to provide more detail regarding expectations.

The plan makes mention of the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, and that cohesion and equality are at the heart of how Public Bodies deliver policies and services in the future, yet there appears to be no method of measuring progress and there is no reference to inputs, outputs, designated leads or cost implications. The plan is currently in an aspirational state in terms of what it seeks to

achieve, which is why the list of intended actions needs further work in order to produce a workable SMART action plan.

### **C: The support and advocacy available to UASC in Wales**

The National Transfer Scheme for unaccompanied asylum seeking children has been considered by all three Local Authorities in North-West Wales, with the aim of sharing more equitably the care of UASC across the UK. Two out of three Authorities have indicated a potential ability to support the scheme, whilst the third has outlined reasonably why it can't at this time take part.

One Local Authority has presented a briefing paper to their Leadership Team with a recommendation to support the scheme by accommodating young people aged between 16 and 18 years in an appropriate area within the County with external provider support.

Another Authority has presented a briefing paper to members to explain the background to the scheme and to seek their views / participation in the scheme so that placements of children who are to be reunited with family living in the UK or those who may be unaccompanied could be arranged to alleviate the problems in Kent and Calais.

Both the reasoning behind the scheme and the breakdown (statistics) appertaining to those affected have been shared, together with the expectation principles based on the proportion of the local child population (up to 0.07%). The scheme is being considered in the light of recent pressures brought about by Welfare Reform and housing pressures and the ability to meet the need of care leavers and vulnerable young people.

Placement options have been explored in line with current legislation, together with the ability to support those aged above or below 16 years, and an options appraisal has been prepared. In one county this favours a tendency to take those aged 16+ years of age by way of supported housing model with a delivery partner, although exemptions might be required for commissioning purposes.

The resource requirements have also been investigated and the financial position and risks has been explored, especially the potential for local support costs to be in excess of the grant made available by the Home Office for certain age ranges i.e. there would be additional costs for case management, placement, educational psychology, special needs, translation and interpretation, health co-ordination, cultural and religious needs, legal advice, personal advisor etc. amongst Local Authorities and Partners.

Opportunities for joint collaboration with neighbouring Local Authorities is also being assessed to see if there is a potential to provide some joint service provision.

One Local Authority has during recent years received UASC cases, and most due to their complex needs have been placed out of area to allow for their cultural needs to

be met as far as practical. They have also been designated as 'Looked After Children' (LAC). The typical receiving process has involved:-

- Attending custody initially to commence an age assessment;
- Utilising the 'BIG word' for general communication and individual translators for assessments and meetings;
- A local service provider would offer advocacy;
- An asylum solicitor would assist with applications and appeals;
- There were no specific services regarding advocacy, however assistance would be sought from any service that might have those skills to assist.

Another Authority has discussed the request for support and advocacy available to UASC or participation in the VCRP at length and has had to decline involvement with the scheme due to legitimate reasons i.e.

- Already receiving a high number of unaccompanied children due to the throughput of passengers through a busy international port;
- Inability to meet language and culture needs, and often (if not always) unaccompanied children are placed with foster carers located out of county – which results in them not only losing their home, it makes the link with any area and the feeling of belonging difficult;
- The lack of capacity for appropriate specialist services i.e. children will have experienced trauma.

The All Wales Heads of Children's Services have recently drawn together a position statement in an attempt to outline the need for a co-ordinated Welsh response to the requests in relation to the UASC. They have acknowledged there is a moral duty to do all they can to support children and young people who have entered the UK seeking asylum regardless of their categorisation under various legislation. They have nominated two leads in Wales to receive and cascade all communications relating to UASC and will be preparing a weekly bulletin to Directors and Heads of Service.

Notwithstanding that the UK already has a formula for working out how many young people should be admitted on County basis, they are proposing that Wales should receive a total of 44 children based on Wales having 6% of the UK population. They equate this to each Region in Wales taking 6 to 7 children and young people, and that this be handled through seven regional partnership boards with a lead Local Authority being identified within each of the seven sub-regions.

#### **D: The role and effectiveness of WG's Community Cohesion Delivery Plan in ensuring the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Welsh communities:**

The 2016/17 Community Cohesion Plan contains seven key outcomes and continues to be an aspiring and challenging workstream with many new aspects being included e.g. SVPRS.

The fourth outcome within the Cohesion Plan promotes increased evidence and awareness on immigration and supporting the inclusion of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. The objective is to provide support in dispersal areas and work with Local Authorities at a strategic level to support implementation of the Welsh Government's Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan (where applicable). This objective's profile has been raised in light of the other work being undertaken across the significant work being undertaken to embed the SVPRS, UASC and migration aspects across Wales.

The Cohesion work has also needed to cover aspects of a recent rise in Community Tensions both pre and post BREXIT with one large-scale right-wing demonstration and a peak in hate crime in one County which involved several hundred police officers.

Regional Community Cohesion Co-ordinators cover a total of 33 key objectives over numerous counties (in this case 3) within the annual delivery plan, but to date extensive time has been invested to get the SVPRS scheme established and to assist with migration issues e.g. via the Wales Migration Project.

The initial role played by Regional Community Cohesion Co-ordinators has been useful in terms of acting as a strategic link between Local Authority areas within their patch, and to enable the sharing of good practice, new ideas and to help circulate and promulgate new policy and scheme development documents through well-established communication channels.

In North Wales, the two Regional Community Cohesion Co-ordinators (RCCC's) have acted as conduits to All-Wales groups and have been a valuable resource to work with lead officers in each County to attend to any queries, difficulties or barriers to delivery, and to work across several Regional delivery groups, voluntary groups and providers to create strategic links with partnerships etc. through Public Service Boards. There are also other examples of support e.g. contributing to sensitive press releases, provide input on Cabinet reports, members briefings, Lead officer support etc.

The RCCC's task is to mainstream workstreams as far as possible, and to forge new links with appropriate groups to support scheme development e.g. Communities First (where some refugees have been located).

The delivery plan has also enabled better links to Wellbeing Plans, under the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, Strategic Equality Plans and cross cutting issues in other relevant plans and strategies (even down to departmental business plans in some cases).

The delivery plan has played a useful role in supporting Local Authorities in their planning and preparations for the arrival and resettlement of refugees, however the resource implications need to be explored further e.g. RCCC's are currently funded one year at a time, which makes planning programmes for the medium to long term plan e.g. over three years difficult. There needs to be more stability for the Community Cohesion programme if the objectives of the delivery plan are to be properly serviced.

Under the auspices of the plan, the RCCC's have worked closely with the Police and other partners to ensure that appropriate areas have been selected for refugees, and to monitor community tensions in and around those areas through e.g. monitoring social media, newspapers and media sources, and close co-operation with Local Authority and Police press and media officers.

The plan's objectives has enabled the provisions of advice and support on engaging with local communities to prepare areas for the arrival of refugees, a role highly valued by local authorities and external partners, and a key resource for creating new bridges and strategic links.

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Cymorth i Ferched Cymru

Response from: Welsh Women's Aid

## Welsh Women's Aid Response

### Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee - Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers

*Nowhere is safe for women seeking asylum...I feel this is no life for me or my children here, I can't see anything changing. It's been [like this] from 16 years of age in my first marriage, my second husband wanted to traffic me and I've never slept one night in peace. I want the home office and immigration people to understand violence and abuse and what happens to women, we need to feel safe. (Survivor, FG7)<sup>1</sup>.*

#### 1. About Welsh Women's Aid:

1.1 Welsh Women's Aid is the national charity in Wales working to prevent domestic abuse and all forms of violence against women and ensure high-quality services for survivors that are needs-led, gender-responsive and holistic. Established in 1978, we are an umbrella organisation that represents and supports a national federation of 23 local independent charities delivering specialist domestic abuse and violence against women prevention services in Wales, as part of a UK network of provision. These specialist services constitute our core membership, and they provide lifesaving refuges, outreach, and community advocacy and support to survivors of violence and abuse - women, men, children, families - and deliver innovative preventative work in local communities. We also deliver direct services including the Welsh Government funded Live Fear Free Helpline; a National Training Service; refuge and advocacy services in Colwyn Bay and Wrexham; and the national Children Matter project which supports local services to help children and young people affected by abuse and to deliver preventative STAR group-work in every local authority in Wales.

1.2 We have been at the forefront of shaping coordinated community responses and practice in Wales, by campaigning for change and providing advice, consultancy, support and training to deliver policy and service improvements for survivors, families and communities. As a national federation, our policy work, consultancy, training and advocacy is all grounded in the experience of local specialist services and service users. Our success is founded on making sure the experiences and needs of survivors are central to all we do.

#### 2. About violence against refugee women and girls<sup>2</sup>:

2.1 Refugee women and girls experience high rates of violence and abuse, including sexual violence, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, sexual exploitation, human trafficking, sexual harassment and domestic violence. A recent report on violence against migrant women in Wales found that *"asylum-seeking...and refugee women face higher levels of violence than native-born women due to a variety of factors, such as age, language barriers, vulnerability, isolation, and poverty"*<sup>3</sup>.

2.2 Refugee women and girls in Wales are highly likely to have experienced violence in their lifetime, in their country of origin, in a refugee camp, on their journey, or in the UK. The Scottish Refugee Council found that 70% of women seeking asylum in Scotland had experienced physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime; 38% had experienced intimate partner violence; and 65% reported that their children had witnessed some form of violence.<sup>4</sup> In 2012 a Women for Refugee Women report on the experiences of refused asylum seekers found that 66% of the refugee women interviewed had experienced some kind of violence including 48% who had been raped, while others were fleeing forced marriage, forced prostitution

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<sup>1</sup> *Are you listening and am I being heard?* Survivor Consultation: A report of the recommendations of survivors of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence in Wales. March 2016

<sup>2</sup> In this evidence we refer to refugee women and girls, including women and girls seeking asylum and refused asylum.

<sup>3</sup> Hubbard, A., Payton, J., Robinson, A. (2015) *Unchartered territory: violence against migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women in Wales*

<sup>4</sup> Zimmerman, C. et al (2009) *Asylum seeking women: violence and health*, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine and Scottish Refugee Council, Dorling, K. et al (2012) *Refused: the experiences of women denied asylum in the UK*, Women for Refugee Women,



and female genital mutilation.<sup>5</sup> A UNHCR report on refugee women's experiences in Finland found that domestic violence was the most critical issue facing all refugee communities.<sup>6</sup>

2.3 Refugee women and girls arriving in the UK can experience violence on their journey. A UN Women report in 2013<sup>7</sup> found that women and children living in refugee camps in Jordan are at a high risk of early marriage, sexual, physical and psychological abuse. Another UN report found that *"women and girls, especially those travelling alone, face particularly high risks of certain forms of violence, including sexual violence by smugglers, criminal groups and individuals in countries along the route."*<sup>8</sup>

2.4 The asylum determination process in the UK does not enable a safe and supportive environment for women to disclose their experience of violence and access the protection or support that they need. Refugee women and girls often remain silent, due to a complex mix of gender inequality, cultural barriers, shame, fear of authorities, and the need to prioritise their own and potentially their family's survival. On her mission to the UK the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women observed that *"women asylum seekers may not have their protection needs appropriately assessed, or have the ability to speak in confidence about any gender-based violence they might have experienced, or be experiencing."*<sup>9</sup>

2.6 Refugee women who have had their claim to asylum refused or have an insecure immigration status are at particular risk of violence against women. Refugee women with no recourse to public funds can find themselves unable to safely leave a perpetrator, forced into sexual exploitation for survival and living in destitution. In Welsh Women's Aid's survivor consultation report a survivor said *"Women survive violence then have to survive on peanuts, we have nothing, no furniture, no food, no recourse to public funds, we need money to live on, otherwise we are either destitute or die. The no recourse and immigration rules don't help... Does the government in Wales understand that we are living on nothing?"* (Survivor, FG6)<sup>10</sup>

2.7 Refugee women and girls can experience multiple layers of discrimination and violence due to their gender, race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, and immigration status. This can exacerbate their experience of violence and limit their access to support. This intersection of discrimination is rarely understood or responded to by policy makers and service providers. The 2014 European Parliament Resolution on violence against women calls for a strategy that *"should devote particular attention to vulnerable groups such as older persons, people with disabilities, immigrants and LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) persons."*<sup>11</sup>

2.8 Refugee women can face abuse from the perpetrator and discrimination from service providers due to their immigration status. In a Welsh Women's Aid's report survivors spoke about their fear of destitution as a result of having no recourse to public funds. Some also spoke of perpetrators using their insecure immigration status as part of the ongoing abuse by threatening to expose them to police, fear of deportation or having their children taken from them. Services too were often reluctant to help victims with insecure immigration status.

*All agencies see is an immigration status they do not see us as human beings. We need help.*  
(Survivor, FG3)

*He told me no one will believe me because of my status, that they will take my children from me.*  
(Survivors, FG1)

<sup>5</sup> Kamena Dorling, Marchu Girma & Natasha Walter with Baroness Helena Kennedy QC and Esther Freud, *Refused: the experiences of women denied asylum in the UK: Women for Refugee Women*, 2012

<sup>6</sup> UNHCR, *Protectors, Providers, Survivors: A Dialogue with Refugee Women In Finland*, October 2011

<sup>7</sup> *Gender-based Violence and Child Protection among Syrian refugees in Jordan, with a focus on Early Marriage. Inter-agency assessment.* May 2013. UN Women

<sup>8</sup> INITIAL ASSESSMENT REPORT: Protection Risks for Women and Girls in the European Refugee and Migrant Crisis Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia United Nations Refugee Agency, United Nations Population Fund and Women's Refugee Commission 2016

<sup>9</sup> Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Mission to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland Rashida Manjoo. May 2015. UN Human Rights Council

<sup>10</sup> *Are you listening and am I being heard?* Survivor Consultation: A report of the recommendations of survivors of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence in Wales. March 2016

<sup>11</sup> European Parliament, Resolution of 25 February 2014 with recommendations to the Commission on combating Violence Against Women (2013/2004(INL))



*Having no recourse to public funds is a huge problem. When I married my husband he was supposed to put me onto his own documents but he refused... When I left home with my pram and baby bag, I saw housing and social workers. I'd had a baby 3 months ago and they both told me – no you can't go back to that house, it's not safe but at the same time said no, we can't help you because you have no recourse to public funds. What was I supposed to do? (Survivor, FG1)<sup>12</sup>*

### 3. Key recommendations:

3.1 Refugee women and girls who have experienced any form of violence against women, including domestic abuse and sexual violence need to have access to gender responsive, trauma informed and needs-led specialist support. We recommend that the Welsh Government makes funding available for specialist services to respond to the needs of refugee women and girls. We recommend that commissioning guidance and local strategy guidance developed for local authorities (to be published in accordance with the Welsh Government's Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015) incorporates information on the needs of refugee women and girls who have survived violence and abuse, including listening to survivors. We recommend that there is a Welsh guardianship programme for children and young people.

3.2 In order to effectively monitor the implementation of the refugee and asylum seeker delivery plan there needs to be a comprehensive monitoring framework and a cross-department commitment. We recommend SMART indicators within the refugee and asylum seeker action plan to monitor the impact on refugee women and girls. We recommend that the Welsh Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS) Operations board includes representation from violence against women services in Wales. We recommend that the VAWDASV National strategy delivery plan (forthcoming) includes specific actions to ensure that refugee women and girls are informed, supported and protected, and that violence is prevented. We recommend that the community cohesion delivery plan has a specific focus on the needs of refugee women and girls.

3.3 Refugee women who have had their asylum claim refused or face difficulties accessing public funds are living in destitution in Wales. We recommend that the Welsh Government expands the eligibility criteria for the Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF) to include those who currently have no recourse to public funds (NRPF), such as refused asylum seekers and other vulnerable migrants including destitute refugees.

3.4 Public services and professionals in Wales need to improve their responses and increase their understanding of the needs of refugee women and girls who have experienced violence and abuse. We recommend guidance for professionals on responding to disclosure from refugee women and girls, including a protocol between devolved and non-devolved services. We recommend the continued delivery of the Violence Against Women National Training Framework, and including materials and resources on the needs and experiences of refugee women and girls across Levels 1-5. We recommend that refugee women are given information on support services in their own language and access to interpreters. *The police and others need to be better trained to deal with domestic violence and different cultures and to publicise this in different communities in different languages – all the time, not just some times of the year.* (Survivor, FG2)

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### 4. The pace and effectiveness of the Welsh Government approach to resettling refugees through the UK Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS);

4.1 The Welsh Government has shown strong leadership in the development of the SVPRS with meetings organised to co-ordinate delivery. This has enabled important discussions on the detail of the delivery of the contracts between local authorities, the Home Office and the Welsh Government. There are nearly 5 million Syrian refugees<sup>14</sup> in the world. In September 2016 Wales had welcomed 112 people through the SVPRS in the last year and Scotland had welcomed their 1000<sup>th</sup> Syrian refugee. All 22 local

<sup>12</sup> *Are you listening and am I being heard?* Survivor Consultation: A report of the recommendations of survivors of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence in Wales. March 2016

<sup>13</sup> *Are you listening and am I being heard?* Survivor Consultation: A report of the recommendations of survivors of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence in Wales. March 2016

<sup>14</sup> UNHCR Syria Regional Refugee Response, Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal, November 2016 <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>



authorities in Wales have made an initial commitment to the SVPRS but the pace of resettlement has been slow. The majority of refugees still arrive spontaneous and claim asylum. The current asylum system needs to be as well-resourced and coordinated as the SVPRS.

4.3 Welsh Women's Aid are concerned that there is not sufficient specialist support available within the new SVPRS local authorities to meet the needs of Syrian refugee women and children who have experienced forms of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence. Welsh Women's Aid member organizations, which include specialist services led by and for Black and minority women, are well placed to offer specialized gender responsive and trauma informed support for refugee women and children who have experienced violence and abuse. Local violence against women and domestic abuse services across Wales can work in partnership with SVPRS orientation support services and local authorities, but funding needs to be allocated so that referrals can be resourced.

Recommendation: We recommend that the Welsh Government's SVPR Operations board includes representation from an organisation leading violence against women services in Wales.

Recommendation: We recommend funding for specialist support services in SVPRS local authority areas for refugee women and girls who have experienced violence against women.

## **5. The effectiveness of the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan.**

5.1 Welsh Women's Aid welcomes the specific action area 7 within the delivery plan, which focuses on gender-based violence, hate crime, modern slavery and community cohesion. Although, currently there are no specific monitoring mechanisms to identify the effective delivery.

Recommendation: We recommend that SMART indicators on violence against refugee women are developed and evidence is collected to monitor the delivery of actions.

5.2 It is crucial that the experiences of refugee women and girls are listened to and their needs responded to through access to specialist services. The Welsh Government should be considerate of funding cuts which have had a detrimental effect on specialist services across Wales. These cuts have meant that services are stretched to capacity and that outreach activities have been minimised. Steps should be taken to help these services maintain and increase their support, so that more refugee women can engage with specialist services. Welsh Women's Aid is currently funded by Welsh Government to support specialist violence against women and domestic abuse services to improve their capacity and support for diverse communities.

Recommendation: We recommend commissioning guidance and long-term funding for specialist services to deliver needs-led, trauma informed and gender-responsive support to refugee women and girls.

Recommendation: We recommend that the needs, experiences and ideas of refugee women who have survived violence and abuse are listened to and heard by the Welsh Government and public services.

5.4 Refugees arriving in Wales may not have access to information on the legal framework, support services or gender equality and violence against women in the UK and therefore not understand their rights or obligations. Language is often a barrier for refugee's to access information, education and support. In Welsh Women's Aid's survivor consultation report women spoke of not knowing what help and support was available because they did not read or speak English and they did not understand that services were available to support women experiencing violence and abuse.

*I don't speak English. How could I call anyone? I did call once but then hung up. I was frightened. What could I say anyway? What if he found out? (Survivor, FG6)<sup>15</sup>*

Recommendation: We recommend that refugee women are given information on support services and access to interpreters. *Information should be available in community languages, we can't all read or write in our own languages. It's a massive cultural barrier to get women to come forward...there should be radio or*

<sup>15</sup> *Are you listening and am I being heard?* Survivor Consultation: A report of the recommendations of survivors of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence in Wales. March 2016

*TV ads in our own communities where to go for help. Just an image and Helpline and number available.*(Survivor, FG1)<sup>16</sup>

Recommendation: We recommend that information on violence against women including the law, and education on gender equality is delivered within refugee communities and integration programmes.

The Welsh Government needs to consider the recommendations from the Women's Refugee Coalition's report on their mission to Germany and Sweden.<sup>17</sup> This includes improving procedures to identify survivors of violence against women, ensure safe accommodation for women and girls and create a protocol for dealing with disclosure of violence against women experienced in their home country, on the journey or in the UK. The report also recommended access to psychosocial support and safe housing.

Recommendation: We recommend improvements to identifying and responding to disclosure of violence against refugee women through a protocol between asylum housing provider, Welsh social services, specialist violence against women services and the Home Office to ensure their safety and support.

5.5 The Welsh Government's National Training Framework (NTF) will improve responsible authorities' responses to violence and abuse through increasing earlier intervention and protection of survivors. The 'Ask and Act' Framework delivered by Welsh Women's Aid aims to provide training for professionals within the public sector that are ideally placed to carry out early identification and provide a helpful response to survivors, including referring them to specialist services.

Recommendation: We recommend that public service professionals working with refugee women and girls in Wales continue to be trained through the National Training Framework. Specifically staff from asylum housing provider Clearsprings must be trained.

## **6. The support and advocacy available to unaccompanied asylum seeking children in Wales:**

6.1 Currently there are no specialist support and advocacy services available to unaccompanied asylum seeking children in Wales. Tros Gynnals young people's project has closed. Children who have experienced or are at risk of forms of violence against women including domestic violence, child sexual exploitation, trafficking, FGM, sexual violence, forced marriage and so-called honour based violence need specialized support.

Recommendation: We recommend that the Welsh Government fund a Welsh Guardianship Service to work with refugee children and young people. A guardianship project will offer children and young guidance on the asylum process, support to ensure their wellbeing as well as help to build social networks.

## **7. The role and effectiveness of the Welsh Government's Community Cohesion Delivery Plan:**

7.1 The Council of the European Union has called for "special attention to the interests and difficulties of all women and girls in vulnerable situations and facing multiple discrimination so as to ensure that protection against violence and support for its victims reaches all parts of society, including marginalised groups."<sup>18</sup>

Recommendation: We recommend that the Welsh Government's community cohesion delivery plan gives special attention to the needs of refugee women and girls who have experienced hate crime and abuse.

Hannah Wharf, Head of Engagement, Welsh Women's Aid  
[Hannahwharf@welshwomensaid.org.uk](mailto:Hannahwharf@welshwomensaid.org.uk)

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<sup>16</sup> *Are you listening and am I being heard?* Survivor Consultation: A report of the recommendations of survivors of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence in Wales. March 2016

<sup>17</sup> *Falling Through the Cracks: Refugee Women and Girls in Germany and Sweden*, March 2016, Women's Refugee Commission

<sup>18</sup> Council of the European Union, Council conclusions on Combating Violence Against Women, and the Provision of Support Services for Victims of Domestic Violence, 6 December 2012

RAS 31

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Cymorth i Ffoaduriaid y Gelli, Aberhonddu a Thalgarth

Response from: Hay Brecon and Talgarth Refugee Support

I am chair of Hay Brecon and Talgarth Refugee Support, a purely civil group, with around 400 people on our database and many more supporters in our vilage and town communities.

We don't have any refugees in our immediate area and have been working with ShareTAWE and Unity in Diversity in Swansea. However in July this year we had around 30 Syrian refugees resettled in Ystradgynlais. Some of our supporters live in or nearby to Ystrad. But the resettling organisation went to great lengths to keep them from meeting and welcoming these people to their strange new homeland.

Some of our group members offered English Language Conversation classes but we were not allowed to contact the newly resettled refugees, who had to wait for 2 months before term-time began and formal ESOL lessons began. There was no consideration for the fact that these people needed and wanted English classes immediately. We eventually made contact, not thanks to the statutory or voluntary services, and our newly-settled refugees were delighted to interact with us, on all levels. There was then further problems, when the "professionals" informed volunteers that their services were not wanted....these volunteers were offering friendship and a welcome in their English conversation groups...which the "professionals", voluntary and Statutory, had no right to usurp.

It would appear that the paid workers of the voluntary and statutory sector deemed volunteers as intruders on their professional arena.

Regards

Sean O'Donoghue

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Cymdeithas Llywodraeth Leol Cymru

Response from: Welsh Local Government Association

## **Ymchwiliad Pwyllgor Materion Cydraddoldeb, Llywodraeth Leol a Chymunedau'r Cynulliad i Ffoaduriaid a Cheiswyr Lloches**

### **Tystiolaeth ar ran Cymdeithas Llywodraeth Leol Cymru**

#### **Cyflwyniad a chefnidir**

1. Mae Cymdeithas Llywodraeth Leol Cymru (WLGA) yn cynrychioli 22 awdurdod lleol y wlad, ac mae awdurdodau'r tri gwasanaeth tân ac achub a'r tri pharc cenedlaethol yn aelodau cyswllt. Mae'n ceisio cynrychioli ei haelodau trwy fframwaith polisïau sy'n cyd-fynd â'u blaenoriaethau. Ar ben hynny, mae'n cynnig amrywiaeth helaeth o wasanaethau sy'n ychwanegu gwerth at faes llywodraeth leol a'r cymunedau mae'n eu gwasanaethu.
2. Mae'r argyfwng dyngarol presennol a'r ffaith bod miliynau o bobl wedi ffoi rhag rhyfeloedd yn Syria a'r gwledydd o'i hamgylch wedi arwain at gynnydd yn nifer y ffoaduriaid a'r rhai sy'n gofyn am loches yn y Deyrnas Gyfunol gan gynnwys Cymru. Felly, dyma adeg briodol i edrych ar waith sy'n mynd rhagddo ledled y wlad i helpu i gymathu ceiswyr lloches a ffoaduriaid mewn cymunedau lleol a chlориannu'r amryw gynlluniau sy'n cyfeirio'r gwaith hwnnw.
3. Bydd Rhaglen yr Ailgartrefu Syriaid ar waith dros bum mlynedd er lles 20,000 o ffoaduriaid a bydd yn bwysig cadw at yr un lefel o ymrwymiad a chydlyniant i gyflawni nodau'r rhaglen yng Nghymru. Felly, rhaid gofalu ein bod yn pennu ffordd hirdymor o gymathu a chynorthwyo ffoaduriaid i'w galluogi nhw i gael eu traed tanynt a dechrau cyfrannu at ein cymdeithas ni.
4. Mae'n bwysig cydnabod mai dim ond un o'r mentrau presennol yw'r rhaglen honno. Er mai prif flaenoriaeth y Swyddfa Gartref yw hi, mae Llywodraeth San Steffan wedi gofyn i'r awdurdodau lleol gymryd rhan mewn cynlluniau eraill megis:
  - ychwanegu at nifer yr ardaloedd lle y bydd ceiswyr lloches yn cael aros tra bo eu ceisiadau am loches o dan ystyriaeth;
  - cynllun trosglwyddo plant i ardaloedd eraill fel y bydd cydbwysedd o ran gofalu am blant sydd wedi dod ar eu pennau eu hunain i fynnu lloches;
  - cynllun ailgartrefu 3,000 o blant bregus eu sefyllfa o'r Dwyrain Canol a Gogledd Affrica, ynghyd â'u teuluoedd.
5. Gan fod cymaint o sylw ar raglen yr ailgartrefu, mae pryderon y bydd dau fath o gymorth ar gael i ffoaduriaid. Ar y cyfan, fydd y rhai sydd yng Nghymru yn barod neu sydd wedi ennill statws ffoadur o ganlyniad i gais llwyddiannus am loches yn y Deyrnas Gyfunol ddim yn cael yr un lefel o gymorth ar gyfer eu hailgartrefu a'u cymathu. Dylai unrhyw wersi sy'n deillio o'r rhaglen arwain at wasanaethau gwell i'r ffoaduriaid i gyd sydd yng Nghymru.

## Cyflymder ac effeithiolrwydd ffordd Llywodraeth Cymru o gartrefu ffoaduriaid trwy Raglen Ailgartrefu Pobl Fregus o Syria Llywodraeth San Steffan

6. Mae awdurdodau lleol Cymru wedi ymateb yn dda i'r cais am gymorth o ran cartrefu ffoaduriaid trwy Raglen yr Ailgartrefu Syriaid am fod pob awdurdod wedi ymrwymo i gymryd rhan ynddo. Mae disgwyl y bydd pob awdurdod lleol wedi derbyn teuluoedd erbyn diwedd y flwyddyn. Bydd dros 300 o ffoaduriaid wedi'u hailgartrefu yng Nghymru yn ystod blwyddyn gyntaf y rhaglen.
7. Doedd gan y rhan fwyaf o awdurdodau lleol lawer o brofiad ynglŷn â gweithio gyda ffoaduriaid. Felly, roedd yn bwysig gofalu y bydden nhw'n derbyn pobl mewn modd trefnus ac effeithiol. Ymatebodd pob awdurdod yn ôl amserlen fyddai'n briodol iddo a'i bartneriaid. Er bod rhai wedi symud yn gyflym trwy helpu i ailgartrefu 1,000 o ffoaduriaid cyn diwedd 2015 yn ôl addewid Prif Weinidog y Deyrnas Gyfunol, mae eraill wedi pwylllo ychydig wrth sefydlu trefniadau sy'n adlewyrchu cyd-destunau ac amgylchiadau lleol.
8. Cydweithio sydd wrth wraidd Rhaglen yr Ailgartrefu Syriaid yng Nghymru ac, er mai'r awdurdodau lleol sydd wedi arwain y gwaith ym mhob bro a rhanbarth fel y bo'n briodol, mae cyfraniad cyrff iechyd, heddluoedd, y trydydd sector a mudiadau eraill wedi bod yn hanfodol o ran gofalu bod gwasanaethau ar gael pan ddaw'r ffoaduriaid. Er enghraifft: cofrestru gyda meddygfa, ymrestru plant yn yr ysgol a chofrestru ar gyfer dosbarthiadau dysgu Saesneg.
9. Er bod awdurdodau lleol wedi'u beirniadu am fethu ag ymateb yn brydlon i'r argyfwng, bu rhaid i'r awdurdodau heb lawer o brofiad ofalu y gallen nhw reoli proses yr ailgartrefu yn drefnus. I wneud hynny, bu angen cydweithio â nifer o bartneriaid er mwyn diwallu anghenion y teuluoedd mewn meysydd megis iechyd neu addysg, nodi llety priodol rhesymol ei bris ger ysgolion a phenodi mudiadau yn y trydydd sector i roi gwasanaethau cofleidio a helpu i ailgartrefu a chymathu teuluoedd. Felly, rydyn ni o'r farn bod y feirniadaeth yn annheg a bod ffoaduriaid wedi'u derbyn mewn modd esmwyth yn sgîl cynllunio'n dda ar eu cyfer.
10. Mae Llywodraeth Cymru wedi helpu'r awdurdodau lleol a'u partneriaid nhw i ymateb i'r argyfwng dyngarol yn Syria. Trwy'r Prif Weinidog, fe ddaeth â'r prif gyrff perthnasol ynghyd fis Medi 2015 i drafod a chydlynu ymateb Cymru. Ers hynny, mae wedi cynnal Bwrdd Gweithredu Materion Ffoaduriaid o Syria. Yn ddiweddar, sefydlodd is-bwyllgor i drin a thrafod materion plant sy'n agored i niwed a phlant sydd wedi dod ar eu pennau eu hunain i fynnu lloches. Mae'r Swyddfa Gartref wedi rheoli Rhaglen yr Ailgartrefu Syriaid yn dda ac roedd wedi cydweithio â'r awdurdodau lleol a'r llywodraethau datganoledig i'w llunio a'i mireinio. Enghraifft nodedig o'r cyfryw gydweithio yw cytuno ar fframwaith iechyd sy'n pennu rôl gwasanaethau iechyd ynglŷn â helpu awdurdodau lleol Cymru i gymryd rhan yn y rhaglen trwy wneud yn siŵr y bydd gwasanaethau gofal iechyd priodol ar gael yn ogystal â gwybodaeth am adennill arian. Mae Partneriaeth Strategol Materion Mewnfudo Cymru wedi cymryd rôl allweddol ynglŷn â helpu awdurdodau i sefydlu eu trefniadau. Lluniodd becyn cymorth i'r diben hwnnw ac mae'n llywio pwyllgor lledaenu gwybodaeth ac arferion da. Penododd y bartneriaeth gydlynedd ailgartrefu ffoaduriaid yn ddiweddar fel y

bydd un ddolen gyswllt â Rhaglen yr Ailgartrefu Syriaid yng Nghymru. Fe fydd yn cydlynu dyfodiad y teuluoedd sy'n ymwneud â'r rhaglen.

## **Effeithiolrwydd y cynllun ar gyfer ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches**

11. Rydyn ni o'r farn nad yw cynllun Llywodraeth Cymru ar gyfer ffoaduriaid a'r rhai sy'n gofyn am loches yn ddigon hysbys nac effeithiol ymhlith awdurdodau lleol. Er y gallai fod yn hysbys i'r rhai sy'n ymwneud â materion perthnasol ac er bod llawer o'i gynnwys yn cael ei drafod, does dim gweithdrefnau sefydlog y gall Llywodraeth Cymru eu defnyddio i dynnu sylw awdurdodau/adrannau at y cynllun. O ganlyniad, efallai na fyddan nhw'n gwybod am yr hyn mae rhaid iddyn nhw ei wneud.
12. Ymatebodd WLGA i'r ymgynghori am y cynllun ac rydyn ni o blaid yr amryw ddeilliannau ym mhob pennod. Does dim manylion, fodd bynnag, o ran pwy sy'n gyfrifol am y gwaith, pryd mae angen ei gyflawni a sut y bydd gwahanol flaenoriaethau'n cael eu gwireddu. Bydd yn anodd nodi deiliant neu effaith rhai camau am nad ydyn nhw wedi'u pennu yn ôl meini prawf ymarferoldeb. Ar ben hynny, mae rhai camau braidd yn eang a rhaid gofyn a ydyn nhw'n berthnasol i gynllun o'r fath. Er y bydd gweithredu llwyddiannus o gymorth i ffoaduriaid, dylid cymathu'r camau dilynol ym mhrif ffrwd gweithdrefnau fel arferion neu safonau sylfaenol (er enghraifft, rhaid i landlordiaid sy'n cynnig llety i ffoaduriaid ofalu ei fod yn addas i fyw ynddo ac mewn cyflwr da).
13. Dylid cydnabod bod nifer y ffoaduriaid sydd wedi dod i Gymru trwy Raglen yr Ailgartrefu Syriaid wedi cynyddu'n fawr ers paratoi'r cynllun gwreiddiol. Gan fod bwriad i drosglwyddo plant i rannau eraill o'r Deyrnas Gyfunol, bydd nifer y plant sydd wedi dod ar eu pennau eu hunain i fynnu lloches wedi codi, hefyd. Mae'r datblygiadau hynny wedi newid cyd-destun y cynllun ac, felly, bydden ni'n awgrymu bod angen llunio ffordd fwy strategol o gymathu ceiswyr lloches a ffoaduriaid a manteisio ar newidiadau diweddar i ddylanwadu arni.
14. Dros y blynyddoedd diwethaf hyn, mae llawer o bleidleiswyr wedi dechrau pryderu am fewnfudwyr, ac fe ddaeth hynny i'r amlwg yn ystod ymgyrchoedd yr Etholiad Cyffredinol a'r refferendwm am Undeb Ewrop. Mae pryderon am nifer y rhai sy'n dod i'r Deyrnas Gyfunol a'r effaith ar wasanaethau cyhoeddus megis iechyd a thai cymdeithasol, sydd o dan bwysau yn barod. Mewn rhai ardaloedd, mae hynny wedi arwain at ragor o dyndra, troseddau atgasedd a phrotestiadau yn erbyn dyfodiad ffoaduriaid. Trwy ddiwygio'r cynllun, byddai modd gofalu ei fod yn adlewyrchu'r cyd-destun a'r anawsterau presennol, a gallai arwain at ffordd fwy cydlynol o gynnwys a chymathu ceiswyr lloches a ffoaduriaid.
15. Yn sgîl llwyddiant y trefniadau cadarn ar gyfer derbyn ac ailgartrefu ffoaduriaid trwy'r rhaglen y Swyddfa Gartref, bydd yn hanfodol helpu ffoaduriaid i gael eu traed tanynt yn ein cymunedau ni. Dysgu'r iaith leol i ddibenion cyfathrebu a chyd-dynnu, cofrestru plant yn yr ysgol a'r feddygfa leol, ailddechrau addysg i oedolion, mireinio medrau a dod o hyd i swydd yw agweddau allweddol helpu pobl i ymdoddi. Dylai unrhyw gynllun neu strategaeth gydnabod na fydd modd ymateb i'r angen i dderbyn a chymathu rhagor o geiswyr lloches a ffoaduriaid

heb ystyried anghenion ac effeithiau rhagor o fewnfudwyr. Dylai fod rhagor o bwyslais ar 'asedion' ffoaduriaid a mewnfudwyr medrus iawn sy'n awyddus i gyfrannu yn ein cymdeithas. Er enghraifft, dylid hyrwyddo, cydlynu ac ariannu Fframwaith Tystysgrifau a Chymwysterau Cymru yn well fel y gallai medrau a chymwysterau ffoaduriaid gael eu cydnabod yn ôl safonau gwladol. Fe fyddai hynny'n effeithio'n sylweddol ar obeithion, incwm, iechyd a theyrngarwch pobl sydd newydd ddod i'r wlad yn ogystal â lleddfu tlodi yn eu plith. Gallai cynllun strategol ar wedd newydd fynd i'r afael â materion o'r fath ledled Cymru trwy gydbblethu â rhaglen Llywodraeth Cymru, 'Symud Cymru Ymlaen', a manteisio i'r eithaf ar unrhyw gyfleoedd i gynorthwyo ffoaduriaid yn ystod cyfnod cyfredol y Cynulliad.

### **Cymorth ac eiriolaeth sydd ar gael i blant ar eu pennau eu hunain**

16. Mae Deddf Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol a Llesiant Cymru yn dweud pa mor bwysig yw eirioli. Mae eirioli'n grymuso plant, gan ofalu bod pawb yn parchu eu hawliau ac yn rhoi pob ystyriaeth i'w sylwadau a'u dyheadau wrth ddod i benderfyniadau sy'n effeithio ar eu bywydau. Mae'n ffordd arall o ddiogelu plant rhag cam-drin, gan ofalu bod cymorth a chefnogaeth ar gael ac y bydd pawb yn gwrando ar eu pryderon ac yn mynd i'r afael â nhw.
17. Mae gan bob awdurdod lleol drefniadau eirioli ar gyfer plant a phobl ifanc ac mae gwaith yn mynd rhagddo i sefydlu ffordd wladol o gynnig eiriolaeth i wella mynediad a chysondeb. Fel plant a phobl ifanc eraill, dylai plant a ddaeth ar eu pennau eu hunain i fynnu lloches gael mynnu eiriolaeth, hefyd. Gan fod angen eiriolwyr arbenigol sy'n gyfarwydd â'u hanghenion o achos materion cymhleth eu statws nhw yn fewnfudwyr, yn ogystal â chynghorion cyfreithwyr arbenigol, fe ddylai eiriolwyr wybod prosesau lloches yn dda fel y gallan nhw fod o gymorth i blant. Felly, mae'n debygol y bydd nifer cynyddol y plant sy'n dod i Gymru ar eu pennau eu hunain i fynnu lloches yn ychwanegu at y galw am y gwasanaethau eirioli – yn arbennig pan fo pobl ifanc yn hel cynghorion cyfreithiol, yn cwestiynu'r statws yn y Deyrnas Gyfunol neu'n gofyn am arian i dalu cyfreithiwr. Mae'n ansicr pwy sy'n gyfrifol am ddiwallu anghenion o'r fath achos y gallai fod angen gwybodaeth a chymorth arbenigol. Yn aml, diben yr eirioli fydd gwrthwynebu un o benderfyniadau'r Swyddfa Gartref.

### **Rôl ac effeithiolrwydd cynllun Llywodraeth Cymru ar gyfer cydlyniant yn ein cymunedau ynglŷn â chymathu ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches**

18. Mae cynllun cydlyniant Llywodraeth Cymru yn un uchelgeisiol iawn ynglŷn â helpu i ddatblygu a chynnal cymunedau teg, cadarn a chydlynol ledled y wlad. Helpu i gynnwys ceiswyr lloches a ffoaduriaid yw un o'r saith deilliante sydd yn y cynllun, ond mae'i bwysigrwydd wedi cynyddu yn ddiweddar o ganlyniad i'r argyfwng dyngarol wrth i fwy a mwy o ffoaduriaid ddod i Ewrop. Nid dim ond ynglŷn â helpu awdurdodau lleol i baratoi ar gyfer ailgartrefu a chymathu hyn a hyn o ffoaduriaid mewn modd na fydd yn amharu ar gydlyniant cymunedau ond, hefyd, ymateb i'r cynnydd yn nifer y troseddau sy'n ymwneud â chasineb yn sgîl ein refferendwm am adael Undeb Ewrop. Mae llawer o ddeilliannau'r cynllun yn cydbblethu â'i gilydd. Er enghraifft, i gymathu pobl mewn cymuned, bydd angen i bobl deimlo'n ddiogel yn eu milltir sgwâr, gan gymryd rhan yn y

gymuned a chyfrannu ati yn hytrach na byw mewn tlodi a bod mewn perygl o gymryd mantais. Mae cydlynwyr cymunedau mewn sefyllfa dda i adnabod y cysylltiadau hynny ar draws y deilliannau. Bydd yn ddefnyddiol cyfeirio at y modd mae cydlyniant cymunedol yn ymwneud â chynlluniau Deddf Llesiant Cenedlaethau'r Dyfodol a chynlluniau strategol cydraddoldeb hefyd, gan fod ystyriaethau trawsbynciol yn helpu i ofalu bod materion cydlyniant yn rhan o gynlluniau a strategaethau eraill.

19. Mae cydlynwyr cymunedau wedi cyflawni rôl hanfodol o ran helpu awdurdodau lleol i gynllunio a pharatoi ar gyfer derbyn ac ailgartrefu ffoaduriaid trwy Raglen yr Ailgartrefu Syriaid. Roedden nhw'n gallu gofalu bod yr awdurdodau lleol a'r rhanbarthau wedi cael y diweddaraf am ddatblygiad y rhaglen – gan gyflwyno unrhyw ymholiadau, pryderon neu awgrymiadau ynglŷn â'i gwella. Maen nhw wedi lledaenu gwybodaeth am amryw ffyrdd o gynllunio a pharatoi ar gyfer y rhaglen gan gynnwys papurau hysbysu a dogfennau perthnasol eraill i osgoi dyblygu a helpu i hwyluso cysondeb. Maen nhw wedi rhoi cymorth wrth drefnu i dderbyn ffoaduriaid, hefyd. Mae'r cydlynwyr hynny wedi parhau i gadw llygad ar unrhyw dyndra allai fod mewn cymunedau gan roi gwybod i gyrff perthnasol am unrhyw gynnydd ynddo a chynnig cynghorion a chymorth am ymgysylltu â chymunedau i'w paratoi ar gyfer dyfodiad ffoaduriaid. Mae'r awdurdodau lleol a'u partneriaid yn gwerthfawrogi'r rôl honno. Yn y cyd-destun ehangach, mae cydlynwyr wedi parhau â'r gweithgareddau mae disgwyl iddyn nhw eu cynnal yn ôl y cynllun gan adlewyrchu amgylchiadau lleol a materion a blaenoriaethau perthnasol. Yn ogystal â chymryd rhan yn Rhaglen yr Ailgartrefu Syriaid, mae cydlynwyr cymunedau yn helpu'r awdurdodau lleol i dderbyn plant bregus eu sefyllfa, hefyd. Wrth wneud hynny, maen nhw wedi hybu cysylltiadau'r ddwy raglen â'i gilydd a chydweithio â phartneriaid i baratoi ar gyfer nifer o blant.
20. Gan fod cydlynwyr cymunedau'n cyflawni rôl hanfodol o ran helpu awdurdodau lleol a rhanbarthau – nid yn unig ynglŷn â cheiswyr lloches a ffoaduriaid ond ar draws saith deiliant y cynllun, hefyd – mae WLGA yn croesawu penderfyniad Llywodraeth Cymru yn ddiweddar i barhau â'r grant ar eu cyfer yn 2017/18.



RAS 33

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Tim Cymorth Ievenctid Ethnig

Response from: Ethnic Youth support Team

**Prepared by:** Rocio Cifuentes [director@eyst.org.uk](mailto:director@eyst.org.uk)

## **Introduction**

Ethnic Youth Support Team welcomes the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee inquiry into refugees and asylum-seekers and its call for evidence submissions. We very much hope that the inquiry will:

- Recognise the value of locally-based grassroots and community initiatives in supporting refugees and asylum-seekers and the importance of financially and strategically supporting these.
- Enable a shift towards a more pro-active, prevention and education-based approach to supporting the effective integration of refugees and asylum-seekers in Wales, rather than one which focuses on refugees and asylum-seekers in isolation and treats them as a problem to be solved.
- Develop a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of 'community cohesion', considering economic factors and competition over resources as primary factors behind racialized social divisions, rather than using the term as a euphemism for race relations, and moving towards an understanding of it as a challenge for 'us' not about 'them'.

## **Background**

Ethnic Youth Support Team is an award-winning BME organisation based in Swansea, which aims to support ethnic minority young people, families and individuals across Wales, including refugees and asylum-seekers. Established for nearly 12 years, we have developed a range of successful programmes to support the BME, refugees and asylum-seekers population in Wales, as well as working more widely to promote integration and community cohesion through a better understanding and more positive view of racial, ethnic and cultural diversity amongst the wider public.

## **EYST provision for refugee and asylum-seekers**

With a staff team of nearly 30, and over 100 volunteers, we have a full-time youth and community centre and offices in Swansea, with workers based in Cardiff, Swansea, Llanelli, Ystradgynlais and Newtown. Our core work includes youth work support and family support to BME young people and families, which includes refugees and asylum-seekers. In Swansea

we deliver a full-time refugee and asylum-seeker advice service funded by Henry Smith Foundation which supported over 900 individuals last year via over 2000 advice sessions. We also deliver an innovative volunteering programme funded by Lloyds Foundation targeting and encouraging refugees and asylum-seekers to volunteer, which since July 2016 has supported 32 refugees and asylum-seekers in Swansea to volunteer 2298 hours helping other clients who access EYST. We also work extensively with schools and youth groups delivering educational awareness sessions to increase young people's understanding of asylum, refugee and migration issues, including for example our Refugee Awareness Workshops which was delivered to over 400 young people in Cardiff, funded by Pears foundation.

Since January 2016, EYST has been delivering the Orientation Service for Syrian Refugee Families resettled in Swansea under the Home Office Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS). We also have the contract to deliver this same service in Carmarthenshire as well as Ystradgynlais and Newtown in Powys.

We will now respond to each of the key issues identified by the inquiry

**The pace and effectiveness of the Welsh Government approach to resettling refugees through the UK Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS);**

We are aware of criticism in relation to the initial pace of the SVPRS resettlement process in Wales. However, in our experience the local authorities with whom we have worked (Swansea, Carmarthenshire and Powys) have worked as quickly as realistically possible to take the necessary steps firstly to procure Orientation Service deliverers in a fair and transparent way and also to identify housing, school spaces, and health provision. They have allocated significant resources to making sure the process of resettlement has gone as smoothly as possible, including convening multi-agency working groups as well as coordinating community-based groups to manage the significant voluntary and community response to Syrian refugee arrivals. So far, 10 families have been safely re-homed with our support in Swansea, 4 in Carmarthenshire, 6 in Ystradgynlais and 2 in Newtown.

Therefore, from our experience, at the Local Authority level, the pace and effectiveness has been good. However, it appears that Local Authorities liaise directly with Home Office rather than with Welsh Government to agree family composition and arrival dates. So, we are unclear what influence and role the Welsh Government has played in this process. We are aware that the Welsh Government set up a Syrian Refugee Taskforce and an Operations Board, in response to the initial announcement of the SVPRS scheme in September 2015. So far, EYST has not been invited to be part of either of these groups, although we are members of the Welsh Refugee Coalition which is currently represented via Oxfam Cymru.

**The effectiveness of the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan**

In our view the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan provided an aspirational but insufficiently defined vision of how Welsh Government would like to see refugees and asylum seekers in Wales. This lack of definition makes it difficult to measure to what extent it has succeeded.

The plan is also very much of its time, having been published in 2014, when refugees and asylum-seekers were a somewhat niche preoccupation in the eyes of the wider Welsh public. This changed dramatically over the summer of 2015 with the media spotlight on tragic toddler Aylan Kurdi leading to an outpouring of public compassion, with the UK government pressured into its pledge to take in 20,000 Syrian refugees – which then became the SVPRS scheme. By early 2016, following terrorist incidents across Europe, public perception of refugees had become significantly more negative and the issue continued to split public opinion, most clearly manifested in the Brexit vote of June 2016.

In hindsight, the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan did not focus sufficiently on preparing the ground for the successful integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Wales as it did not focus sufficiently on delivering an effective media and communications strategy, nor an effective awareness campaign for key frontline workers. The plan also made too much reference to Welsh Government funded delivery for refugee and asylum seekers which was almost exclusively in Cardiff and Newport, and did not give sufficient recognition to wider work being delivered across Wales, although not necessarily Welsh Government funded. Overall, the plan focused exclusively on the refugees and asylum-seekers without taking into account the wider context and growing challenge of how the issue and group is perceived and understood by people in Wales. In terms of the key areas highlighted by the plan, it is our understanding that there still remain key gaps in terms of:

- The understanding of refugee and asylum-seeker issues of public sector workers, including teachers, police, social workers, health-care workers. There should be renewed efforts to improve training on this topic for those public sector professionals.
- There is a huge gap in provision for refugees accessing employment. There are particular issues with the current capacity and disposition of JobCentrePlus staff to effectively support refugees seeking employment. There is also inconsistency in use of interpreters and language line which adversely impacts benefits claims, etc.
- Within health care while it is welcomed that Wales offers more services to asylum seekers than England, there is patchy knowledge amongst health care providers about the rights of asylum-seeker and refugees to healthcare provision, and inconsistent use of interpreters and Language line.
- ESOL provision remains insufficient to meet demand. This should be increased as language is a key barrier to integration for refugees and asylum seeker.
- Destitution is not adequately addressed by the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan, and remains a huge gap in public policy in Wales.

### **The support and advocacy available to unaccompanied asylum seeking children in Wales**

In EYST's experience, there is no service which is available to support or advocate for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in Wales. The responsibility for supporting these children has in practice fallen on already over-stretched social services departments within Local authorities, who lack culturally specific knowledge and expertise. Local authorities in Swansea, Neath port Talbot and Carmarthenshire have often contacted EYST youth workers to provide support alongside their own social workers, and this approach has been welcomed and has proved effective in helping the child feel more culturally supported and comfortable. However, we recognise that our own team lack the immigration-specific knowledge which would enable them to perform the advocacy role more effectively. We are aware that Tros Gynal previously provided a similar service in some parts of Wales, however this is a current gap. We also have experienced public sector workers lacking knowledge of and understanding about the rights of unaccompanied asylum seeker children and in some cases displaying lack of empathy bordering on hostility. This is reflective of the wider social climate and public attitudes towards refugees and immigration which we see today.

### **The role and effectiveness of the Welsh Government's Community Cohesion Delivery Plan in ensuring the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Welsh communities**

Overall, the Community Cohesion Delivery Plan was overly focused on tackling hate crime and insufficiently focused on prevention of hate crime and challenging attitudes of hate – which is akin to closing the stable door after the horse has bolted. The plan also risked pandering to and increasing racial stereotypes by focusing on specific issues such as modern slavery and gypsy traveller communities, rather than the wider and overarching issue of racism. The challenge of Community Cohesion should not confine itself to the realm of reactive policing, rather it should have embraced a more proactive preventative and educational approach aiming to reach out widely to all those living in Wales. EYST has delivered pioneering work in this field in Wales:

#### **Promoting Awareness & Tackling Negative Attitudes through Education: EYST's work in Schools**

Given that one of the key issues facing BME Young people is racism, lack of understanding and racial stereotyping, rather than just offering a victim-focused approach, which many BME organisations tend to do, we have pro-actively sought to address this problem in a solution-focused manner. EYST have developed strong relationships with local schools, including primary and secondary schools and deliver regular educational awareness-raising sessions to pupils, on a range of diversity-based topics, as requested by the schools, usually via assemblies, PSE lessons or RE lessons. In the last year we have delivered 54 such sessions to over 2000 children across Swansea. Schools very much appreciate our input, particularly as they recognise that teachers lack both the expertise and the confidence to tackle such sensitive subjects. Our input can diffuse and reduce racial tensions and bullying within schools particularly following international terrorist events.

For example, following the Paris attacks, we contacted schools and offered to come in and talk to children about what Islam is, what ISIS is, and the difference between them. What makes these sessions effective is that they are delivered by local BME and Muslim Youth Workers who are skilled in engaging with children and young people, and as well as giving pupils much needed facts and information, they also give them an opportunity to get to know and like a Muslim and Welsh/ British person. Never underestimate the power of a cool and funny person to cut through and challenge racial and cultural stereotypes! Feedback from the young participants in the sessions included:

“I’ve learnt that not all Muslims are terrorists” “Helal is a legend!”



However this work is not publicly funded, neither is it strategically embedded in any Schools’ Local Authority or Welsh Government plans – we would like to see both happen. We would also like our example to be used as best practice in order for it to be replicated across the UK.

### **Preventing Islamist Extremism through Youth Engagement and Support: the Positive Street Project**

From 2009 to 2012, EYST was funded by the Welsh Government via their Community Cohesion Fund to deliver the ‘Positive Street Project’ (PSP) – a project engaging with young Muslim males in Swansea to prevent Islamist extremism and radicalisation. The project was highly successful, working with over 250 young males across the project life-time through a youth-engagement and information model. Under the project Muslim youth workers set out to develop meaningful relationships with young Muslim males, offering support via street-based outreach, community outreach and a regular youth club provision. The project gave the young people information and understanding of ‘authentic Islam’ using approved and respected Imams and other credible speakers on Islam. Importantly, the project was fundamentally supported by Local Police who respected the freedom and best judgement of EYST to deliver the project, while at the same time offering support and input when needed. The project revealed that one of the key grievances of Muslim young males was the

perceived inequality in how they were treated when suspected of Islamist extremism, compared to how racist white males were treated when espousing apparently far right extremist views. The project provided an important communication link between Muslim young people and the Police, and Local Authority leads, where they could voice these grievances and concerns. This project ended in 2012, and has not received any continuation funding. We would also like to see it used as best practice and replicated across the UK.

**Challenging Racism and Far-Right Extremism through Education and Contact theory: the 'Think' Project** [www.thinkproject.org.uk](http://www.thinkproject.org.uk)

In response to the growing racism, Islamophobia and Xenophobia being experienced by our young BME clients, EYST devised the 'Think' Project – an educational programme designed to challenge racism and far-right extremism – especially in disadvantaged, vulnerable young white people - through an intensive 3 day educational programme. The project was funded over 3 years from 2012 – 2015 by the Big Lottery Innovation Fund and delivered to over 400 young people across South Wales. Formally externally evaluated, it proved to be an innovative and effective way of increasing young people's understanding of diversity and immigration issues and increasing their resilience to far-right extremism.

To begin with, the majority of participants had strong and largely negative views about immigration, asylum and diversity. These views had changed significantly for the vast majority of participants by the end of programme:

- At the start of the programme 62% agreed with the statement *'It's not fair that a lot of jobs in Swansea and Wales are taken by people from other countries'*, By the end of the programme these figures had dropped to only 11% agreeing.
- At the start of the programme 46% agreed with the statement *'Asylum Seekers come to the UK to get Benefits'*, By the end of programme only 2% agreed with the statement
- At the start of the programme, young people vastly overestimated the scale of ethnic diversity in Wales. When asked to estimate the percentage of people in Wales from ethnic groups different to their own, over half of the young people thought the figure was 50% or more. By the end of the programme, 89% correctly put the figure at less than 10%.

The Think Project was found to be unique in the UK and even across Europe, in terms of its practical education-based approach to tackling racism and far-right extremism, in terms of its targeted approach with disadvantaged, disaffected white young people (potentially most vulnerable to far-right extremism), and in terms of its unique methodology based on open dialogue, contact theory and experiential learning. Unlike 'zero-tolerance' approaches to racism, this approach encourages open discussion of young people's feelings and views towards immigration, asylum, Muslims and so on. Only then, once out in the open can such views be effectively challenged. Professors Ted Cattle and Paul Thomas wrote a report on the project, which can be read here <http://eyst.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Think->

[project-report-web.pdf](#) , and the project was also invited to share its learning at the conferences in Stockholm and Brussels. While highly successful, the project does not receive public or continuation funding, and we are left trying to sell the training at a time of increasingly restricted public funding. Again, we have here an example of best practice, which could easily be rolled out and replicated to meet a growing need in Wales and the UK.

[www.eyst.org.uk](http://www.eyst.org.uk)

RAS 34

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: The Wales Strategic Migration Partnership (WSMP)

Response from: The Wales Strategic Migration Partnership (WSMP)



# Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee Inquiry into Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Wales

## Introduction

The Wales Strategic Migration Partnership (WSMP) is (one of 12 RSMPs) funded by the Home Office and is based at the Welsh Local Government Association. WSMP is a partnership organisation which has for 16 years provided an enabling function and a strategic leadership, advice and consultation on migration in Wales. The Partnership facilitates sharing of expertise, managing impacts and raising awareness of issues, risks and opportunities.

## Submission on behalf of the WSMP

### 1. The pace and effectiveness of the Welsh Government's approach to resettling refugees through the UK Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS)

#### Background;

- a. The WSMP alongside all the UK Strategic Migration Partnerships, were tasked by the Home Office to take a lead role in coordinating the SVPRS, undertaking cross-government department liaison at UK level with the Syrian Programme Team and with Welsh Government, WLGA and local authorities and a wide range of partners to ensure that the programme is properly coordinated at a Wales level. In doing so we worked in tandem with structures established by Welsh Government – the Task Force and Operations Group and sub groups (mental health and communications).
- b. This builds upon previous work that WSMP have undertaken to support participation in the original Syrian and Afghan resettlement schemes, engaging and mobilizing partners on this agenda since 2013.
- c. The WSMP established a *Local Authority SVPRS Delivery Group* which has representation from all LAs and health, Police and DWP in Wales, which has proved key to delivery of the scheme in Wales in providing a mechanism for all LAs involved in resettlement to work collectively and learn from each other, and provide an interface with the Syrian Programme Team. To underpin this work and support operational planning, the WSMP developed a **SVPRS Toolkit** which was disseminated to all 22 LAs and has been widely used to assess their capacity to participate in the programme and organize local/regional multi agency partnerships to deliver the requirements of the scheme.
- d. Regarding the **pace**, Local authorities in Wales have been criticised in some quarters for not responding more quickly and taking greater numbers of refugees. However, we have always been clear that we want to deliver *sustainable* refugee resettlement in Wales; it is not just a question of numbers of refugees settled, and that careful thought and meticulous planning needed to go

into the implementation of such a wide ranging and complex scheme, keeping at its heart the very vulnerable refugees who have applied for resettlement.

- e. Given that in Wales we did not have the benefit of experience in previous UK Government protection programmes, and only Swansea, Newport, Cardiff and Wrexham are asylum dispersal areas, the remaining Local Authorities were largely new to refugee resettlement, and therefore more time was needed to put effective plans in place.
- f. RSMPs with a bigger staff complement are abler to provide the one-to-one engagement with LAs that supports engagement in the scheme, and in some areas this may have led to earlier engagement with the scheme and higher numbers resettled. Until October 2016 the WSMP Director has been leading on the coordination single-handedly on behalf of the WSMP, alongside delivery on other Home Office priorities; the SRP and associated Community Sponsorship Programme is only one of a number of UK Government schemes which are a high priority at the current time including:
  - Increasing the number of asylum dispersal areas in Wales
  - A National Transfer Scheme for unaccompanied asylum seeking children
  - The Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme set to receive 3,000 children and families from the Middle East and North African region.
- g. However, after a relatively slow start for the reasons articulated above, the SRP team are now more than satisfied with the Wales response, and as we move into the second year of the programme, momentum has gathered and, according to recently published Gov.UK figures, we have resettled 294 refugees and two families from the VCRP (with another family due to arrive in January).
- h. The SRP have signalled the need to maintain momentum; the WSMP, like all regions in the UK have been tasked with moving to a **regional** approach to resettlement which will be coordinated centrally by a 'Refugee Resettlement Coordinator. This person will provide the interface between the HO and LAs in Wales, rather than the HO having to engage with all 22 LAs. It is proposed that this has a number of anticipated benefits for both central and local government:
  - *Undertaking a matching allocation and coordination role for Wales on behalf of participating LAs*
  - *The ability to work more collaboratively to share knowledge*
  - *The ability to rapidly deploy a range of resources locally and regionally*
  - *The ability to capitalise on existing mainstream capacity and partnership arrangements and build new arrangements*
  - *The ability to use the funding available to secure economies of scale and jointly commission services*
  - *Ability to identify solutions to a range of challenges*

## 2. Effectiveness of SRP Scheme delivery;

- a. The SRP is a cross-UK Government scheme implemented by local authorities-in which sense the WG ability to influence the pace and effectiveness has been

around strong political leadership and garnering senior level support and resolution of strategic/policy issues, to underpin the work of Welsh Local Authorities. All 22 authorities in Wales are committed to participation (*- note that Wales appears to be unique in this respect*).

- b. The leadership provided by Welsh Government in establishing a Task Force and Operations Board to ensure an all Wales approach, and senior level buy in of all relevant partners, and the WLGA in gaining political commitment has been key to the success of the scheme in Wales.
- c. In summary, the contribution of Local Authorities and their partners thus far in participating and receiving refugees during the first phase of Syrian refugee resettlement and in responding to a pressing humanitarian need has been acknowledged at all political levels. The compassionate and proactive, can-do approach to delivering resettlement by LAs in Wales should be recognised and celebrated, alongside the support offered by communities across Wales.
- d. However, there are a number of challenges going forward which may impact on the pace and effectiveness of the scheme, as follows;
- e. **Key issues and risks;**

- Maintaining momentum and delivering sustainable resettlement across 22 local authorities, (alongside delivery on all the other HO migration priorities) will require the ongoing support and proactive engagement across WG to support and drive forward national solutions to strategic issues.
- The potential increase in complexity of the scheme; for example, aside from an increase in the number of complex and ‘mobility’ cases needing to be resettled, there may be an increase in Community Sponsorship applications across Wales, which will require LAs to consider, approve and monitor, and Local Authorities also now need to work out how to deliver the anticipated benefits of the extra ESOL monies being made available by UK Government. There will also be an increasing focus on integration aspects of the programme going forward.
- Maintaining momentum on the SRP scheme will be to a large extent dependent on the availability of housing, and reductions in the welfare benefit cap will have an immediate impact of SRP beneficiaries who tend to have larger family sizes. Therefore, **special attention and focus** should be given to overcoming these and other housing related issues.
- Identifying suitable housing of the right size in the right location has been the biggest challenge affecting the scale and pace of the programme, and will continue to be so going forward. This may slow down the pace if national solutions are not found.
- A lack of trained and qualified interpreters in some areas of Wales has been reported, alongside a reluctance to use interpreting services and language line

in some health settings. There has been a suggestion that WG consider funding a course for Arabic speaking interpreters.

- Access to culturally sensitive mental health services: there needs to be more concerted planning and consideration of issues around waiting lists through mainstream mental health service provision and consideration of how services best support the linguistic, religious and cultural needs of refugees. See mental health (below).
- There is an increasing disparity between the level of resource allocated to different categories of refugees, but starkest in comparison between Syrian Resettlement Programme beneficiaries and so-called ‘spontaneous’ arrivals of adults from Syria who sought asylum via the normal route. WG and partners will need to ensure that benefits and good practice re SRP are realised to the benefit of the wider asylum seeker and refugee population, where possible.
- Isolation - especially for refugees in areas without diaspora communities. Many refugees are very happy with their resettlement but some feel isolated and unsettled and this has the potential to undermine the reputation of the scheme. LAs have worked very hard to address these issues, and in areas which are less diverse, to promote refugees’ independence, making links with services and communities which will support their integration.
- As the scheme matures we will need to consider proactive work around identifying refugees’ skills and development of approaches to enhance employability.

**f. Opportunities:**

- Community Sponsorship, additional ESOL funding and the willingness and commitment of UK Government to ensure the success of the scheme offers opportunities to support broader work across the migration agenda. For example, LAs are beginning to develop capacity on resettlement which may make them more likely to participate in other asylum and resettlement schemes in the longer term.

**3. The effectiveness of the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan**

- a. The WSMP welcomes ongoing work and commitment by Welsh Government on Refugee Inclusion and responded to the consultation on the Delivery Plan in 2015. A summary of our key points, updated to reflect the new context, is as follows;
- b. Overall, the Delivery Plan needs revision due to the dramatically changed context for the work and following on from heightened profile around increased number of asylum seekers entering Europe (due to the ongoing situation in Syria, conflicts in the Middle East and several other areas which have reignited in the past five years). As a consequence, resettlement schemes are being implemented across the UK and Wales (albeit in small numbers). Thus WG Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan needs to address much greater complexity; broader

geographies, different resettlement programmes and inclusion issues, and different levels of expertise and infrastructure across the twenty-two LAs in Wales.

- c. The Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan should be reframed for the current context, and actions should be identified which prioritise and address risks and gaps flagged in this consultation, and which maximise opportunities and the development of infrastructures which may have benefits across the resettlement schemes.
- d. To support this work Welsh Government should consider a review of the established structures around migration (Syrian Operations Group and Task force, Refugee Children's, Communications and Mental health sub-groups), and consider convening an overarching high level **Refugee Policy Forum** to revise the Delivery Plan and drive forward strategic aims around integration of all asylum seekers and refugees in Wales – redefining the priorities in the current delivery plan given the dramatic change in scale and context for refugee and asylum seeker inclusion. This should be linked into the Programme for Government and all relevant Welsh and UK Government legislation and policy areas (including the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, Wellbeing Needs Assessment, the UK Government Immigration Act).
- e. **Mental Health**; we welcome the initiative in the Delivery Plan to reduce stigma around mental health in some asylum seeker and refugee communities, and the proposal to set out WG expectations on the range of physical and mental health services which should be provided, but we are unclear how this is being taken forward.
- f. However, we are mindful that refugees are now being resettled across Wales, many of whom have complex needs including PTSD, who lack access to services.
- g. We would like to see better provision of specialist support which is accessible to refugees or asylum seekers wherever they reside in Wales, as part of WG strategy to improve access to mental health services for asylum seekers and refugees.
- h. We are mindful that WG has engaged with UK Government on mental health services for refugees but are yet to see any outcomes around this. Meanwhile the number of refugees in Wales potentially requiring services is increasing. For example;
  - The UASC National Transfer Scheme may eventually see unaccompanied children in every region of Wales: statistics from Dover, Kent, show that of their population of UASC, 41% had psychological symptoms; PTSD, depression, sleep disorder, flashbacks (aside from a range of physical health problems) and that the trauma experienced means an increase in the need for mental health support.
  - In a recent ADCS report, local authorities highlighted the mental and physical health of UASCs arriving in the UK as a common concern; over a third of

young people displayed psychological symptoms upon arrival, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, flashbacks and depression.

- i. Syrian Refugee Children: According to some research 79% will have experienced a death in the family. Almost half may display symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) - ten times the prevalence among children around the world. Syrian refugee children will likely need ongoing, targeted support to bridge the gaps in their education, attain fluency in the host-country language, and deal with trauma and other mental health symptoms.  
<http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/educational-and-mental-health-needs-syrian-refugee-children>
- j. Some LAs in Wales are also resettling families from the *Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Programme* which will support children (and their families) at risk or having experienced violence, abuse, torture, trafficking, forced labour and FGM.
- k. We are aware that many GPs and mainstream services are not trained in complex trauma and PTSD and would ask WG and Home Office to expedite work around this. While WG have developed a **Mental Health Pathway** for the SRP scheme, there are real concerns about how accessible complex trauma services are across Wales, and whether they are able to respond to the increasing needs of significant numbers of new arrivals. The qualifying vulnerability criteria of the programme means that defacto, refugees arriving in Wales are likely to require some form of mental health service.
- l. We believe the actions in relation to mental and physical health require partnership work and strategic leadership in understanding and addressing the complex health needs of asylum seekers and refugees and vulnerable migrants.
- m. Given that the *Wales Asylum Seeker and Refugee Health Advisory Group* (WASRHAG), chaired by PHW, no longer meets, we would ask that WG considers how the specific and specialist needs and issues for refugee communities in this new, more complex environment will be identified and addressed and confirm whether the WG Mental Health Sub Group is able to take on a broader remit such as that previously undertaken by the WASRHAG.
- n. **Health screening of asylum seekers at Initial Accommodation**; we support the ambition for provision of appropriate and timely health screening at initial assessment for asylum seekers but are aware that this provision has been problematic in recent years. Greater transparency and engagement is required by the service provider, and the ability to feed the concerns of our partners to the providers and commissioners of the service, so that we can identify issues and risks, and support continued improvement to the service.
- o. In recommissioning the screening service at the CRI, there are opportunities for improvements, most critically consideration of how to ensure the service is able to respond to demand, which it has struggled to do in the past, and measures to address the high levels of DNA and 'close the gaps' in relation to health screening, which has knock on impact for asylum seekers and for health services.

- p. **Homelessness policy and strategy** will need to address potentially increased level of destitution and street homelessness for failed asylum seekers (and illegal migrants), in light of potential Immigration Act impacts - which could impact across Wales.
- q. **Advice networks** may require specialist knowledge around no recourse to public funds and the intersection between LA duties and Immigration legislation. There is very patchy provision of specialist advice for asylum seekers and refugees in the established dispersal areas, and there may be increased need and challenges for advice services in all 22 Local Authorities who have or who are likely to see increased asylum seekers and refugee populations.
- r. **Immigration Act**; as a result of the Home Office terminating support to people who do not demonstrate they are taking steps to return etc., and the right to rent measures in the Immigration Act 2016, there is likely to be an increase in illegal migrants and failed asylum seekers with/without children presenting to local authorities if they are unable to find accommodation elsewhere, with friends, or in the private rented sector – at the very least for advice and assistance in managing their homelessness. If the family contains a child or vulnerable adult, then they may need assistance from social services in the form of accommodation or support.
- s. It is likely that failed asylum seekers will refer themselves to one of the LA dispersal areas in Wales alongside other migrants in those areas. However, there could be an impact in any LA areas in Wales.
- t. If they do manage to find accommodation in the PRS, they are more likely to be living in overcrowded poor quality housing, and if there are substantial numbers of people seeking access to the PRS at the bottom end of the market there will be implications for environment health, housing, child protection/POVA resources.
- u. **Impact on Gender-based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence**; if families are made destitute they will be at increased risk of violence and exploitation as has been evidenced in [WSMP](#) and [Oxfam](#) research.
- v. The WSMP no longer has the capacity to administer and chair a NRPF network and engage effectively in this policy area, and although it is a non-devolved policy area, the impacts continue to be felt and may increase in Wales. There are calls from the voluntary sector for such a network to be re-established to help mitigate the worst impacts and develop strategies to address them. There needs to be a more thorough-going assessment of the full and potential scale of NRPF in Wales and due consideration by WG and other partners of recommendations on NRPF in [‘Uncharted Territory’](#) and [WSMP/WLGA NRPF report](#).
- w. To address the gaps in service provision for women with NPRP and their vulnerability to homelessness, destitution, violence and exploitation, we would like to see WG provide a **Destitution Fund** along the lines of the fund made available in Northern Ireland by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (OFDPM). This is particularly important in the context of VAWGSADV context and would ensure that women and girls don’t become more vulnerable to violence and exploitation

through destitution. Evidence demonstrates that the fund has been most effective in addressing protection gaps related to domestic abuse and gender based violence.

- x. WSMP would welcome input from across WG on understanding and exploring the impact of the Immigration Act 2016 on individuals, devolved public service and local authorities in Wales, and identifying opportunities where devolved competencies could help mitigate any potential negative impacts.
- y. **Asylum accommodation;** Engagement and partnership work between Clearsprings and partners in Wales has been facilitated by WSMP and has resulted in improvements to the environment at the Initial Accommodation Centre, establishment of a Safeguarding Forum chaired by UKVI, and agreed processes for consultation on housing procurement and management of contingency arrangements, to an agreed process for accommodation of complex bail cases.
- z. Going forward, there is a need for Welsh Government to continue to actively engage with the UK Visa and Immigration Asylum Accommodation and Support Transformation (AAST) programme and help ensure that any new contract for asylum housing and support ensures lessons are learned from the COMPASS contracts, notably around safeguarding measures and standards, contingency arrangements, complaints processes and monitoring of accommodation standards

#### 4. The support and advocacy available to UASC in Wales

- a. Advocacy support is especially important now that Wales is likely to see an increase in its UASC population due to the National Transfer Scheme. Recent world events have led to a significant increase of numbers in 2014-2016.
- b. The Home Office wants all local authorities to take part in a 'National UASC Transfer System' and there are altered expectations regarding pace, arrival and cohort. The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act underlines the importance of advocacy. Advocacy is important for UASC in Wales for the following reasons (as set out in WG COP);
  - speaking up for and with individuals who are not being heard, helping them to express their views and make their own informed decisions and contributions, and
  - safeguards individuals who are vulnerable and discriminated against or whom services find difficult to serve
  - speaks up on behalf of individuals who are unable to do so for themselves
  - empowers individuals who need a stronger voice by enabling them to express their own needs and make their own informed decisions
  - enables individuals to gain access to information, explore and understand their options, and to make their views, wishes and feelings known, and
  - actively supports people to make informed choices.
- c. Section 78 of the SSWB Act specifies that the local authority must have regard to the views, wishes and feelings of the child and any other relevant person in



making decisions about them. This may be facilitated by an advocate, a foster carer or a key worker. The [All Wales Practice Guidance on Safeguarding and Promoting the Welfare of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children and Young People](#) published by the WSMP highlights the responsibility of social workers to appoint legal representatives for the looked after child, appoint an appropriate adult to attend all immigration interviews, arrange interpreters within Children's Services and refer children and young people to advocacy services so that this group of children are able to access appropriate support through the immigration process.

- d. The Practice Guidance advises that those working with separated migrant and asylum-seeking children have some working knowledge of the asylum and immigration processes in order to support the children effectively through the process. Advocates should be appropriately trained given that appropriate methods of ascertaining the child's wishes and feelings must include a consideration of the child's religious beliefs, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background.
  - e. We are aware that there are issues around access to advocacy services for children and that work is underway to implement a national approach to statutory advocacy. We also know that there are also no specialised advocacy services for UASC. The little provision that existed, provided by *Tros Gynnal*, was highly localised (Newport and Cardiff) and this service ensured that the particular interests and needs of UASC were provided for. This project closed in 2016.
  - f. UASC in Wales do not have a system of *Guardianship* or support of the *Refugee Children's Panel* so it could be argued they are especially disadvantaged compared to UASC in other parts of the UK. It is therefore essential that UASC are informed about and able to access an advocate, and that the advocate uses interpretation where necessary, if UASC are to be afforded the same UNCRC rights as other looked after children in Wales.
  - g. The 2016 Concluding Observations from the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child also called for 'statutory independent guardians for all unaccompanied and separated children', raising their concerns over the lack of support for, and increased vulnerability of this group of children and young people.
  - h. Advocacy becomes even more important in the context of age disputes. The WSMP has developed and published an [All Wales Age Assessment Toolkit](#) and has delivered training to Social Workers in South Wales, to improve consistency and ensure adherence to best practice. In our experience, the issues surrounding age assessment which we identified and reported on (report available on request) remain to a large extent, unaddressed.
- 5. The role and effectiveness of WG's Community Cohesion Delivery Plan in ensuring the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Welsh communities**

We support the aims of the WG in its CCDP and acknowledge that the work is critical in the wake of Brexit and the increase in profile and significance of migration, and make the following observations;

- a. Funding for the Community Cohesion Co-ordinators for 2017-18 is welcomed. This has enabled a more co-ordinated approach to be taken in relation to the Syrian Relocation Scheme in north Wales.
- b. The role of the Community Cohesion Coordinators has been critical in underpinning a regional, coordinated approach to resettlement. Their work in monitoring and managing community tensions that have arisen has been really important, and given added momentum and support by the work of the WG SRP Communications sub group.
- c. It is clear to us that there is a growing need to raise awareness and share knowledge about the rise in profile and scale of migration – to put it into perspective and counter some of the very negative, inaccurate and sometimes hostile media reporting about migration.
- d. This work is increasingly important in the wake of Brexit and the insecurity and rise in hate crime being experienced by the migrant community, the extent of which is largely underreported and not understood. The WG will need to consider actions to address this new context.
- e. There needs to be a more developed understanding of the causes of community tensions in this new context and methods to address them; for example, evidence shows that, is ‘myth busting’ is not necessary an inadequate tool for increasing knowledge and understanding of immigration, that we require more sophisticated and evidence-based approaches, and greater engagement with communities, to inform actions to address cohesion issues related to migration, and development of a **communications strategy**.
- f. The WG should consider actions to address community tensions around migration, building on previous research which acknowledges that socio-economic and political exclusion, poverty and deprivation are drivers of hostility to migrants and cohesion issues.
- g. The proposals to reform asylum support, together with potential impacts of other measures in the Immigration Act, including those around right to evict (and the Right to Rent Pilot – if rolled out nationwide), will have significant and wide-ranging impacts, as they may increase levels of poverty in migrant communities and social exclusion, with concomitant impacts on community cohesion.

For further information, please contact [Anne.Hubbard@wlga.gov.uk](mailto:Anne.Hubbard@wlga.gov.uk)

RAS 35

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Torfaen

Response from: Torfaen County Borough Council

## Introduction

Torfaen County Borough Council (the Council) has taken a decision to fully contribute to the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers by supporting both national and regional governments' priorities in discharging their humanitarian duties, and through proactive engagement is participating in the:

- Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS)
- The Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children Voluntary Transfer Scheme (UASC's) and
- Vulnerable Children Resettlement Programme (VCRP)

The Council is currently engaged with the Home Office, WLGA and Strategic Migration Partnerships to ensure a collective and joined up approach and smooth transition to resettlement for these very vulnerable families and their children.

The Council has not undertaken this process without the full engagement and support of its local partners that includes Gwent Police, Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, Public Health Wales, Registered Social Landlords, Education and Social Care Departments, 3<sup>rd</sup> sector, Faith Groups, Advocacy agencies and Specialist Support Services.

Two working groups support this function: an Operation Group of senior managers to progress cases and a Community Group established to ensure wider community engagement, support and on the ground delivery. This system has worked well for us and we intend to duplicate this structure as we progress the 3 schemes in parallel, with community cohesion at the heart of the entire process

The Council welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Assembly's Local Government and Communities Committee inquiry. Our response is structured in accordance with the inquiry's terms of reference.

**The pace and effectiveness of the Welsh Government approach to resettling refugees through the UK Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS)**

As the participation of local authorities in the SRP remains voluntary and driven by the Home Office, the approach of Welsh Government to encourage, but not to prescribe, participation was welcomed.

It is also reassuring that Welsh Government have refrained from promoting any projected or anticipated total resettlement numbers; this has perhaps reassured the participating in areas not versed in programmes such as the SRP, and has allowed areas to respond appropriately in accordance with their area's local capacity to deliver a constructive programme of resettlement.

At the early stages of the programme many local authorities, including Torfaen, had limited experience of working with refugees, and at that time authorities participating within phase one of the SRP welcomed opportunities to share practice and ideas and lessons learned with other regions. Particularly useful (in late 2015) was the All Wales Strategic Migration Operations Group, which encouraged open dialogue between authorities who were receiving new arrivals, later this group included representation from Welsh Government which allowed for constructive conversations centred on the challenges authorities were experiencing such as ESOL provision, Education, and Primary health care.

As with other authority areas, Torfaen responded and developed partnership structures to support the scheme in a timescale that was appropriate for the area and local partners - this has led to successful resettlements. However some authorities, particularly those participating in phase 1 of the SRP, could have benefited from additional guidance from Welsh Government in sharing practices from Welsh Government's commissioned services, such as the Wales Refugee Council. At the preliminary stages this might have supported areas to prepare for challenges post arrival, such as community isolation and orientation complexities.

The pace question is a difficult conundrum, as it was out of Welsh Government's control at the early initial stages of the programme. The drive from the Home Office to resettle 1000 refugees before Christmas 2015 meant that individual conversations with receiving authorities took precedence to ensure delivery. Torfaen was one of those early participants, and we experienced a hiatus between the expectations of Central Government and a time lag where Welsh Government was playing 'catch up' for a little while. Despite having experienced this 'lag', there has been consistent dialogue between Torfaen, the Lead Director at the WLGA and senior officials at Welsh Government to ensure the delivery of the programme, particularly around the safer and cohesive agendas.

The pace did pick up following the direct intervention and leadership by the First Minister in establishing the Task Force of Leaders and key stakeholders to coordinate and take the programme forward in Autumn 2015.

During this period partnership working and coordination from Community Cohesion Coordinators has been absolutely vital to delivery, and responses from partners have been very positive.

A key partner to ensure that a consistent coordination process has been undertaken has been the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership, which has an all Wales

membership of key partners who have helped all authorities, including the development of a tool kit for hosting refugees. This has been very helpful. Also the Syrian Refugee Operations Board has maintained a strategic overview of delivery of the process in Wales.

In terms of negative aspects, although not experienced directly in Torfaen, some local authorities have come under some pressure and criticism for not responding as quickly as others. There are good reasons for this; some being that this process is new to many authorities, and that critical to the whole process is effective partnership planning, without which vulnerable people will suffer. A smooth effective resettlement is infinitely more acceptable than a quick resettlement where families may fail.

### **The effectiveness of the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan**

The Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan (the plan) covers 8 key areas and has, in Torfaen's view, a limited profile in terms of its existence outside of those service areas and agencies working directly with the programme. It is reliant upon those staff working directly in this area to really make the plan a reality.

The Welsh Government are aware that local authorities are delivering programmes of work that are directly financed from the Home Office for the resettlement programme. Albeit that the delivery plan is 'generic' to all asylum seekers and refugees, there are no connections made within the plan to those requirements of contracting that report to the Home Office and will receive a separate reporting stream.

The delivery plan contains priority areas and actions required. Even though many of the actions that will be undertaken are 'normal business' for the Council (such as housing advice, access to the housing register, homelessness services etc), these are all very wide areas. The plan is generic, and not specific on those pertinent areas that Welsh Government could be concentrating on - such as ensuring effective ESOL takes place, which is the very key to integration through the understanding of English/Welsh.

Naturally, as with any action plan, suitable resources need to be found and, whilst there are connections within the plan to the cohesive communities agenda, wider resource application, such as additional translation, does not appear to attract additional resource and means that there is an additional financial burden to bear.

We are now moving into another two phases of delivery including the SVRP to supporting UASCS and VCRP, and there should be a recognition in the plan that numbers are likely to increase, which isn't currently reflected in the plan at either a strategic or operational level.

In terms of mental health, Torfaen considers that this area is vital to successful resettlement. The Council is working with its partners and neighbouring authorities to address the needs of both adults and children needing to access mental health services, which are already stretched to capacity. The likelihood of receiving

vulnerable people from war zones will mean that access to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services is particularly vital, and this would require not just policy guidance but also resourcing.

The plan does require timescales or a reporting stream for authorities to report relevant impact if this is outside of the National Community Cohesion Delivery Plan.

### **The support and advocacy available to UASC in Wales**

The Council is pleased to note the specific reference to the provision of support and independent advocacy that UASC should have access to, and has little to add to this area other than its generic support of providing advocacy.

Children and young people who present or will be received as part of the voluntary transfer scheme will have access to these services.

Increasing numbers may have an operational impact on referrals, and we would suggest that Welsh Government considers the capacity across Wales to deliver on independent advocacy for children whose first language will not be English/Welsh.

### **The role and effectiveness of Welsh Government's Community Cohesion Delivery Plan in ensuring the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Welsh communities**

The Community Cohesion Coordinators have provided an important function in supporting local authorities in their planning and preparations.

Coordinators have been able to support the standardisation of processes that local authorities have developed across regions, this has included the ways that authorities review and consult partners in discussing potential resettlement cases, as well as exploring community cohesion considerations, such as hate crime. In the wake of the recent EU referendum, the issue of immigration has been recognised as increasingly divisive within communities - factoring in possible tensions pre arrival has supported successful resettlements, and the coordinators have been important in facilitating this dialogue.

The all Wales cohesion delivery plan has also provided a blueprint for cohesion coordinators to explore how cultural orientation and community integration is embedded into the approaches of authorities receiving resettlements. This has involved coordinators working with the services commissioned to deliver case work support for resettled families, long term resettlement plans and ways to nurture community involvement.

The Council was pleased to note that a community cohesion programme, supporting issues such as Hate Crime, Modern Slavery, FGM and violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, is included in the delivery plan.

The Community Cohesion Coordinators have been pivotal to the entire delivery of the programme in Gwent, and Welsh Government have supported their role by allowing Councils to utilise this expertise within the grant. Whilst the Council

appreciates grant funding is by its nature temporary, these roles are very much a vital part to delivery; and we would suggest the plan is widened to encompass more of this work (as more refugees and asylum seekers arrive) and that therefore funding for this work should be on the basis of the wider programme – for example, SVRP is a 5 year programme that cannot be delivered without Community Cohesion Coordinators in Torfaen.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments in response to the National Assembly for Wales Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales.

Public Health Wales welcomes this opportunity to contribute to this important subject, which has clear links to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act goals, particularly 'a Globally Responsible Wales', 'a More Equal Wales' and 'a Wales of Cohesive Communities'.

Please find below our response to the specific points raised by the inquiry.

**The pace and effectiveness of the Welsh Government approach to resettling refugees through the UK Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS)**

1. Public Health Wales wishes to highlight that the sooner refugees and asylum seekers are settled in a country with appropriate support, the better their health and well-being outcomes are likely to be. In addition, we would like to highlight two pieces of work that could support those working in this field:
2. In November 2015, Public Health Wales produced a brief guide for service providers in Wales regarding [Screening of New Entrants arriving via the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme \(VPRS\)](#). This document provides brief guidance for health boards, local authorities, service providers and clinicians involved with the provision of health care to new entrants to Wales arriving via the Syrian VPRS programme. This guidance provides an overview of the health care needs of new entrants to Wales, but concentrates on those aspects of new entrant health care relating to screening for infectious diseases and the provision of vaccinations.
3. In January 2016, Public Health Wales' Primary Care Quality department produced a [guide for General Medical Practices \(GMPs\)](#), which provides advice about access to GMP services from potential patients wishing to register and who are also seeking asylum, or are failed asylum seekers or refugees. It looks at their rights and



responsibilities and the medical and social issues that need to be addressed at, and preceding, the point of registration.

### **The effectiveness of the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan**

4. The [Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan](#) refers to the need to ensure relevant training is delivered to professionals in order to better support refugees and asylum seekers in Wales. Training requirements identified cover a number of aspects including barriers, challenging discriminatory practices, female genital mutilation, honour-based violence and forced marriage. It is reassuring to note from the delivery plan that training for key professionals will be funded in order to help them understand particular issues relating to asylum seekers and refugees. We would welcome the development of a national approach to the delivery of this training for NHS staff to cover the diverse and complex needs of asylum seekers and refugees so that professionals are able to identify any issues and support individuals as required.
5. Under '*Action Area 2: Health, Wellbeing and Social Care*', the plan refers to the development of the '*Guidance on healthcare provision for asylum seekers and refugees*'. This guidance will be aimed at service providers and will raise awareness amongst NHS Wales and other public service staff of the rights and entitlements of asylum seekers and refugees to access mental health services. When considering this, services should be fully equipped to deal with individuals who have experienced significant trauma. They will need to consider how they will support the linguistic, cultural and religious beliefs/needs of people. Service providers will also need to consider how they are able to provide services in a timely manner, especially for those individuals who have experienced trauma and require specialist counselling or other therapies or for those whose mental health has deteriorated due to other factors, for examples those individuals under significant stress when going through the complex and lengthy asylum process. We believe that refugee and asylum seekers should be able to access general mental health and specialist Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) services and that those who have experienced torture or organised violence should be able to access specialist mental health services.
6. We believe that it is important that refugees and asylum seekers are provided with accessible information about the healthcare system in Wales, as well as more general healthcare and support information. There is also a need for this information to be shared with partner

agencies that are supporting refugees and asylum seekers so that they are fully informed of available services.

7. Under Action Area 6: Employment, the documents states that refugees and asylum seekers are:
- empowered to utilise their skills and knowledge to achieve their full potential as members of Welsh society;
  - have more prospects to engage with volunteering and employment opportunities; experience less unemployment

It may be opportune to consider how public sector bodies can create openings and opportunities to proactively support people in terms of volunteering opportunities, work experience, apprenticeships etc so that individuals can gain the necessary experience and confidence which may enhance their knowledge, life skills and employability.

### **The support and advocacy available to unaccompanied asylum seeking children in Wales.**

8. The Looked After Children (LAC) Steering Group, which links in to the NHS Safeguarding Network, is developing guidance for health professionals regarding Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) <http://howis.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/888/document/388106> to aid health professionals undertaking health assessments.
9. We are aware of the Scottish Guardianship Service as an example of good practice. The service works to help young asylum seekers feel supported and empowered throughout their journey whilst their claim is assessed and their status determined. It enables them to access the assistance they need, when they need it and helps them to make informed decisions about their future. On referral, the young person is appointed a guardian, who will represent a point of contact and continuity through their progress through the asylum and immigration system. The guardian is there to make the young person aware of their rights, explain aspects of the asylum and welfare system to them, introduce them to social opportunities and to begin to integrate them into community life.

### **The role and effectiveness of the Welsh Government's Community Cohesion Delivery Plan in ensuring the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Welsh communities.**

10. Whilst the Welsh Local Government Association, together with Local Authority and Health Board dispersal areas, and Community Cohesion Co-ordinators are well placed to respond to this point, we note that Community Cohesion Delivery Plan activities appear to be

centred around Cardiff. This may be where larger numbers of refugees and asylum seekers are resettled, but it will also be important to ensure that integration of refugees and asylum seekers resettled elsewhere in more remote, rural areas across Wales is similarly facilitated.

### **Other comments**

11. In addition to the specific points raised by the inquiry, we would like to highlight a briefing produced by Public Health Wales, through its International Health Coordination Centre (IHCC). The IHCC's briefing on '[Refugees and Asylum Seekers: Public Health implications for Wales](#)', published in November 2015 at the height of the European Union's refugee crisis, provided a focus on the impact the crisis has had in the UK and Wales.
12. We wish to highlight the important links between community cohesion and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act Wellbeing Plans and also the Strategic Equality Plans, which present opportunities to embed community cohesion issues across key plans and strategies.

RAS 37

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

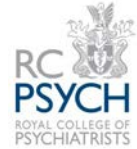
Ymateb gan: Coleg Brenhinol y Seiciatryddion

Response from: Royal College of Psychiatrists

# Royal College of Psychiatrists

## Consultation Response

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**DATE:** 14 December 2016

**RESPONSE OF:** THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PSYCHIATRISTS in WALES

**RESPONSE TO:** Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

The Royal College of Psychiatrists is the professional medical body responsible for supporting psychiatrists throughout their careers, from training through to retirement, and in setting and raising standards of psychiatry in the United Kingdom.

The College aims to improve the outcomes of people with mental illness, and the mental health of individuals, their families and communities. In order to achieve this, the College sets standards and promotes excellence in psychiatry; leads, represents and supports psychiatrists; improves the scientific understanding of mental illness; works with and advocates for patients, carers and their organisations. Nationally and internationally, the College has a vital role in representing the expertise of the psychiatric profession to governments and other agencies.

RCPsych in Wales is an arm of the Central College, representing over 550 Consultant and Trainee Psychiatrists working in Wales.

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@RCPsychWales

1. The Royal College of Psychiatrists in Wales welcomes the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales and we are pleased to respond. Since 2001, major cities around the country including Wrexham, Cardiff, Newport and Swansea became dispersal areas to ensure that no one area was 'over-burdened' by the obligation to support refugees and asylum seekers. In 2013, the number of people seeking asylum in Wales reached 1,571 with an estimated 8,000 to 10,000 refugees having settled here.<sup>i</sup>
2. Asylum seekers and refugees are a highly vulnerable group of people with complex social and health needs. They are fleeing persecution and/or have experienced major traumatic events. Some will have been subjected to multiple and repeated acts of cruelty over a prolonged period of time. They are also likely to have experienced a great deal of loss, whether it be one or several family members, their home, their jobs and their savings. Asylum seekers and refugees are faced with further distress when they enter the UK; waiting indefinitely in detention, with few or no benefits, often no family support, and in unfamiliar surroundings. They typically struggle to find employment and accommodation and many are here with their children or are themselves unaccompanied minors.
3. A large number of refugees and asylum seekers will require the services of the NHS for both their physical and mental health needs. We know that asylum seekers are more likely to develop mental illness than the general population; amongst the most common illnesses are Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), severe depression and anxiety. The PTSD rate in this cohort is ten times more than in the general population.<sup>ii</sup> Mental health services have been treating asylum seekers and refugees for decades yet we struggle to manage the diverse and specific needs of this population as we try to compete with growing demands. The nature of warfare has changed and the political environment responding to an increase in the public's apprehension towards immigrants means that mental health services are faced with an ever fluctuating set of problems and difficulties.
4. Refugees and asylum seekers will have a number of concerns around not just their mental or physical health needs but around their education, housing, employment and welfare needs. Although Welsh Government published its Refugee Inclusion Strategy in 2008, there is still evidence that refugees continue to struggle to access both primary and secondary care services as well as social services. This is largely due to social, cultural, and structural barriers.

5. We are pleased that in the *Together for Mental Health Strategy*, Welsh Government plans to issue a pathway of care ensuring access for refugees and asylum seekers to general mental health and specialist PTSD provision by as early as January 2017 and that this will be supported by a policy for guidance on healthcare provision for refugees and asylum seekers. We would like to stress that the following must be in place in order for the NHS to provide a good service to this vulnerable group:
  - Local services (education, housing, health, employment etc.) must be joined up with particular attention placed on the needs of parents with children and unaccompanied minors.
  - Clinicians must be supported to develop the knowledge, skills, capacity, and leadership to meet the diverse need of this group of people. This would include cultural competency training, the availability of interpreters, and appropriate and adaptable approaches to therapy that focus on a functional recovery (“What do you need to do”) as opposed to an emotion-focused approach (“How does it make you feel”).
  - Service delivery must support the adjustment to life in a foreign country.
  - There must be adequate training for all staff who come into contact with refugees and asylum seekers.
6. We must stress that important work around refugees and asylum seekers is taking place in the College UK-wide. We have an [Asylum Seekers and Refugees Mental Health Network](#) recognising the complexities when treating this unique population. The group is designed to support psychiatrists and it sets out:
  - To allow psychiatrists working with asylum seekers and refugees to maintain an awareness of this changing and evolving area.
  - To provide a source of information on resources for this patient group.
  - To share information on the latest evidence base for treatment.
  - To offer peer support, allowing psychiatrists to share accounts of their clinical experience with this group.
7. The College has set up a dedicated Working Group on asylum seekers and refugees with clear aims and objectives for the coming years. These objectives include promoting research and best practice, developing and delivering training programmes relating to assessing and promoting the mental health needs of

refugees and asylum seekers of all ages, promoting links with other healthcare professionals and organisations, and reacting to relevant events that occur globally. The group is keen to involve the jurisdictions in this work. The group also plans to publish a leaflet on refugees and asylum seekers for the general public. We would like to keep the Committee informed of the progress of the work of the Working Group in due course and are happy to discuss further any of the issues mentioned above.

14 December 2016

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<sup>i</sup> Wales Migration Partnership Briefing, 2013

<sup>ii</sup> Fazel et al 2005: Systematic review of prevalence of serious mental disorder in refugees resettled in western countries



RAS 38

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Cyngor Sir Ceredigion

Response from: Ceredigion County Council

## **1. The pace and effectiveness of the Welsh Government approach to resettling refugees through the UK Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPR)**

1.1 Ceredigion County Council was one of the trailblazing Authorities in delivering the SVPR and has committed to resettle 50 individuals over five years with a phased approach of 10 individuals per year. By end December 2016 we will have resettled 23 individuals and are on target to deliver our commitment.

1.2 The SVPR scheme is overseen by a local Task and Finish group based on the membership of the Public Service Board. The group meets regularly and is chaired the Leader of the Council. The group produced a 'Lessons Learnt' document (see Appendix 1). This supported the partnership working at Local Authority level as well as on an all-Wales level.

1.3 We welcome the partnership approach that the Welsh Government has taken to this Scheme. The WLGA and the WSMP have been also been key in liaising with Local Authorities to support the scheme and are particularly effective in enabling the sharing of good practice and working through issues as they arise.

1.4 The Welcome to Wales pack, including the Child Friendly version, have been very well received by the refugees.

1.5 The continued funding of the regional Community Cohesion Co-ordinators means that our local Co-ordinator has been able to share good practice between the Local Authorities in the region and act as a conduit between Welsh Government, WLGA and Ceredigion Public Service Board partners.

1.6 As Ceredigion was a trailblazing authority, much of the initial processes to support the first 12 months are now established. It would be useful to have additional support around ongoing needs, for example access to mental health services and advice to refugees who are trying to help family members join them in the UK.

1.7 We have found that refugees resettled in Ceredigion thought they were coming to Manchester or Bristol (the receiving airports) and were unaware that they were coming to rural mid-Wales. This has been passed on the UNHCR and the IOM during the recent research project. It would be useful if the Welsh Government continued to work with the Home Office to make sure that the expectations of refugees about their resettlement location are managed appropriately.

## 2. The effectiveness of the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan

2.1 Many of the proposed actions in the plan appear to refer to actions which mainstream services would deliver in any case. There are additional costs attached to ensuring these services are also available to refugees and asylum seekers (e.g. translation and specialist advice). This does not appear to have been addressed throughout the plan and where it has been addressed the services are focused in South Wales.

### 2.2 Housing & Advice Services

The Intended Outcomes in this action area are fit for purpose but immigration advice and legal support seems to be focussed in South Wales and this makes it more time consuming and expensive for refugees resettled in mid-Wales to access.

**Case Study:** A refugee resettled in Ceredigion requested immigration advice and was accompanied to Swansea to see a solicitor trained in this area. The solicitor was funded to provide 30 minutes of free advice. This involved a 4 hour round trip by the refugee and the support worker for 30 minutes of advice.

### 2.3 Health, Wellbeing and Social Care

Refugees resettled in Ceredigion have experienced a good level of support from Health services, some needing a weekly GP appointment. Translation services can pose a problem however; the service is available but some front line staff do not know how to access it. We commission the Red Cross to deliver our case work support service and they are often asked to make sure they provide translation for health appointments – Google translate is often utilised.

2.4 More work is needed to raise awareness of mental health services available. There is a need to manage the expectations of refugees about NHS waiting lists for both physical and mental health services. Assessment take place in good time but there can be a waiting time for delivery of treatment e.g. physiotherapy and talking therapies/counselling.

### 2.5 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

The committee should be aware that there is a danger of placing UASC in areas where there are a low number of people of their own race or culture. There is a risk that children in this circumstance will find it difficult to develop a network of support and friendship. This is very likely to have a negative impact on their mental and emotional health.

### 2.6 Education

We welcome the idea of a monthly surgery at Cardiff Metropolitan University to provide advice for refugees on possible routes into higher education. This would be difficult for refugees in Ceredigion to attend however as it is a 9 hour round trip by public transport. Aberystwyth University has been proactive in this area albeit on an ad hoc basis and with no additional funding.

### 2.7 Employment

Refugees resettled in Ceredigion have accessed employment opportunities via the Job Centre and volunteering opportunities via casework support service provided by the British Red Cross.

2.8 Gender Based Violence, Hate Crime, Modern Slavery and Community Cohesion  
Our Regional Community Cohesion Co-ordinator has been very proactive in this area. He has organised Hate Crime training and liaises with Dyfed Powys Police via the Community Safety Partnership.

2.9 Refugees in Ceredigion are able to access Families First services like any other resident in Ceredigion. The Team around the Family process and the Flying Start Outreach service can be accessed through completing the Joint Assessment Family Framework (JAFF). To date this has not been deemed necessary.

2.10 Arts Culture and Sport

Refugees in Ceredigion have taken part in events and exhibitions at Ceredigion Museum and Aberystwyth Arts Centre. Some of the female refugees have joined the gym. To date we have not experienced any issues with regard access of female refugees to sport.

### **3. The support and advocacy available to unaccompanied asylum seeking children in Wales**

This is not a point we can comment on as we have little experience in this area. See point 2.5 above.

### **4. The role and effectiveness of the Welsh Government's Community Cohesion Delivery Plan in ensuring the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Welsh communities**

4.1 A Regional Community Cohesion Co-ordinator is in post to facilitate the implementation of the Community Cohesion National Delivery Plan 2016-17. The Co-ordinator covers mid and west Wales comprising Ceredigion, Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire and Powys County Councils.

4.2 The relevant area of work with regards to refugees has been the ongoing delivery of the Syrian Resettlement Programme, (SRP). Ceredigion does not fall within an asylum seeker dispersal area.

4.3 The Co-ordinator assisted with primary planning with Ceredigion partners as a trail-blazing authority for the SRP. Specifically this included advice and guidance on integration and service provision for refugees and also sharing best practice from other migration integration work within the region, (for example engagement work with the Nepalese community in Brecon).

4.4 The Co-ordinator has been able to share best practice and experience between the four local authorities in mid and West Wales. The Co-ordinator sits on the four respective Syrian Resettlement Programme Multi-Agency Task Groups. Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire and Powys were very appreciative that Ceredigion was able to share best practice as a trail-blazing authority under the Syrian Resettlement Programme. The Regional Co-ordinator has also been a link with the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership and Welsh Government.

4.5 The Regional Community Cohesion Co-ordinator has also offered specialist support in three areas.

- Supporting the production of a Syrian Resettlement Programme Communications Strategy. As a trail-blazing authority and also as a largely rural county, there was considerable press interest.
- Hate Crime, including co-ordinating hate crime awareness raising training and information and strategic work with Dyfed Powys Hate Crime Forum and Ceredigion Community Safety Partnership.
- Tension monitoring. The Co-ordinator linked in with Dyfed Powys Police and Ceredigion CC Communications Team to monitor for any tensions. No significant tensions were identified.

## **Appendix 1 - Ceredigion Syrian Persons Relocation (SPR) scheme – Lessons Learnt**

### What went well?

1. The SVPR scheme in Ceredigion is facilitated via a multi-agency task and finish group based on Local Service Board membership. Members include the Local Authority, the Health Board, Higher Education, DWP, the Police, Fire & Rescue, the Third Sector and Registered Social Landlords. Adopting this multi-agency approach from the beginning has been very beneficial.
2. The process of procuring the case work support service went quickly and smoothly. Expressions of interest in the work were invited from existing Supporting People providers. Quick Quotes were obtained from 3 providers via the Sell2Wales website and the contract was based on Home Office Statement of Requirements. The process took three weeks.
3. The Press Office prepared a list of key messages and circulated to members of the multi-agency SVPR group for further distribution. They were also sent to all elected Members and all senior Local Authority officers. This helped to provide clear consistent messages that had been agreed by the whole group.
4. The Press Office managed enquiries from the media effectively, and continues to do so. A good relationship has been maintained with the local press. Enquiries from the media are evaluated and a very small number are invited to come and film and/or interview. Our Press Officer has worked in partnership with our Support Service Provider's Press Officer to achieve this.
5. A Local Panel, with separate Terms of Reference, has been established to consider whether we have the resources locally to meet the needs of those refugees referred to us by the Home Office. Local arrangements associated with panel decisions are transparent and robust. National guidance and structure, especially those associated with Health Finance have been slower to be tested and put in place.

## Lessons Learnt

1. A workshop was offered to County Councillors to share information about the SPVR scheme and progress to date. This took place around 2 months after the initial multi-agency Syrian Refugee task and finish group. In retrospect we should have offered this workshop earlier in the process.
2. Ceredigion Housing stock has been transferred to a Housing Association. Our Housing team delivers the Local Authority's statutory duty with regard housing and homelessness. Environmental Services inspect local housing to ensure it is fit for purpose. It is essential that both Housing and Environmental services are happy with the accommodation being offered.
3. The Welcome to Wales leaflets were a good idea but they should have been checked for accuracy before they were presented to the refugees.

## Other Points

1. Ceredigion's multi-agency SVPR group was chaired by the Leader of the Council; this helped facilitate multi-agency engagement with the process.
2. Telephone translation facilities have been set up for a range of public facing services within the Council (including Social Care, Education, Town Library, Housing and main reception). We know that these services won't all need the facility but they have the confidence of knowing that they have it should they need it. There are separate cost codes so we can monitor the use.
3. The Local Authority Delivery Group, facilitated by the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership has been a useful forum for group discussions and creating informal links between officers in other counties with whom to share good practice and helpful hints.
4. Concerns have been raised relating to the quality of information sent from the home office in relation to medical forms; examples include inaccurate vaccination records. Whilst this has not caused a major challenge as yet, new guidance which suggests that medical costs need to be calculated from the medical forms prior to arrival and not from assessments undertaken on arrival does cause concern.
5. We are working with the local population to help with integration and are managing the offers of support from local residents. The aim is to enable the local community to show that refugees are welcomed without overwhelming the group. Examples are shown below:
  - two part time teaching assistants have been recruited from the local Arabic speaking population to support the children in school
  - the Local Muslim Society has been involved with welcome meetings
  - offers of accommodation are passed on to Environmental Services
  - welcome cards were made by children and families and given to the refugees when they arrived in Ceredigion

RAS 39

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol Caerdydd a'r Fro

Response from: Cardiff and Vale University Health Board



## **CARDIFF AND VALE UNIVERSITY HEALTH BOARD**

### **Response to the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee Inquiry into Refugee and Asylum Seekers Wales.**

#### **1 Introduction**

Cardiff and Vale University Health Board is pleased to provide a response into the Inquiry into Refugee and Asylum Seekers Wales and will primarily respond in relation to Health and Wellbeing and Social Care.

This response will include reference to:

- the pace and effectiveness of the Welsh Government approach to resettling refugees through the UK Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS);
- the effectiveness of the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan
- the support and advocacy available to unaccompanied asylum seeking children in Wales; and
- the role and effectiveness of the Welsh Government's Community Cohesion Delivery Plan in ensuring the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Welsh communities.

#### **2 Pace and Effectiveness of the Syrian Vulnerable Person Relocation Scheme. (SVPRS)**

Cardiff and Vale University Health Board (UHB) is involved the relocation Syrian families at both strategic and operational level, working closely with other partner organisations. The approach taken has been inclusive with all partners working to ensure the best possible experience for these vulnerable people. Prior to arrival there is a robust process in place between the Local Authority and the UHB to ensure that relevant health information is shared securely. This allows the UHB to have some indication of potential health needs prior to arrival. Both primary and

secondary care have been engaged in this process and to date all family members have registered with a local doctor in the first few weeks of arrival. From this initial health assessment, a subsequent treatment plan can be developed. The UHB has developed a referral pathway from primary to secondary care for these patients.

The Local Authority has a robust support system for all families and this appears to have been invaluable in assisting people to settle into a new country and navigate through our systems.

### **3 The effectiveness of the Refugee and Asylum seeker Delivery Plan.**

Cardiff & Vale UHB is the provider of the Cardiff Health Access Practice (CHAP) which is a dedicated facility based in Cardiff Royal Infirmary. CHAP is an Initial Assessment centre for the dispersal centre in Cardiff. The service operates 5 days a week and undertakes Initial health assessments for all new arrivals.

This initial assessment ensures that all newly processed arrivals are screened for any potential public health issues. There are close working relationships with the housing provider and Home Office (UKVI). The multi disciplinary team also provide midwifery service for pregnant women and health visitor service for children. This is particularly important to ensure multi agency management of any safeguarding issues for this group.

As a main provider of primary care services, Cardiff & Vale UHB is aware of the rights and entitlements of asylum seekers and refugees to access primary health care services. Those asylum seekers and refugees that have been granted the right to remain are assisted to register with local General Practitioners where they are able to obtain primary healthcare. For those that are awaiting dispersal, their primary healthcare is delivered within the CHAP service.

The UHB would consider providing support for dental screening for this client group providing funding was available.

In addition to the above the local Cluster of GP practices are engaging with 3<sup>rd</sup> sector groups to gain a better understanding and awareness of the services that are available for asylum seekers and refugees e.g. Oasis, Migrant Help. Where English is not widely understood/spoken, interpretation services are used.

There is an increasing demand for secondary care services for this group but not statistically significant, however the impact on

language line in terms of increase access may need to be reviewed while ESOL services are limited.

Cardiff & Vale UHB recently worked with the Local Authority and other key agencies in the resettlement of children from Calais. Support was extensive and the multi agency approach ensured that the children had initial assessments from each agency at a single reception in CRI. The children were supported by various agencies such as Red Cross and the entire operation was very successful.

The Health Board has close links with other agencies that support Violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence. These links are both internal and external to the UHB and provide education and training for staff across the organization to better manage victims within this group. Training is available and has been provided to UHB staff.

#### **4 Role and Effectiveness of Community Cohesion Delivery Plan**

The Community Cohesion Strategy is a National Delivery Plan that works across Wales and is supported by the appointment of local coordinators. The UHB is engaged with the Local Community Cohesion Coordinator for Cardiff and Vale with particular reference to the SVPRS.

Also close working with neighbourhood partnerships provides an opportunity to support local communities by multi agency working. This provides a better understanding and increases knowledge and skills in relation to this client group. This will ultimately help to support a cohesive population with better health and wellbeing.

#### **5 Additional Comments**

From a healthcare perspective, there has been a considerable difference in the planning and provision of services for those relocated via the Syrian Scheme compared with refugee and asylum seekers. The former has had a much more structured approach, with good engagement among stakeholders. Additionally, having information in advance has enabled us to plan our services/responses accordingly. The very planned/unpredictable nature of the other arrivals is more difficult to manage with peaks and troughs in demand throughout the year. This has led to an inequitable provision for these 2 specific client groups.





RAS 40

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Pobl i Bobl

Response from: Pobl i Bobl

## **WAG Consultation – Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales**

**Response submitted by Pobl i Bobl, grassroots organisation in NW Wales**

### **Organisational Background**

1. Pobl i Bobl is a grassroots organisation founded in response to the refugee crisis of 2015. We have grown in membership primarily through social media, and currently have around 1000-1500 supporters. Our main task is to collect and distribute physical donations to refugees worldwide, whilst also raising awareness of refugee issues. Over the past 6 months Pobl i Bobl has been engaged with refugees arriving in North West Wales under the SVPRS. We are pleased to submit the following points with regard to our experiences relating to resettlement.

### **Pace & effectiveness of WAG approach**

2. We believe that the majority of our supporters would like to see more refugees settled in Wales and at a quicker pace than is currently occurring. We do appreciate that the decision on numbers lies in the hands of Parliament rather than the Welsh Assembly. However, we would like to take this opportunity to state that we feel WAG should make a firmer commitment to take a greater number of refugees, and take appropriate action to lobby the British Government to allow Wales to do so.
3. We are aware that there are no Home Office designated dispersal areas in North West Wales (the closest being Wrexham), and that the settlement of Syrian refugees in the area so far has been a steep learning curve for councils and partner organisations, and therefore inevitably has had to be slow. We hope that, moving forwards, the process of resettlement will progress more swiftly.
4. Pobl i Bobl would like to be able to welcome refugees under the community sponsorship scheme, whereby named refugees are resettled in the UK, hosted and paid for by the local community. However, if communities are

to raise funds and host these refugees, this should be in addition to SVPRS numbers and not, as currently being considered, within the UK 20,000 over 5 years. We would urge the Welsh Assembly to lobby parliament on this matter.

## Effectiveness of Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan

5. We agree with the principals of the above plan, but would like to make the following points:
  - a. We are concerned that refugees are not provided with a sufficient introduction to living in Wales prior to their arrival in the UK, which leaves them somewhat unprepared for the cultural differences. For example, a lack of awareness that Wales is a bilingual country, and the significance of the Welsh language in education, culture and identity.
  - b. We believe that it would be beneficial to offer training to both council employees and third sector relevant parties on resettlement, integration and the specific needs of refugees, to enable us all to work together more closely and effectively.
  - c. As noted, North West Wales has not had a significant intake of refugees as yet but we question whether there are sufficient advice services available to the refugees in the area, particularly in relation to welfare benefits, debt, housing, employment and discrimination. We feel that it would be beneficial to provide a specific advocacy service which is sensitive to the language and cultural needs of Syrian refugees.
  - d. We feel that the provision of mental health services for refugees, needs to be strengthened and be more sensitive to the trauma and PTSD suffered by refugees escaping war.
  - e. We consider that educational support (including ESOL) is being well provided for by local authorities and local colleges.
  - f. We find that some of the points raised in the community cohesion plan are South Wales centric and feel that greater utilisation could be made of grassroots groups across Wales in facilitating stronger links between refugees (and asylum seekers) and members of the community who wish to support them. For example, as a third sector grassroots group, we are unaware of who holds the position of Community Cohesion Co-ordinator locally.
  - g. We feel there could be better dissemination of information on how refugees can engage with the provision of arts, culture and sport.

## **Unaccompanied children**

6. To date, Pobl i Bobl has not been involved in working with unaccompanied children, but we are keen to offer our support to local councils in preparation for the arrival of unaccompanied children in North West Wales.

## **Integration of Refugees & Asylum seekers**

7. We feel that North West Wales is lacking in formal integration services, with many organisations mentioned in the delivery plan being South Wales based. However, there is strong community support for refugees in the North West area, which has led to successful integration, albeit on a relatively informal and ad hoc basis.
8. As stated earlier, better use could be made of local grassroots groups by the local councils in facilitating integration in a more structured way.
9. The far right rally that took place locally in November 2015, generated a counter rally on the day of 400 attendees (compared to no more than 10 “infidels”) and resulted in a celebration of diversity and welcome to refugees and asylum seekers.
10. Pobl i Bobl has developed a growing relationship with the families who have arrived in the area under the SVPRS, and helped them engage with the local community of both Arabic, and Welsh/English speaking residents. For example, we have organised integration events for the refugees, and some members of the families choose to regularly volunteer with Pobl i Bobl, working alongside local residents. This has helped the families settle in the area quickly and feel welcomed.
11. The existence of an Islamic Centre in Bangor has been an important factor in successful integration, where refugees have been warmly welcomed by other Muslims and Arabic speaking residents.

## **Conclusion**

12. In conclusion, we would like to reiterate that support for refugees in the area is strong and that we have experienced no adverse responses to our continuing work in supporting refugees to date. The community of North West Wales has been exceedingly generous with both financial and physical donations, since the inception of Pobl i Bobl and has always turned out to show their support for refugees.

RAS 41

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Migrant Help

Response from: Migrant Help

**Migrant Help response to the Inquiry into Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Wales conducted by**

**Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee's, National Assembly for Wales**

**December 2016**

**For further information about this paper please contact:**

**Ruth Gwilym Rasool**

**Regional Operations Manager, South Wales and South West England**

**Asylum Help/Migrant Help**

**[Ruth.GwilymRasool@migranthelpuk.org](mailto:Ruth.GwilymRasool@migranthelpuk.org) 02920100092**

**About Migrant Help**

We are an UK wide charity offering advice and support to vulnerable migrants, helping them feel protected, safe and informed. We are non-campaigning and have more than 50 years of knowledge and experience in supporting asylum seekers, refugees, victims of modern day slavery and other migrants.

Our vision is for a global society that protects vulnerable migrants, treats them with respect and enables them to become successful members of their community.

**Our work in Wales**

Asylum Help has operated in Wales since the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2014 replacing all other government funded asylum advice services. This is free independent advice and guidance to asylum seekers. Our advisers assist asylum seekers to understand their situation and to make informed decisions. Asylum Help has advisers based in Initial Accommodation in Cardiff (as well as other IA's across the UK). It runs a national free telephone helpline to provide advice and assistance with completing support applications in the client's language of choice. We also provide outreach for a defined vulnerable group of asylum seekers and are also first responders to the National Referral Mechanism for victims of slavery. Resources and information are available in 15 language on [www.asylumhelpuk.org](http://www.asylumhelpuk.org) and [www.migranthelpuk.org](http://www.migranthelpuk.org)

Migrant Help is supportive of fuller responses to the inquiry given by the Welsh Refugee Coalition, Tai Pawb and Welsh Women's Aid.

## **1. Asylum Accommodation**

As an exception to devolved housing policy asylum accommodation is not devolved. Asylum Accommodation in Wales is run by Clearsprings which runs both the Initial Accommodation and dispersal properties. Clearsprings is a private company that is contracted by the Home Office to do this. Asylum Seekers are made to share bedrooms, the standard of the accommodation is often poor and when asylum seekers want to report a maintenance issue or complaint the existing processes are not effective. There is no independent scrutiny on standards or independent means of complaint.

**Recommendation 1:** Welsh Government to engage in ways to improve asylum accommodation in Wales. This could be done by putting measures in place for asylum housing quality to be scrutinized by Welsh Government or local authorities. Welsh Government could also engage with UK Visa & immigration Asylum Accommodation and Support (AAS) stakeholder consultation on new contracts for asylum housing and influence bringing the asylum housing contracts back to the Local Authorities in Wales.

## **2. Destitution and Homelessness**

Asylum Seekers who have been through the asylum process and become all rights exhausted are evicted from asylum accommodation and have no right to public housing, no right to legal work and no access to public funds or benefits (NRPF)

Some asylum seekers at the beginning of the asylum process may also be at risk of destitution due to inability to evidence destitution to the Home Office, particularly vulnerable unfamiliar with their environment with no family links.

Enforced destitution on vulnerable asylum seekers should not be happening in Wales and although it is a Home Office policy, Welsh Government could take measures to reduce destitution and thus exploitation of vulnerable displaced people.

Voluntary hosting schemes have been operating in Cardiff and Swansea but capacity is an issue particularly in terms of risk assessing, training hosts and safeguarding framework. Although as a Welsh society we are facing increased racism, the rise of far right movements and general hostility towards asylum seekers and refugees there has on a positive side been a massive upsurge in people wanting to help asylum seekers and refugees. Support for those who have spontaneously claimed asylum and who have been through the asylum process should also be encouraged.

**Recommendation 2:** Welsh Government expands the eligibility criteria for the Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF) to include those who currently have no recourse to public funds. Welsh Government to look at how it can support hosting schemes either through capacity building or through the DAF.

Registered Address: Migrant Helpline Limited (trading as Migrant Help), Charlton House, Dour Street, Dover, Kent, CT16 1AT

Website: [www.migranthelp.org](http://www.migranthelp.org) Tel: 01304 203977

Registered Charity (England and Wales): 1088631 Registered Charity (Scotland): SC041022 Company No (England and Wales): 4172880

**Recommendation 3:** WG to commission standard information sharing protocols with UKVI asylum support or its contracted agencies to provide ongoing statistical data on asylum seekers refused support and are destitute in Wales. Data/trends to be closely monitored to inform policies and advocacy areas following full implementation of the new immigration rules in 2017.

### 3. Health and wellbeing

#### **Initial Screening/Services for newly arrived asylum seekers**

Newly arrived asylum seekers have an initial health screening during their stay in IA (Initial Accommodation), this is done by staff at CHAP (Cardiff Health Access Practice). The health service at the time was designed for a throughput of 140 asylum seekers in IA. The average number of asylum seekers passing through IA are on average 300 and have been for the past 2 years. CHAP service have undergone two tenders and many changes, at times there have been no capacity to see all newly arrived asylum seekers and quite often asylum seekers have significant and complex health needs.

The intended stay in IA is 28 days but we are finding that people may be in IA for longer as TDA (Temporary Dispersal Accommodation) this means that people are waiting longer for permanent dispersal and thus access to secondary health care.

**Recommendation 4.** WG to monitor health service for newly arrived asylum seekers (previously done via WASHRAG meetings)

#### **Mental Health**

Many asylum seekers have experienced significant trauma and are in need for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Counselling – the waiting lists are long and quite often the counselling does not include appropriate translation and interpretation. It is also evident that the asylum process itself can have a significant negative impact on an asylum seekers' mental health – the lack of control over their situation, poor living conditions, low financial support rates, isolation, culture shock, mental health stigma, language barriers and loss of identity. There is a lack of understanding of these issues amongst health professionals, with very few specialists in refugee related trauma. In England asylum seekers have easier access to the services of Freedom from Torture and Helen Bamber charities – but this is more difficult for those asylum seekers living in Wales – partly due to their capacity and also distance/travel.

**Recommendation 5.** WG to look at joined up working with third sector charities in developing sustainable provision of specialist mental health services for asylum seekers. WG to review and develop a framework for specialist training for health professionals.

#### **Language Line/Interpreting Services**



Not all health services are offering or using Language Line. Some GP's are refusing to use language line or make other interpreting arrangements. This can be because GP's may use patients' children to interpret or simply because of direct discrimination.

**Recommendation 6.** WG/Delivery Plan should reflect action to work with health colleagues to ensure all health services in Wales fully integrate Language Line or equivalent into health provision. Monitoring systems should be put into place to ensure access to interpreting services.

#### **4. Asylum Seeking and Refugee Women**

As service providers in the Initial Accommodation we are witness to the fact that refugee women and girls in Wales are highly likely to have experienced violence in their lifetime, in their country of origin, in a refugee camp, on their journey, or in the UK. We fully support the response and recommendations made by Women's Aid to this enquiry.

#### **5. Integration of new arrivals**

Newly arrived asylum seekers dispersed in Wales are accommodated in the Initial Accommodation for a relative period of +/- 28 days. This is an estimated length of stay which could ultimately be as long as 3 months due to various contributing factors. In our experience this is wasted time when many service users start to become frustrated, depressed and disorientated. It is noted one of the principles underpinning the policy approach to supporting refugees in the Welsh Inclusion Strategy acknowledges 'refugee inclusion begins on day one of arrival'. As many of these policy issues affecting asylum seekers and refugees are notably not devolved areas of responsibility, promoting community cohesion from day of arrival should be extended to newly arrived asylum seekers as they are more than likely to be settled long term in Wales as asylum seekers or when granted leave to remain.

**Recommendation 7:** WG to provide support and SMART framework to the third sector agencies providing activities promoting community cohesion. These should be relevant and relative to the requirements of the service users ie. English Conversation groups or ESOL + courses, children's therapeutic play groups, access to sporting facilities/extracurricular activities and proactive engagement by local PCSO's. Orientation/life in UK modules would be useful for newly arrived asylum seekers in learning about welsh society and laws. Skill identification is needed at an early stage and assistance to utilise such skills in a volunteering capacity. Opportunities should be maximized for residents in IA and in dispersal to be involved in local volunteering activities, and for capacity building support for local communities to support befriending/mentoring schemes.

**Recommendation 8:** Structured monitoring of the experiences of newly arrived asylum seekers to be required from supported third sector

agencies to inform policy development and lobby areas in areas of devolved responsibility.

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INVESTORS  
IN PEOPLE

Tudalen y pecyn 273

RAS 42

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Space4U

Response from: Space4U

We write as Lead Volunteers for Space4U Cardiff (Registered Charity 1158327) in response to your request for written submissions to the Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales.

Space4U has operated since 2007 at the Trinity centre in Cardiff and we were pleased to meet with members of the Inquiry on their recent visit to the Trinity Centre.

Space4U operate a twice-weekly drop-in centre offering a number of services that support up to 200 refugees and asylum seekers per session. A number of the services which we offer are vital for those who attend due to lack of provision elsewhere. For example we offer up to six ESOL classes per week which are mostly accessed by asylum seekers and refugees who are not able to access mainstream provision at Cardiff and Vale College due to long (up to 1 year) waiting lists. We also operate a foodbank for those asylum seekers and refugees who are destitute; either without asylum support or new refugees who are in the move-on period who have not been able to access mainstream welfare benefits due to delays. We also have a clothing store where newly arrived asylum seekers and refugees can receive essential clothing. In addition to these services, we also offer a hot meal to all attendees and a social space for people to meet new friends and relax in a welcoming environment.

We would like to offer our full support and endorsement to the submission written by the Welsh Refugee Coalition, which highlights many of the issues that users of Space4U are currently facing in Wales.

We thank you for your time in reading this submission and also for carrying out this inquiry.

Yours Sincerely,

Sam Parker and Sister Ruth O'Neill  
Lead Volunteers Space4U

RAS 43

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Cymdeithas Tai Merthyr Tudful

Response from: Merthyr Tydfil Housing Association

We are replying to your request information on the inquiry in to the Refugees and asylum seekers.

Our main issue is around the fact that our board agreed to provide up to 10 houses for the Syrian refugees as a way of supporting the initiative.

I am aware that Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council is concentrating on supporting the refugees by providing private rented accommodation. This is not a criticism in any way or form, but we feel that there is likely to be better support and advice provided if they were placed in housing association stock.

The other issue is that we work with Focal Point which is a lottery funded scheme based in Merthyr that has provided extra support to the Syrians but the money allocated to running this advice service will terminate in September 2017. I would argue that help and support needs to continue for more than the initial 12 months and the voluntary services such as Focal Point need to be adequately resourced.

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Wrexham

Response from: Wrexham County Borough Council

**14 December 2016**

**Welsh Government's Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee  
inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales.**

**Feedback from Wrexham County Borough Council**

**Contact details:**

Gill Grainger  
Community Diversity Manager  
WCBC  
gillian.grainger@wrexham.gov.uk  
Tel: 01978 292261

**1. The pace & effectiveness of the Welsh Government approach to  
resettling refugees through the UK Government's Syrian Vulnerable  
Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS).**

Wrexham Council is committed to the principles of humanitarian protection. Wrexham has been a dispersal area for asylum seekers since 2001 and we are continuing to co-ordinate support for these vulnerable people. We take a lead role in co-ordinating positive partnership arrangements across the local public, voluntary and community organisations. Our ambition is that Wales is rightly seen as a nation of sanctuary and protection for vulnerable people.

Work to progress our role in the Syrian Resettlement Programme is continuing. With partners we have agreed to accommodate five families during 2016-17; four families are now resident in Wrexham. Ongoing partnership working with local groups and the wider community is central to our overall support arrangements. A highlight has been the 'Welcome Wall' created by school children from across the County Borough. This is a wall of letters and artwork in Wrexham library to welcome Syrian Refugees.

In December our Executive Board will discuss and agree how Wrexham may appropriately support the Scheme in 2017-18.

We welcome Welsh Government's coordination role regarding the SVPRS. We recommend that:

**Recommendation 1:** Welsh Government facilitates an evaluation of SVPRS in Wales so far, in order to develop and share good practice / good integration practice across public services and third sector support organisations. This is especially important in relation to local authority areas without diaspora communities.

We are concerned that the level of financial and organisational support for Syrian refugees supported through the SVPRS compared with the financial support and coordination for asylum seekers and refugees in Wales via the Home Office dispersal programme has created a two-tier system. This has created tensions between different groups of refugees and asylum seeker and the perception of different levels of 'welcome'. Potentially this could increase the negative discourse around 'deserving' and 'undeserving' migrants.

**Recommendation 2:** That the committee seek commitment from the Welsh Government to promote positive messages about *all* refugees being welcome in Wales, as well as the benefits of migration to Wales.

**Recommendation 3:** Welsh Government to fund a long-term refugee move-on service to support all refugees.

## **2. The effectiveness of the Refugee & Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan.**

This Plan and Welsh Government's proposed budget and outline specification for work they would like to see delivered under the Refugee, Asylum Seeker and Migrant strand of their Inclusion Fund from April 2017 are welcomed. There are however some areas for further consideration which include:

**Recommendation 4:** Welsh Government should reiterate that integration begins on day one of arrival (rather than upon receipt of status or approaching the point at which people are eligible to apply for citizenship or naturalisation).

**Recommendation 5:** Welsh Government to actively engage with the UK Visa and Immigration Asylum Accommodation and Support Transformation (AAST) stakeholder consultation to ensure that any new contract for asylum housing in Wales brings housing quality standards, complaints procedures, monitoring and enforcement in line with Welsh Quality Housing standards.

**Recommendation 6:** Welsh Government insist that the quality of asylum housing in Wales is scrutinised by either Welsh Government or local authorities.

**Recommendation 7:** Welsh Government to support and enable staff in partner organisations across the statutory and voluntary and community sectors to understand the barriers faced by refugees with a particular emphasis on Jobcentre Plus staff, to increase their understanding of the barriers faced by refugees in job seeking. This would lead to more person-centred services with improved longer term outcomes.

**Recommendation 8:** The Welsh Government should ensure that 3<sup>rd</sup> sector organisations providing support to asylum seekers and refugees under contract have access to translation and interpretation services. This would improve outcomes for the service area and for the families.

**3. The support & advocacy available to unaccompanied asylum seeking children.**

There are no specialised advocacy services for UASC. Advocacy support is especially important now that Wales is likely to see an increase in it's UASC population due to the National Transfer Scheme.

UASC in Wales do not have a system of Guardianship or support of the Refugee Children's Panel so it could be argued they are especially disadvantaged. It is therefore essential that they are informed about and able to access an advocate, and that the advocate uses interpretation where necessary, if UASC are to be afforded the same UNCRC rights as other looked after children in Wales. Advocacy becomes even more important in the context of age disputes.

**Recommendation 9:** Welsh Government are recommended to make appropriate arrangements for advocacy support for UASCs in Wales.

**4. The role & effectiveness of the Welsh Government's Community Cohesion Delivery Plan in ensuring the integration of refugees & asylum seekers in Welsh communities.**

Funding for the Community Cohesion Co-ordinators for 2017-18 is welcomed. This has enabled a more co-ordinated approach to be taken in relation to the Syrian Relocation Scheme in north Wales.

**Recommendation 10:** Welsh Government should monitor and review public service organisations and particularly local authorities in relation to their engagement in the Community Cohesion agenda and commitment to the national Delivery Plan.

**Recommendation 11:** Welsh Government support and enable Public Service Boards to include the consideration of longer term migration impacts as part of their Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, Wellbeing Assessment.

**End**

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Prifysgol De Cymru

Response from: University of South Wales

### **About me**

**Dr. Mike Chick Senior Lecturer TESOL, University of South Wales**

Firstly, I would like to express my gratitude at being given the opportunity to share some of my experiences and reflections as part of this consultation.

I have been a senior lecturer in ESOL teacher education at the University of South Wales since 2008 and have worked as a volunteer with the Welsh Refugee Council since 2013. I advise on the design and implementation of the suite of ESOL provision that is currently delivered at their offices in Cardiff. With regards to refugees on the SVPRS, I have been working closely with officials from Rhondda Cynon Taff to plan and organise a syllabus of ESOL provision for the six resettled families who began arriving in May 2016. In these capacities, I have met and taught hundreds of refugees and asylum seekers in Wales over the last three years and have observed first-hand the challenges and difficulties they face. Given the above, the suggestions that follow will focus on areas of the action plan that relate to my area of expertise, namely, Higher Education and ESOL provision.

1. The pace and effectiveness of the Welsh Government approach to resettling refugees through the UK Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS)

### **ESOL Provision**

Having worked closely with refugees and asylum seekers who have arrived in Wales through various, often unconventional means, as well as with families



on the SVPRS, it is clear that there is now a very obvious “two tier” system in operation. The thorough and detailed responses made by the Welsh Refugee Council and the Welsh Refugee Coalition draw attention to the many outstanding aspects of good integration practice that are features of the SVPRS yet also highlight the risks and drawbacks of limiting the provision, of such a comprehensive resettlement package, to an exclusive cohort of migrants.

As stated in many other responses to this consultation, developing competency in English is crucial to effective integration. Yet despite the “gold standard” support that is provided to those on the SVPRS, there is still alarmingly inadequate ESOL provision in place across Wales. This is a serious drawback. The recent UK government–commissioned review on social integration concluded that language was fundamental to integration of immigrant communities and that further funding should be made available to ESOL (Casey 2016). From the reports included here (e.g. see responses from Swansea and Torfaen) it is obvious that local authorities are struggling to provide full–time ESOL courses for the resettled Syrians. One of the most frequently recurring requests from the families is their desire to attend far more English classes than at present. FE colleges are often oversubscribed, are unable to place the refugees in a class suitable to their linguistic need or do not provide any provision at all at the level which the families need. The result is, in every case that I have encountered, a patchy ad–hoc provision that relies largely on volunteer teachers. For example, in RCT, ESOL provision for the first four months of the families’ arrival was delivered entirely by volunteer language teachers.

### **Recommendations**

- WAG should encourage cooperation between local authorities and FE colleges to ensure that newly arrived refugees are placed in appropriate level classes as soon as possible.

- Few areas in Wales have FE colleges that provide full time ESOL classes at a complete range of learner levels. In these cases, authorities should be provided with guidelines regarding effective ESOL provision. Such guidelines should include information about examinations and qualifications that may be offered as well as advice on teacher qualifications, recommended number of hours of study and so on.
- WAG should ensure that funding be made available in order for the above to be attainable.

## 2. The effectiveness of the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan

### **Higher Education**

The action plan states that it is a priority to “increase opportunities for asylum seekers to access higher education” (p.16). Working in both the HE and voluntary ESOL sectors, I understand the difficulties and complexities involved in this aim. Nevertheless, there are a number of practical opportunities that should be considered:

### **Recommendations**

- As detailed in the Welsh Refugee Council response (p.7), asylum seekers are still treated as international students and thus are prevented from attending university due to the financial burden. WAG should explore possibility of allowing asylum seekers to be treated as home students – as are those with refugee status.
- Refugees are treated as home students but do not get funding for International Foundation programmes. This is a serious impediment to a large number of refugees and asylum seekers. This is because many refugees possess the academic requirements for entry into university but lack the linguistic requirement. WAG should investigate the possibility of working with universities in order to allow refugees and asylum seekers entry on to International Foundation Programmes and bridging language

programmes, where successful completion would be the condition to university entry, without expecting them to pay exorbitant international fees.

## **ESOL**

There is widespread agreement that the development of language competency is key to successful integration, nevertheless, as stated in many responses (e.g. see The Welsh Refugee Coalition report p.7), ESOL provision varies greatly across Wales. A pattern that appears to be replicated in all areas is firstly, the existence of long waiting lists to attend formal, accredited classes delivered at colleges and secondly, a reliance on volunteer organisations to provide survival “drop-in” classes. The action plan states that it is a priority to “improve the flexibility of ESOL provision” (p.16) and to that end, the following recommendations are made:

### **Recommendations**

- In order to prevent refugees and asylum seekers having to wait up to twelve months to access language classes, providers of accredited language courses (e.g. FE colleges) should be supported in increasing the number of entry points throughout the year.
- Organisations delivering drop-in provision should be supported e.g. through funding being made available to increase the sparse provision that is currently offered. Moreover, third-sector organisations could be supported in developing closer cooperation. For example, in working together to assess new arrivals’ competency levels and offer bespoke classes with an integrated timetable. In this way, migrants could attend classes in more than one institution and voluntary organisations may work together to offer a greater total number of language classes.
- WAG should encourage closer collaboration between drop-in centres and formal providers in order to facilitate process of enrolment / transition from one centre to another e.g. through workshop visits offering access information etc.

- Access to language classes for women with young children is limited. Organisations such as WRC and Oasis have valuable experience and are trusted by the migrant community. They should be given support to deliver language classes for this vulnerable section of the migrant community.

## Conclusion

The SVPRS contains much to commend it with regard to its wide-ranging attempt to provide an effective integration package. Many lessons can be learned from these initial attempts at coordinated integration. As stated in other reports, there are many examples of good practice that should be extended to the way all migrants are treated. However, the ESOL element of the programme is patchy, incomplete and desperately needs support in order that effective, rather emergency, language classes are delivered.

Much can, and should, be done with regards to increasing opportunities for accessing higher education. Granting migrants access to the many language foundation courses offered at Welsh Universities would not be difficult yet would make an enormous difference to the integration of many refugees and their ability to contribute to society.

In order to achieve WAG's aim of more flexible ESOL provision, organisations offering English language classes need to receive support. It is crucial that the number of entry points to formal, full-time courses are expanded (e.g. to three points during the year rather than one). In addition, organisations offering the essential drop-in classes, delivered by qualified, experienced instructors, need to be supported in their aim to deliver a more comprehensive suite of language classes.

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Displaced People in Action

Response from: Displaced People in Action

## **Evidence for Local Government and Communities Committee**

**Aled Edwards**

**(Chair Displaced People in Action)**

### **Background**

DPIA was formed in 2000 and has since then offered crucial services to asylum seekers and refugees in Wales. It played a crucial part in creating and ensuring the success of the Welsh Refugee Doctors Group (WARD) which has helped over 175 medical professionals to retrain with a view to gaining GMC registration. Over the past sixteen years DPIA has helped thousands of displaced people to enjoy sporting and cultural activities, assisted others in acquiring English language skills, retrain and seek employment and sought to advocate on their behalf.

Currently DPIA continues to support the WARD Scheme and supports the Afghan Relocation Scheme, Syrian Resettlement Scheme and the Wales Cities of Sanctuary Project.

What is offered here reflects my own views as Chair. We have not had an opportunity to reflect on the consultation as an organisation.

### **Pace and Effectiveness**

DPIA has delivered the SVPR Scheme for a number of local authorities in the south-east Wales valleys. The work has been challenging but deeply rewarding. Enabling families from the war-torn background of the Middle East has presented unique challenges: complex health needs, managing expectations, assisting with profound cultural differences and helping those involved to settle in a very different environment. DPIA has been able to employ staff from the host Welsh community and the existing Syrian refugee community in Wales to assist the displaced people. This mix has been useful.

DPIA has been granted access to Welsh decision making at the highest strategic level concerning SVPRS through my involvement with the Welsh Government's Taskforce. Through this process we have been able to press the case that the Scheme should not be rushed and consequently be effective in the delivery of key services. DPIA's experience of the numbers needing support through the spontaneous arrivals dispersal system who, unlike the SVPRS arrivals, have to apply for asylum, has compelled us not to call for greater numbers to be brought through the Syrian scheme. The greatest human need in terms of service provision does not rest with the SVPRS arrivals.

### **Delivery Plan**

Co-operating with partners in the sector DPIA has worked with Welsh Government in pressing for high standards of care concerning health needs – especially for children. Ensuring screening and providing advice concerning age assessments have been part of our work.

As one of the main partners in the City of Sanctuary movement DPIA has assisted in delivering key outcomes especially in Swansea and Cardiff through a project sponsored by the Big Lottery. DPIA was the prime initial drafter of the Welcome to Wales pack that has enabled recently arrived dispersed people to have a sense of the distinctiveness of Wales.

DPIA has been supportive of 'Tackling Hate Crimes and Incidents: A Framework for Action' but was acutely aware that hate crime increased during 2016 and that all concerned were operating in a challenging environment.

DPIA has not closely tracked Delivery Plan progress but has been aware of and valued the work of partner organisations in the sector.

### **Unaccompanied Children**

DPIA has no specific projects focused primarily on unaccompanied children. However, our general experience has enabled us to offer advice to the Welsh Government Syrian Taskforce about the need, once key services have been provided, to reflect on placing mentoring provision in place so that children and young people have access to peer support.

### **Cohesion Delivery Plan**

At the start of 2015 the idea of Wales as a Nation of Sanctuary was little more than a pipe-dream, but it has now really taken off. Many of the movement's aspirations fall within the aspirations of the Welsh Government's Community Cohesion Delivery Plan.

The Annual Report of the Cities of Sanctuary movement reveal a record of Welsh activity. *Since the 'summer of 2015, there has been a burgeoning of support for refugees all over Wales and several new groups have formed or are forming, including Wrexham, Neath Port Talbot, Abergavenny, Montgomeryshire and Newport.*

*In Swansea, highlights have been the "Welcome to Swansea" mentoring scheme, with 40 volunteers (half refugees, half other locals) having mentored over 100 newly arriving asylum seekers; work with about 20 local pledged supporting organisations to make their pledges practically meaningful; four local charities achieving a Sanctuary Award; a thriving "Sanctuary Speakers" team; continuing working groups on Mental Health and Family & Play; and now the launch of a Maternity Stream in Swansea. The Swansea voluntary hosting project has many new hosts, with over 1700 nights in beds provided in 2015.*

*Cardiff has a different model, with resources from a successful Lottery project shared between DPIA, the refugee centre Oasis (which has an open drop-in four full days every week and provides up to 200 hot meals per day), and communications work based in the Welsh Refugee Council.*

*Hay, Brecon and Talgarth Sanctuary for Refugees (HBTS4R) and Hiraeth Hope in West Wales began by collecting and fundraising for Calais and Lesbos, and also link up with places in Wales to support asylum seekers. Both groups now have a regular programme of respite breaks and weekends away for groups of asylum seekers from Swansea and Cardiff. Hiraeth*

*Hope has workshops for training in practical rural skills (woodworking etc.), while HBTS4R was instrumental in achieving visibility and support for sanctuary at the 2016 Hay Literary Festival, including several events with refugee speakers or focusing on refugee issues.*

*A joint manifesto was developed setting out what would be needed from the Welsh Government to make Wales truly a Nation of Sanctuary. The Coalition also has representation on the Welsh Government's Syrian Refugee Operations Board, and has repeatedly tried to ensure that Syrian resettlement is integrated with support for all asylum seekers and refugees in Wales. The Coalition's manifesto was published as a booklet entitled "Seven Steps to Sanctuary" and it is being used to press the Welsh Government to make the commitment to Wales as a Nation of Sanctuary more tangible.*

*A small organising group from CoS, DPIA, Oxfam Cymru and Welsh Refugee Council put on the first Sanctuary in the Senedd on 10 December (Human Rights Day), just after Sanctuary in Parliament 2 in Westminster. All Assembly Members (AMs) were invited and sent a briefing based on the Coalition's manifesto. Over 120 people were present to hear an inspiring keynote address from Rocio Cifuentes, Director of the multi-ethnic Swansea youth charity EYST, who reflected on the welcome her family received when she came as a child with her parents, as refugees from Pinochet's Chile in the 1970s. There were moving testimonies from several asylum seekers and refugees and a panel of AMs from the four parties represented in the Senedd at the time.'*

DPIA has appreciated the work of the Regional Community Cohesion Co-ordinators and is aware of the seven outcomes on hate crime, modern slavery, Gypsies and Travellers, immigration, tackling poverty, mainstreaming and tension monitoring. We agree that the role of the Co-ordinators has been essential to working with Local Authorities to strengthen the efforts to support the Syrian Resettlement Programme.



**Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru**

Y Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb, Llywodraeth Leol a Chymunedau

Tudalen y pecyn 287