

SP 27

Blaenoriaethau ar gyfer y Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb,
Llywodraeth Leol a Chymunedau
Priorities for the Equality,
Local Government and Communities Committee
Ymateb gan: Cyngor Ffoaduriaid Cymru
Response from: Welsh Refugee Council

**Consultation response to the National Assembly for Wales' Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee.
August 2017.**

1. Welsh Refugee Council.

1.1 For over 25 years, Welsh Refugee Council has been working people who are fleeing persecution, conflict and oppression. We deliver direct specialist support services in Cardiff, Wrexham, Newport and Swansea and work to empower asylum seekers and refugees to build new futures in Wales.

1.2 We work extensively with a range of community, voluntary and statutory sector partners and strive to contribute to the creation of a society where respect and equality for all are paramount and where human rights are enjoyed. We are an active member of both the Welsh Refugee Coalition¹ and City of Sanctuary² movement in Wales.

1.3 In partnership with the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) and the Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford and funded by Welsh Government, we lead the Migration Services in Wales project. This project aims to increase access to up-to-date information on migration policy and practice and to facilitate the development of a strategic approach to migration in Wales. As part of this project we produce Legal and Policy Briefings, provide specialist training, support the development of local strategic frameworks on migration and provide a migration enquiry service.

2. Migration in Wales.

2.1 In Wales, those people fleeing persecution, conflict and oppression are:

- People seeking asylum and living in one of Wales' four designated dispersal areas in Cardiff, Newport, Swansea or Wrexham. In December 2015 there were 2,856 people seeking asylum in Wales - under 0.1% of

1 A coalition of organisations 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.

2 <https://cityofsanctuary.org/>

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our population. This includes people from Eritrea, Sudan, Iraq, Iran and Syria. 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.

- Refugees who have received a positive decision on their asylum application. The total number of people with refugee status living in Wales, whether with limited or indefinite leave to remain, is not known. Additionally, people without refugee status but with subsidiary protection status, victims of trafficking and family migrants, such as spouses and children joining parents, are also unknown.
- Refugees who have arrived into Wales through resettlement schemes. Recently, local authorities in Wales have joined the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS), meaning that refugees are being accommodated and supported in locations beyond areas that have been part of the existing asylum dispersal system.

2.2 Beyond people fleeing persecution, conflict and oppression, Wales is home to migrants from a range of other backgrounds including:

- International students enrolled at Welsh universities in cities and towns such as Aberystwyth, Bangor, Cardiff and Swansea. In the academic year 2013-14, there were 25000 international students from 145 countries studying in Wales, a total of 19% of the student population³
- Migrant workers engaged in both high and low-skilled work. The number and population share of working age non-UK born residents in Wales has increased in the past decade from 89,000 in the mid-2000s to 149,000 in 2015 (5% of the working age population in mid-2000s to 8% in 2015)⁴
- There are also notable trends for some of Wales' rural communities, with migration from Poland accounting for over three-quarters of A8⁵ migrant worker registrations in rural Wales and the South Wales Valleys⁶.

3 Universities Wales, 'International Students': <http://www.uniswales.ac.uk/policy/international-students-their-impact-on-wales/>

4 Migration Services in Wales, 'Migrants in the Welsh Labour Market': <https://www.welshrefugeecouncil.org/migration-information/migration-trends/migrants-in-the-welsh-labour-market>

5 The A8 countries are a group of eight of the 10 countries that joined the European Union during its 2004 enlargement: Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia.

6 Wales Rural Observatory: 'Migrant Workers in Rural Wales and the South Wales Valleys', p.5: <http://www.walesruralobservatory.org.uk/sites/default/files/Migrant%20Workers%20in%20Rural%20Wales%20and%20the%20South%20Wales%20Valleys%202014.pdf>

2.3 The Office of National Statistics projected population growth rate for Wales indicates that net migration will be the major component of demographic change for the nation, accounting for 84% of projected population growth between 2014-2039.⁷

2.4 Whilst immigration policy is determined, designed and funded at UK level, it's impacts on all migrants and society are felt at the local level, where it interacts with other policies such as health, housing, and education. Understanding population change within communities is therefore crucial to support responsive and effective planning and delivery of local services in all these spheres. This is all the more critical at a time when migration is a misunderstood and contentious topic and when integration trends are deteriorating⁸.

2.5 In order to contribute socially, culturally, economically and politically to the communities in which they live and to thrive as individuals, robust migration integration strategies which facilitate 'a dynamic two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents' and which result in a 'shared sense of belonging at the local and national level'⁹ are required.

3. Recommendations to the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee.

In light of the above, we urge the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee to prioritise the following actions.

3.1 Recommendation 1: Scrutinise and review Welsh Government's Refugee and Asylum Seeker Plan for suitability and effectiveness.

3.1.1 With regards people fleeing persecution, conflict and oppression, Welsh Government published its Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan in March 2016. Whilst this plan was very welcome, we are concerned that this plan will neither address critical issues for people seeking sanctuary in Wales, nor create the conditions needed to ensure that people are safe, able to contribute and integrate into communities or enjoy their human rights.

3.1.2 Key concerns regarding the plan relate to:

- **Accountability:** a lack of clear actions, indicators, benchmarks, lead responsibilities, timeframes or a monitoring and evaluation framework.
- **Financing:** a lack of clear resourcing to achieve the content of the plan.
- **Access to rights:** if fair and just decisions are to be made on asylum applications, support entitlements and refugee rights, it is essential that people seeking sanctuary have access to good quality, timely advocacy provided by specialist practitioners. In Wales currently, information on the

7 The Migration Observatory, The Impact of Migration on UK Population Growth, Figure 4, <http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/briefings/impact-migration-uk-population-growth>

8 <http://mipex.eu/united-kingdom>

9 Spencer, S (2011), The Migration Debate, chapter 6 'Integration and Citizenship'. Bristol: Policy Press

asylum process, support and access to legal aid is very limited. Welsh Government's plan does not address the volume or breadth of need, provides only for advice services and within this provision, leaves open a risk that any specialist advice services may be absorbed into generic advice services for the wider population.

- Protection for children and young people: children and young people moving through the asylum process have particularly complex needs which demand specialist knowledge and advocacy, especially if children and young people are to enjoy their rights as provided for by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The plan overlooks the need for independent advocacy for children and young people beyond duties owed by the Social Services and Well-being Act 2014. Such advocacy exists in other UK nations, with Scotland's Guardianship programme¹⁰ an example of an effective response to the complex needs of children.
- Destitution: the plan overlooks destitution as a human rights issue for individuals and cohesion issue for communities. Destitute asylum seekers have nowhere to live and no right to public housing; no income and no access to public funds or benefits and have 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. Destitution has a disproportionate effect on refused asylum seekers, newly granted refugees and women with insecure immigration status experiencing domestic violence. The practice also places significant and unpredictable demand on Local Authority and third sector services. The enforced destitution of vulnerable displaced people has no place in Wales and the Refugee Coalition has urged Welsh Government to prevent the practice with a dedicated fund to ensure that no person, regardless of their nationality or migration status experiences destitution¹¹. This is already in place in Northern Ireland.

3.2 Recommendation 2: Extend the resourcing and strategic oversight afforded to the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme to all people seeking sanctuary in Wales.

3.2.1 Under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS), Wales has welcomed 112¹² refugees since the scheme's inception. For many Welsh Local Authorities, refugee resettlement is a new area of work and great care has been taken to make sure that it works for both the resettled families and the communities that receive them. The resources and strategic oversight afforded to the scheme by Welsh Government are most welcome, though we anticipate that without corresponding interest and resourcing for people using independent routes to seek sanctuary, this will create a two-tier system of support for refugees in Wales, 'the deserving' and 'the underserving'.

¹⁰ http://www.aberlour.org.uk/how_we_help/services/248_scottish_guardianship_service

¹¹ <https://www.welshrefugeecouncil.org/sites/default/files/news/files/Welsh%20Refugee%20Coalition%20Manifesto-%20English.pdf>

¹² <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-statistics-april-to-june-2016>

3.2.2 Consideration must be given to the evaluation of SVPRS in Wales and mechanisms developed to promote the sharing and expansion of good integration practice across local authorities and regions. In the longer term, the evaluation of SVPRS should inform the mainstreaming of effective approaches to integration across public service providers as part of an inclusive strategic approach to promote integration and cohesion across Wales.

3.3 Recommendation 3: Scrutinise the pace at which new initiatives to ensure the safety and rights of children are being implemented, as well as the barriers to implementation in Wales.

3.3.1 The near future promises an expansion of resettlement schemes with three new Home Office initiatives for asylum seeking and refugee children:

- 'Children at Risk' (resettling children and adults from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region)
- 'Lone Asylum Seeking Children from the Camps in Europe' and the
- 'National Transfer Scheme' (established to help resettle Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children who arrive in the UK across the four nations).

3.3.2 By way of response to these schemes, a Children's sub group of the Welsh Government's Syrian Resettlement Scheme Operations Board has been established to ensure co-ordination for resettling children and unaccompanied asylum seeking children across Wales. This groups remit is to 'support local authorities in Wales, create additional capacity, skills and expertise so that they are better equipped to accommodate refugee and asylum seeking children'¹³. Whilst this group is paramount, as highlighted above, children and young people moving through the asylum process have particularly complex needs which demand specialist knowledge and advocacy if they are to enjoy their rights as outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. We therefore urge the committee to scrutinise not only the pace at which new initiatives to ensure the safety and rights of children are being implemented, but also the barriers to implementation in Wales.

3.4 Recommendation 4: Endorse and advance calls for a National Migration Strategy.

3.4.1 Wales needs a comprehensive National Migration Strategy, building on the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan and addressing poverty, the labour force and economic renewal of Wales, alongside commitments to equality and human rights. It needs to be supported by clear goals, indicators and evaluation mechanisms necessary to adjust policy, evaluate progress on integration and to make the exchange of information more effective. The Migration Services in Wales project held an International Learning Exchange Conference in June 2016, inviting pan-Wales representatives to explore effective local approaches to fostering migrant integration. Delegates emphasised that, to be most effective, local efforts must be informed and supported by an umbrella national strategy which ensures clear

¹³ <http://gov.wales/about/cabinet/cabinetstatements/2016-new/refugeeweek/?lang=en>

messages on the role of migration in Wales' future and the status of migrants in Welsh society.¹⁴

3.5 Recommendation 5: Assess how migration features in Local Authority planning and promote the collection of migration data.

3.5.1 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.

3.5.2 The purpose of having a local strategy (rather than ad hoc responses by individual services) is to have a 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.

3.5.3 We are partnering with Community Cohesion Coordinators to develop local strategic frameworks on migration integration at local and regional levels across Wales. We are supporting Local Authorities to build upon their current expertise, to identify challenges and opportunities for migrant integration in their local areas, to explore local solutions and to develop strategic objectives. As part of this work, we are supporting partners in the development of inclusive Local Population Assessments and Well-Being Plans as required by the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2016 respectively.

In light of the above, we ask that the committee:

- Encourage Local Authorities to extend their gaze beyond Equality Act protected characteristics and capture migration data as part of their Population Assessments and Well-being plans. This is especially important given that immigration status is increasingly critical regarding entitlement to a range of public services.
- Ensure that implementation of the Social Services and Well-being Act 2014 and the Well-being of Future Generations Act take into account the needs of migrants and that the duties owed to different types of migrants are well understood by both front line practitioners and policy makers.
- Utilise strategies and opportunities to respond to the concerns of native communities around migration and to shift the often derogatory narrative around migration. As part of this, encourage clear, positive messages on migrant integration from Public Service Boards.
- Create mechanisms to facilitate migrant engagement in policy development, monitoring and evaluation: these groups are currently largely invisible in many engagement measures, leaving them largely invisible to policy makers.

¹⁴ 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>

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