



SEVEN STEPS TO SANCTUARY

Welsh Refugee Coalition Manifesto



Welsh Assembly Elections 2016

PARTNERS



Welsh Refugee Council



Hope not Hate



The Syrian Association of Wales



Asylum Justice



Just Across - Wrexham



Together Creating Communities



British Red Cross



Oasis Cardiff



Trinity Centre



Children in Wales



Oxfam



Tros Gynnal Plant



City of Sanctuary



Swansea Bay Asylum Seekers Support Group



Unity in diversity



DPiA - Displaced People in Action



Taff Housing Association



Women Connect First



Ethnic Youth Support Team



Tai Pawb



WSSAG Wales

THE WELSH REFUGEE COALITION

We are 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.

Decision-making on claims for asylum is not one of Wales devolved powers, however many important public services such as health, education and housing are devolved. Access to these services has a significant impact on the lives of asylum seekers and refugees in Wales and their opportunities to flourish in their new home.

In this manifesto we outline our **‘Seven Steps to Sanctuary’**, identifying key actions that can be delivered by the new Welsh Government, to ensure that Wales continues its long tradition of welcoming refugees and strives to create progressive, effective and meaningful strategies to challenge inequalities and promote the integration of asylum seekers and refugees in Welsh communities.



REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS IN WALES: **A HISTORY**

A little known but important part of Wales history is the remarkable welcome that the nation offered to over 4500 Belgian Refugees fleeing the horrors of the First World War. There are important lessons to learn from our heritage.



Image from BBC showing Belgian Refugees attending mass.

100 years later, in the midst of Europe's current and ongoing refugee crisis, Wales still has an important role to play in protecting the safety and dignity of those fleeing persecution and harm. In September 2015, Prime Minister David Cameron announced that the UK would welcome 20,000 refugees fleeing the Syrian civil war by 2020, and as of April 2016 around 60 in total have been settled so far in Torfaen, Ceredigion, Neath Port Talbot, Caerphilly and Swansea¹. The Welsh Refugee Coalition welcomes this demonstrable commitment to refugee resettlement and the emerging progressive integration policies of the Welsh Government and the Welsh Local Authorities who have received Syrian refugees through the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS) to date.

But these families represent just a fraction of the total number of asylum-seekers and refugees in Wales. In December 2015, there were 2856 people seeking asylum in our country (Home Office Migration Statistics). This figure includes 289 people from Pakistan, 275 from Eritrea and 224 from Iran, along with hundreds of others from different countries who have fled similar dangers and persecution to that faced by the Syrian refugees who have arrived in Wales through SVPRS.

REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS IN WALES: **A FUTURE**

It is time to do more and it is time to be more ambitious. In our manifesto for the new Welsh Government, we call for a proactive, evidence-based strategy on migration which recognises the dignity of all refugees and asylum seekers.

Our Seven Steps to Sanctuary reflect three underlying requirements for a responsible and effective governmental strategy to the refugee crisis:

1. OFFERING SAFETY AND PROTECTION

Refugees fleeing violence and persecution have the right to be given domicile in a safe place under international law. It is the responsibility of the international community to ensure that these rights are realised, and Wales is no exception to this. Offering sanctuary and ongoing and effective safeguarding within our communities are dual aspects of this obligation.

2. DEMONSTRATING POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

The Welsh Government has the opportunity to demonstrate the strong political leadership in their response to one of the greatest crises of our time. We must recognise the significant human cost of fearmongering politics and be proactive in challenging established falsehoods about refugees and asylum seekers.

3. GROWING THE WELSH ECONOMY AND SUSTAINING PUBLIC SERVICES

There is a significant opportunity to be seized through recognition of the valuable skills, education and experience brought by inwards migration to Wales. Investment in the training and education of workers is a pivotal aspect of ensuring the future prosperity of Wales, protecting our essential public services and growing the success of Wales' many high-skilled industries.

If we are to successfully offset the fiscal cost of an aging population, we must devise ways to bridge existing and projected skills gaps. The creation of a strategic and asset-based approach to migration and community development, whereby existing experience and skills are matched to employer's needs, with additional training and support provided where necessary, is a cost-effective and constructive means to achieve this and the opportunities presented by migration should not be missed.

OUR MANIFESTO,
'SEVEN STEPS TO
SANCTUARY',
CALLS FOR THE NEW
WELSH GOVERNMENT
TO TAKE SEVEN PRIORITY
ACTIONS TO HELP
REALISE THIS VISION
FOR THE FUTURE OF
ASYLUM SEEKERS AND
REFUGEES IN WALES.

SEVEN STEPS TO SANCTUARY

1. A WELCOMING WALES

Sustaining Wales' commitment to welcome refugees & supporting Wales to become the world's first Nation of Sanctuary.

2. DEVELOP A NATIONAL MIGRATION STRATEGY

Developing high national standards for the integration of people resettled in Wales, recognising and seizing the opportunities presented by migration to Wales and responding effectively to challenges.

3. POSITIVELY INFLUENCE AND ENGAGE THE UK GOVERNMENT'S MIGRATION LEGISLATION

Create effective and pre-emptive strategies for managing the impact of new immigration legislation to mitigate risks to the human rights and safety of migrants in Wales.

4. DEVOLVED ASYLUM SUPPORT

Pushing for a devolved asylum support system, including asylum accommodation and dispersal in Wales.

5. END DESTITUTION IN WALES

Preventing destitution amongst asylum-seekers and refugees.

6. FUND SPECIALIST ADVICE, ADVOCACY AND SUPPORT SERVICES

Protecting the delivery of vital services for asylum-seeking and refugee children, young people and adults.

7. INCLUSION OF ASYLUM-SEEKERS AND REFUGEES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF POLICIES THAT AFFECT THEM

Promoting the active participation of asylum-seekers and refugees in the policies that affect them.

1. A WELCOMING WALES

We call on the new Welsh Government to sustain Wales' commitment to welcoming asylum seekers and refugees and to support the call for Wales to become the world's first 'Nation of Sanctuary'.

Wales: The world's first Nation of Sanctuary?

'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.

We ask the Welsh Government to:

- Encourage pledges of support for a Nation of Sanctuary from local authorities, Assembly Members and MPs, and public, voluntary and private sector organisations.
- Identify and deliver actions which the Welsh Government and AMs can take towards making Wales a Nation of Sanctuary both a political and social reality.
- Pledge to continue using 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 and refugees in the media.

2. DEVELOP A NATIONAL MIGRATION STRATEGY

Wales needs a comprehensive National Migration Strategy, building on and addressing the significant shortfalls of the updated Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan, and addressing poverty, the labour force and economic renewal of Wales, alongside our commitments to equality and human rights.

The inclusion of a robust and comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework will add impetus and encourage a pragmatic approach to the attainment of the National Migration Strategy's vision.

A considered strategy to promote migrant integration will support the new Welsh Government to safeguard vulnerable children and adults. It will also help them to reach their broader Equality Objectives by addressing gaps in access to services and attainment. Further still, a robust framework for integration is essential for Wales' economic and social prosperity. We need to create clear pathways for resettlement, promoting integration from 'day one' to ensure that Wales provides opportunities for skills development and training for all along with encouraging and retaining international talent.

We ask the Welsh Government to:

- Develop and deliver a National Migration Strategy informed by high quality evidence on migration and the migrant experience to tackle pervasive inequalities in access to education and employment opportunities.
- Maximise accountability through the development of mechanisms to monitor effectiveness by measuring outcomes for migrant communities in Wales.



3. POSITIVELY INFLUENCE AND ENGAGE

The new Welsh Government must actively engage the UK Government to positively influence migration policy. The Immigration Bill, for example, is likely to introduce dramatic and harmful changes which will cause severe hardship to many asylum seekers and refugees living in Wales. The new Welsh Government must clearly and consistently engage with the UK Government to ensure that concerns over the impact of the changes introduced by the Immigration Bill and similar proposed legislation are taken into account.

The Welsh Government must also develop effective and proactive strategies for managing the impact of new immigration legislation in order to mitigate potential risks to the human rights and safety of migrants in Wales.

We ask the Welsh Government to call on the UK Government for:

- An increase in asylum support rates from £36.95 per week per person to reflect data on the local cost of living and to ensure an end to destitution.
- The inclusion of the measure within the Immigration Bill that would provide essential sanctuary for at least 3000 unaccompanied refugee children who have fled their homes and find themselves uncared for in refugee camps across Europe.
- Guidance on how the Immigration Bill will apply within the Welsh legislative context and affect Welsh Local Authorities and explain how Social Services' increased duties will be funded.
- Improved decision making on asylum applications.¹
- An end to the detention of innocent people seeking sanctuary. Although there are no detention centres in Wales, people are being detained in Wales and taken to detention centres elsewhere.

1. The acceptance rate for Eritreans for example, dropped from 90% at the end of 2014 to just 39% at the end of 2015. Of those who were initially rejected, 86% were successful on appeal. This is a terrible injustice for those who claim asylum and also a significant waste of our courts' time and resources. Find out more: The Economist, 'Turned away' December 2015, <http://www.economist.com/news/britain/21679843-thin-evidence-britain-declares-its-biggest-source-refugees-safe-after-all-turned-away>

4. DEVOLVED ASYLUM SUPPORT

The Welsh Refugee Coalition strongly believes that the new Welsh Government must push for the adoption of a devolved asylum support system, including asylum accommodation and dispersal in Wales, as recommended by the Smith Commission Report on devolution in Scotland. The exposure of the abhorrent practice of requiring asylum seekers to wear red wristbands to receive food at Cardiff's asylum accommodation attracted international attention and criticism. There are systemic failings and deep-rooted issues within the existing provision of asylum accommodation under the UK Government's COMPASS contracts.

Devolving asylum support will enable the Welsh Government to deliver a humane asylum support system and improve dispersal policy, with manifest benefits for asylum seekers, local communities and community cohesion. This will also support a smoother transition from asylum support to mainstream benefits or work for people granted refugee status, reducing levels of destitution and improving cost-efficiency.

We ask the Welsh Government to:

- Explore devolution of asylum support, accommodation and advice to empower councils, health boards and communities and to promote the welfare of asylum seekers and refugees in Wales through tailored and integrated welfare and reception procedures.



5. END DESTITUTION

Destitute asylum seekers have nowhere to live and no right to public housing; no money but 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 enforced destitution of vulnerable displaced people has no place in Wales and the new Welsh Government must prioritise the prevention of destitution.

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 asylum seekers and refused asylum seekers, and other vulnerable migrants including destitute refugees. A similar fund in Wales would prevent this form of avoidable destitution.

We ask the Welsh Government to:

- Highlight the Welsh Refugee Coalition's concerns to the UK Government over the use of destitution to create fear in the asylum system and the resulting generation of avoidable destitution in Wales.
- Set up a destitution fund so that no person is left destitute in Wales, regardless of their nationality or migration status as already in place in Northern Ireland through the OFMDFM Crisis Fund.



6. FUND SPECIALIST ADVICE, ADVOCACY AND SUPPORT SERVICES

Despite the complexities of the asylum system, there are extremely limited advice and support services for asylum seekers in Wales. Local drop-in services often cannot meet demand, and significant cuts to legal aid mean that often people cannot access the support they need to obtain the necessary evidence to support their asylum application. This leads to a poorer standard of asylum claim and reduces the quality and accuracy of decision making in the first instance. In consequence, many substantiated asylum applications do not receive a fair hearing.

There is still no advocacy service for asylum seeking children, as is funded in England, despite a previous commitment by the Welsh Government to put in place sustainable advocacy provision. In addition, the only service for young (16-25) asylum seekers has recently lost its funding, meaning that there are now no specialist services for asylum seeking children or young people in Wales.

Migrant women need specialist services tailored to their needs and experiences. Women's services are chronically underfunded across the UK and the new funding for women's services from the 'tampon tax' (that Welsh women also help to pay for) is not being directed to Welsh women's services. At the time of writing (April 2016) the Welsh Government were deliberating the new budget, with many specialist women's organisations in Wales not knowing if their vital services will continue to be funded due to an absence of ring-fenced funding for the sector.

We ask the Welsh government to:

- Fund a Guardianship programme to deliver comprehensive support for children seeking asylum in Wales and a complimentary programme for young (16-25) asylum seekers.
- Increase funding for ESOL courses to remove barriers to English classes and include childcare provision and women-only classes within this.
- Include and ring-fence funding for specialist services to help realise the pioneering vision of the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act.

7. ENSURE THE PARTICIPATION AND INCLUSION OF ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES

The co-production of policies that affect asylum seekers and refugees is an important way of promoting active participation and demonstrating understanding of their experiences.

Asylum seekers and refugees must be able to participate in national and local policy development, political forums, and the co-production of services for refugees in Wales in order for their voices to be heard in the creation and shaping of policies that have a significant impact on their lives and well-being.

We ask the Welsh Government to:

- Forge dynamic and responsive relationships with Refugee Community Organisations and third sector organisations working with asylum seekers and refugees to promote understanding and political engagement within hard-to-reach communities.
- Actively engage refugees and asylum seekers in consultations on proposed legislation and policy that affect them through facilitated focus groups within their communities in partnership with Refugee Community Organisations and the third sector.
- Invite feedback from migrant communities on the efficacy of integration measures introduced by the Government by coordinating at least bi-annual roundtables with a diverse range of representatives from a migrant background.



FIND OUT MORE

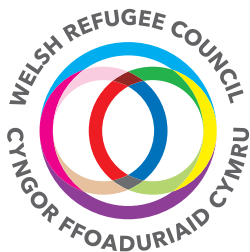
You can find out more about the Welsh Refugee Coalition and view our Manifesto online on the Welsh Refugee Council's website:

www.welshrefugeecouncil.org

- **Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme**
www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/472020/Syrian_Resettlement_Fact_Sheet_gov_uk.pdf
- **Welsh Government Community Cohesion National Delivery Plan 2016-17**
<http://gov.wales/docs/dsjlg/publications/equality/160310-community-cohesion-plan-en.pdf>
- **The Welsh Refugee Council- Migration Information**
www.welshrefugeecouncil.org/migration-information
- **Cardiff City of Sanctuary**
<https://cardiff.cityofsanctuary.org/>
- **Swansea City of Sanctuary**
<https://swansea.cityofsanctuary.org/>
- **Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan**
<http://gov.wales/docs/dsjlg/publications/equality/160316-refugee-asylum-seeker-delivery-plan-en.pdf>

If you would like to find out more about how you can support asylum seekers and refugees in your area or how you can support our work, please contact Siân at the Welsh Refugee Council: sian@wrc.wales





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