

Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Welsh Government Evidence Paper

Introduction

The Welsh Government welcomes this inquiry into support for refugees and asylum seekers in Wales as an opportunity to recognise the long standing and continuing positive response of Welsh people and the Welsh Government towards those who have had to flee war, persecution or natural disaster and rebuild their lives in Wales.

Whilst the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan was published less than a year ago, it was always intended to be a 'living document' which was regularly updated. We will consider the inquiry recommendations closely whilst revising the plan in 2017, with a view to building on what has been achieved so far.

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

In the year since the launch of the SVPRS (now the Syrian Resettlement Programme – SRP) in September 2015, Welsh local authorities have resettled 294 refugees in 18 local authority areas. By the end of 2016, many more refugees will have been resettled, though the Home Office is not expected to release updated figures until the end of January 2017.

In response to the UK Government's announcement on 7 September 2015 of the intention to resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees, the Welsh Government convened a Refugee Summit on 17 September 2015. The Summit was arranged in the spirit of collaboration with other Welsh public services and led to the immediate publication of a joint communique by the attendees and the establishment of the Ministerial Syrian Refugee Taskforce and Operations Board.

These structures were crucial to ensure public services across Wales coordinated their efforts and were ready to start accepting refugees. Since many of the 18 areas which have so far participated in the scheme had not previously resettled refugees, it was important to ensure they understood how the process would work.

All 22 Welsh local authorities have committed to playing their part in the SRP and we believe all areas will have resettled refugees under this scheme before the end of March 2017.

In the early stages of the programme, a lack of communication from the Home Office, regarding eligible costs which would be funded by the UK Government, posed challenges for local authorities considering how many refugees could be resettled in their areas. However, since these issues were resolved the SRP has, in general, operated very successfully.

Although some criticism was levelled at Welsh public authorities for the perceived slowness of resettlement at the start of the SRP, recent data demonstrates that excellent preparatory work has now led to a significant increase in the pace of resettlement.

The following table demonstrates the recent increase in resettlement in Wales:

Quarter	Region	Resettlement scheme
2015 Q4	Wales	45
2016 Q1	Wales	33
2016 Q2	Wales	34
2016 Q3	Wales	182

Recently, the UNHCR has visited Wales as part of the evaluation of the SRP. Gonzalo Vargas Llosa, UK Representative of the UNHRC, has confirmed that, among approximately 30 refugees resettled under the scheme to whom his team spoke during their visit, there was universal thanks for the welcome they had received in communities across Wales. Similar experiences have been reported in Wrexham¹, Ceredigion² and Swansea³.

This positive welcome was linked to the pace of resettlement under the SRP as it was important that communities and public services were ready to receive vulnerable people, often with complex needs.

The effectiveness of the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan

¹ <http://www.wrexham.com/news/syrian-refugee-families-praise-generous-wrexham-as-second-phase-to-get-green-light-123934.html>

² http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/syrian-refugees-hand-out-flowers-in-aberystwyth-to-thanks-welsh-community-for-welcoming-us_uk_57863bf3e4b08078d6e7b167

³ <http://www.southwales-eveningpost.co.uk/swansea-city-of-sanctuary-goes-to-parliament-to-raise-awareness-of-the-struggles-of-asylum-seekers/story-29944408-detail/story.html>

The Welsh Government published the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan in March 2016. As less than a year has passed since publication, it is difficult to assess its effectiveness accurately. The Welsh Government was, however, clear when the delivery plan was published that it was a 'living document' and we welcome the opportunity the inquiry presents to enhance the plan's effectiveness.

The delivery plan has already led to positive changes for refugees and asylum seekers:

- A mental health care pathway has been created to ensure all refugees and asylum seekers have increased awareness of mental health issues and can be diagnosed for any conditions at an early stage so that they can be treated as soon as possible.
- The 'Welcome to Wales' pack was produced and has been distributed to ensure refugees and asylum seekers have easily understood information about their new home.
- Training has been delivered through Dynamix to educate key professionals working in health, housing and social services on issues affecting refugees and asylum seekers.
- The Migration Services in Wales project has produced a range of policy briefings to ensure up-to-date information on policy and legislation is accessible to service providers and other stakeholders. Briefings published include:
 - The Legal Framework and Options Available to Migrant Women and Girls in Wales Subject to Violence
 - Migrant care leavers: Duties of Welsh local authorities under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014
 - Developing a Strategic Approach to Integration in Wales: A Resource for local authorities
 - Single adult migrants: Destitution, safeguarding and services under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014
- The Welsh Refugee Council produced a leaflet on Hate Crime which will be translated into 3 key languages This was developed in partnership with Victim Support, Gwent Police, the British Red Cross and asylum seekers and refugees from the Oasis and Trinity Centres in Cardiff, as well as from WRC's ESOL classes. The leaflet was distributed widely during Hate Crime Week in October to relevant service providers and to service users.

The publication of the delivery plan occurred at a time of significant change in relation to UK Government refugee and asylum seeker policy. A number of new schemes have been launched which an updated plan will seek to address. These schemes are:

- National Transfer Scheme for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children
- Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme
- Unaccompanied children in Europe (including the 'Dubs' amendment and Dublin III Protocols)

These recent developments have impacted significantly on the delivery plan. The Welsh Government has accordingly initiated a number of additional measures which were not envisaged when the plan was published for consultation in early 2016.

To help local authorities to participate effectively in schemes supporting the resettlement of unaccompanied children, the Welsh Government has created a short-term position to build social care capacity. In addition, Welsh Government funding of £350,000 has been agreed to enable the development of a regional approach to building social care capacity to assist with the integration of unaccompanied children into Welsh communities. This will support the ongoing identification of placements, build social work knowledge and expertise, promote the recruitment and training of foster carers and promote understanding of language and cultural needs. A children's sub-group of the Refugee Taskforce has also been established to support the coordination of these schemes across public services.

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

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 provides the legislative framework for social services in Wales and imposes duties on local authorities that require them to promote the well-being of those who need care and support. The Code of Practice on part 10 of the Act sets out the circumstances in which individuals, including children and young people, may require advocacy services and when a local authority must provide advocacy.

Two of the organisations currently funded under the Equality & Inclusion Grant, the Trinity Project and Welsh Refugee Council, have provided support for advocacy, including for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. The projects are funded to increase access to specialist support and guidance for asylum seekers and refugees from the day they enter Wales.

Until April 2016, Tros Gynnal operated an advocacy project for refugees and asylum seeking children living in Wales. The Welsh Government was notified in November 2015 that the funding for this project was coming to an end but funds to support

refugees and asylum seekers were already committed under the Equality & Inclusion Grant until April 2017.

We have responded to the gap in specific child-centred services by explicitly including the need for advocacy for asylum seeking children in the contract specification for the new refugee, asylum seeker and migrant advice and advocacy service to launch in April 2017.

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

The Community Cohesion Delivery Plan includes a specific outcome relating to supporting the inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers. The 8 Regional Community Cohesion Coordinators, funded by the Welsh Government, also play a key role in coordinating efforts to resettle refugees across Wales.

In relation to the SRP, Regional Community Cohesion Co-ordinators:

- Lead on communication with the Home Office, local partners and health on case acceptance including negotiations with the Home Office on allocated cases.
- Provide ongoing management of the support local authorities are providing to all resettled cases.
- are in some cases the lead receiving officers for UNHCR case referrals.
- Hold case review groups on each resettlement.
- Undertake preparatory work which includes the procurement of properties and refurbishment if required.
- Hold recruitment exercises to set up an SRP team – recruiting a programme coordinator and support workers.
- Engage with local volunteers and Third Sector groups for provision of housing items and coordinate volunteers support for the SRP.
- Support the setting up of local ESOL provision.
- Work with relevant schools to prepare staff for new arrivals.
- Trouble-shoot issues that have arisen in relation to the programme.
- Regularly contribute to the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership's Local Authority Dispersal Group.
- Provide briefing papers to local authority Cabinet members.

The feedback we have received from the UNHCR and through news reports from communities across Wales (referenced above) demonstrate that the process of resettling refugees in the past year has been handled effectively.

The Equality & Inclusion Grant currently funds the Welsh Refugee Council to develop media programmes which promote good practice by challenging discrimination against refugees and asylum seekers. The Welsh Refugee Council is

also funded to promote diversity and cohesion through the annual Refugee Week celebrations.

The Welsh Refugee Council has produced 'A guide when making media representations with Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Wales'. It also worked with the BBC to produce a documentary which charted the life and journey of Syrian Refugees who are here or came to the UK on the SRP. The programme featured the reunion of one family and life in the UK for another and provided information on the entitlements of refugees in the UK.

The Trinity Centre has been funded to undertake a series of projects to break down barriers between communities in Cardiff, including creating a football team, the 'Music without Borders' project and other initiatives.

These projects have also contributed towards positive outcomes under Action Area 8 of the refugee and asylum seeker delivery plan by providing opportunities for these individuals to participate in programmes which improve their wellbeing and support integration into the community.

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