



Equality, Local Government and
Communities Committee

“I used to be someone”
Refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

April 2017



National Assembly for Wales
Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee

The National Assembly for Wales is the democratically elected body that represents the interests of Wales and its people, makes laws for Wales, agrees Welsh taxes and holds the Welsh Government to account.

Cover photo:

Asma*, 3, a refugee from Syria, waits with her family at a registration centre for migrants and refugees in Preševo, in southern Serbia, on October 5, 2015. Credit: Sam Tarling / Oxfam

*child's name has been changed to protect identity.

An electronic copy of this report can be found on the National Assembly's website:

www.assembly.wales/SeneddCommunities

Copies of this report can also be obtained in accessible formats including Braille, large print; audio or hard copy from:

Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee

National Assembly for Wales

Cardiff Bay

CF99 1NA

Tel: **0300 200 6565**

Email: **SeneddCommunities@assembly.wales**

Twitter: **@SeneddELGC**

© National Assembly for Wales Commission Copyright 2017

The text of this document may be reproduced free of charge in any format or medium providing that it is reproduced accurately and not used in a misleading or derogatory context. The material must be acknowledged as copyright of the National Assembly for Wales Commission and the title of the document specified.

Equality, Local Government and
Communities Committee:

“I used to be someone”
Refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

April 2017



National Assembly for Wales
Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee

Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee

The Committee was established on 28 June 2016 to examine legislation and hold the Welsh Government to account by scrutinising expenditure, administration and policy matters encompassing (but not restricted to): local government; housing, community regeneration, cohesion and safety; tackling poverty; equality of opportunity and human rights.

Current Committee membership:



John Griffiths AM (Chair)
Welsh Labour
Newport East



Gareth Bennett AM
UKIP Wales
South Wales Central



Janet Finch-Saunders AM
Welsh Conservative
Aberconwy



Siân Gwenllïan AM
Plaid Cymru
Arfon



Bethan Jenkins AM
Plaid Cymru
South Wales West



Rhianon Passmore AM
Welsh Labour
Islwyn



Jenny Rathbone AM
Welsh Labour
Cardiff Central



Joyce Watson AM
Welsh Labour
Mid and West Wales

Contents

Chair’s foreword	5
Recommendations.....	8
01. The context for this inquiry	12
02. The Welsh approach	16
03. Integration	28
04. Life during the asylum process.....	38
05. Life after the asylum process	45
06. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC).....	50
07. Nation of Sanctuary?	57
Annex A – Case studies	59
Annex B – Consultation responses.....	62
Annex C – Schedule of oral evidence	64

Chair's foreword

The work of the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee is guided by our ongoing dialogue with our stakeholders. This report on refugees and asylum seekers in Wales, following our first major policy inquiry, is no exception. It was a top priority for those who responded to our consultation during summer 2016 on our forward work programme.

The context for our inquiry is the tragedy of war, instability and displacement. The world is experiencing the worst refugee crisis since the Second World War. In 2015, one in every 113 humans was either a refugee, internally displaced, or seeking asylum. In 2016, with an intensifying conflict in Syria and huge uncertainty across countries in the region, there were more displaced people in the world than at any other time in our history. Millions are dead, families have been torn apart by conflict and children have lost their parents.

In Syria, Iraq and other countries people are desperately fleeing war and persecution. The constant news cycle of images and stories of people escaping war and persecution in Syria, Iraq and other countries is extremely distressing. The perilous journey many of them take in crossing the Mediterranean in small, overcrowded boats has resulted in countless people, many of them children, dying before they make it to shore. As the Committee heard, those who survive to reach the UK, including unaccompanied children, are likely to have experienced hugely traumatic events which leave lasting psychological scars. And at this extremely vulnerable time in their lives, they face a fresh set of major challenges. As we were told, a phrase often used by refugees and asylum seekers is:

“I used to be someone.”

I was deeply moved by the stories we heard during this inquiry. For example, a young Albanian living in Llanelli wrote:

“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.”

But he also said:

“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.”

Asylum policy is the responsibility of the UK Government, thus outside the remit of the Committee. However, the experience of refugees and asylum seekers in Wales, and the degree to which they are able to settle and pay a full part in our communities, depends largely upon the accessibility and quality of the devolved services for which the Welsh Government is responsible.

We wanted to:

- find out whether the Welsh Government's approach, driven by the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan and the Community Cohesion Delivery Plan, was working;

- assess the effectiveness of Wales’ participation in the UK Government’s Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme; and
- examine the support available to unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

The Committee undertook visits in Cardiff and Swansea as well as Glasgow and Edinburgh in the course of this inquiry. We were heartened to see such commitment and passion from people supporting refugees and asylum seekers in our cities. We were also impressed by the strategic as well as the community approaches we learned about in Scotland. I am very grateful to everyone involved in the visits who welcomed us so warmly and spoke to us so candidly about the challenges faced. I would also like to place on record my personal thanks to all the people who took the time to give evidence, both in writing and at Committee meetings.

We found examples of good practice across Wales, and it is clear that in many places and in many ways both public services and the third sector are working effectively to help refugees and asylum seekers to adjust to life in our communities and to get the support they need. However, we also heard evidence that in a number of areas the Welsh Government needs to do more to help delivery partners, including by making representations to the UK Government, by refreshing the strategic direction and by getting directly involved in delivery.

I am delighted that the Committee’s work has already made an impact, even before we finalised this report. In direct response to our inquiry and evidence from stakeholders:

- the role of the Welsh Government’s Operations Board has been expanded beyond the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme to cover all refugees and asylum seekers, to help overcome the two-tier asylum system which stakeholders told us had emerged; and
- there is positive engagement between the provider of asylum accommodation in Wales and organisations who support asylum seekers to address serious concerns about the quality of housing.

These are important steps, but there is further to go to meet the wide-ranging and complex challenges we face. We have made 19 recommendations to the Welsh Government in this report. They cover:

- updating and improving the strategic approach, through reviewing the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan, ensuring the Operations Board meets regularly and openly, and preparing for the implementation of the UK Immigration Act;
- facilitating integration, by updating the Community Cohesion Plan, expanding the role of community cohesion co-ordinators, extending concessionary transport to refugees and asylum seekers, and improving English for Speakers of Other Languages teaching provision;
- supporting asylum seekers during the asylum process, through better monitoring and resolution of complaints about asylum accommodation, revising the asylum accommodation contract before its next renewal, ensuring asylum seekers’ landlords are registered and inspected, and improving the advice and support available;
- supporting both refugees and failed asylum seekers after the asylum process, through help for refugees to find accommodation, better access to education and employment and action to prevent destitution;

- meeting the specific needs of unaccompanied asylum seeking children, through a Guardianship service, ensuring there is capacity and capability across Wales to undertake age assessments and setting minimum standards for mental health support; and
- making Wales the world’s very first ‘Nation of Sanctuary’.

In making our final recommendation, we considered and endorsed the Seven Steps to Sanctuary, which were produced by the Welsh Refugee Coalition and had widespread support among the stakeholders with whom we engaged. I hope that the Welsh Government, local authorities and third sector partners, as well as communities throughout Wales can take the Seven Steps together so that we become the world’s first Nation of Sanctuary.

John Griffiths AM
Chair, Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. The Welsh Government should commit to a specific timescale for conducting a speedy but comprehensive consultation on and revision of the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan. The revised Plan should include measurable actions, timescales and resources, and incorporate best practice from Scotland, including standards for service provision and initiatives aimed at improving public perceptions of refugees and asylum seekers. Page 26

Recommendation 2. The Welsh Government should commit to quarterly meetings of the Wales Refugee and Asylum Seeker Operations Board, and ensure that the Board has a clear work programme and publishes minutes of its meetings. Page 27

Recommendation 3. The Welsh Government should undertake an immediate assessment of the impact the UK Immigration Act 2016 will have on Wales. This assessment should include establishing when the Right to Rent check will be commenced in Wales, and the impact the Act will have on the support available to failed asylum seekers and their families. The Welsh Government should discuss its assessment with the Home Office and seek additional funding to cover any extra costs arising from the legislation. The Welsh Government should then ensure that local authorities, landlords and other stakeholders are prepared for the impact of this change in the law, including publishing and disseminating comprehensive guidance. Page 27

Recommendation 4. The Welsh Government should work with partners to review the Community Cohesion National Delivery Plan 2016-17. The subsequently improved Plan should include a communications strategy that emphasises the benefits of immigration to Welsh society and dispels myths and inaccuracies about refugees and asylum seekers. It should also include a Wales-wide publicity campaign similar to the one already undertaken in Scotland. Page 36

Recommendation 5. The Welsh Government should expand the role of the community cohesion co-ordinators beyond the SVPRP to all refugees and asylum seekers to support the delivery of the revised Community Cohesion National Delivery Plan. Page 36

Recommendation 6. The Welsh Government should consider extending concessionary transport schemes to refugees and asylum seekers, including children, to enable them to have greater access to education, employment, and volunteering opportunities. Page 37

Recommendation 7. The Welsh Government should publish a detailed analysis of the current provision of ESOL courses and its assessment of future demand. It should then work with local authorities to join up skills and capacity within both Further Education colleges and Higher Education institutions as part of a new action plan to be published before the start of the 2017/18 academic year. The action plan should:

- fill gaps in provision;
- ensure that refugees are offered appropriate classes as soon as possible following their arrival in Wales; and
- address barriers to accessing classes. Page 37

Recommendation 8. The Welsh Government should convene regular meetings of all partners in the asylum accommodation process to review complaints procedures, guidance and dissemination, and monitor how live complaints cases are being addressed. These meetings should be appropriately advertised so that asylum seekers and those supporting them are aware of the discussions and the outcomes, and are engaged in the process. Page 43

Recommendation 9. The Welsh Government should undertake urgent negotiations with the Home Office to reform the asylum accommodation system in advance of the contract renewal process in 2019. The reforms should include:

- the full involvement of delivery partners in the development, awarding and monitoring of the contract;
- an independent complaints process for asylum seekers in Wales, including a central register of complaints, systematic monitoring of progress in resolving them and communication of timescales to tenants; and
- equalities training for contractors’ staff. Page 43

Recommendation 10. The Welsh Government should ensure that asylum seekers’ landlords are covered by a registration scheme, either as an extension of or complement to Rent Smart Wales. The scheme should include an obligation

on local authorities to conduct in-depth inspections of properties accommodating asylum seekers and report regularly on standards of accommodation. Page 43

Recommendation 11. The Welsh Government should ensure through the new Refugee, Asylum Seeker and Migrant Inclusion Service, that there is sufficient provision of legal advice; regular reminders about the importance of health screenings as well as help for people to attend them; and mental health support, overseen by a ‘Freedom From Torture’ mental health professionals group. The Service should be underpinned by a robust monitoring and evaluation framework. Page 44

Recommendation 12. The Welsh Government should include specific actions to help asylum seekers and refused asylum seekers avoid destitution in its revised Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan, including creating a small grants fund for asylum seekers and people with no recourse to public funds, through the Discretionary Assistance Fund. Page 48

Recommendation 13. The Welsh Government should do more to help people awarded refugee status to find suitable accommodation in Wales. It should check that local authorities are informed when asylum seekers in their areas are awarded refugee status, and ask local authorities to consider whether a new refugee is vulnerable and therefore regarded as in priority need for housing alongside other vulnerable groups. Page 49

Recommendation 14. The Welsh Government should make representations to the Home Office about extending the 28-day move-on period to 56 days. Page 49

Recommendation 15. The Welsh Government should do more to help refugees and asylum seekers access education and employment by:

- promoting the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales as widely as possible, both to refugees and asylum seekers and service providers;
- requiring Welsh universities to treat refugees as home students; and
- creating more opportunities for public sector internships and volunteering opportunities designed for refugees and asylum seekers. Page 49

Recommendation 16. The Welsh Government should establish a Guardianship service for Wales, supported by peer networks, as part of reaffirming Wales’ commitment to welcome unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

..... Page 55

Recommendation 17. The Welsh Government should ensure that there is a designated and suitably trained person in each local authority to undertake age assessments of asylum-seeking children. Page 55

Recommendation 18. The Welsh Government should ensure minimum standards of mental health support for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children with trauma, in line with the British Psychological Society’s recommendations.

..... Page 55

Recommendation 19. The Welsh Government should take the Seven Steps to make Wales a Nation of Sanctuary. Page 58

01. The context for this inquiry

The Committee launched its inquiry on refugees and asylum seekers during the world's largest refugee crisis since the Second World War. At the time of publishing this report, more than 65 million people were forcibly displaced from their homes due to conflict or persecution.¹

By the end of 2016, Wales had provided sanctuary to 397 Syrian refugees, and nearly 3,000 asylum seekers of other nationalities (including some Syrians) were awaiting the outcome of their applications while living in Wales – mainly in Cardiff, Swansea, Newport and Wrexham. The number of refugees settled in Wales is not known, but estimated to be between 6,000 and 10,000.²

The standard asylum route

1. If people apply for asylum through the standard asylum route, they are dispersed to asylum accommodation around the UK and receive £36.95 per week in cash (called 'section 95 support') while the UK Government's Home Office is considering their application. People seeking asylum are excluded from claiming mainstream welfare benefits, and they are not usually allowed to work during this period, which could take years.
2. If the person is granted refugee status, they have 28 days to move out of the asylum accommodation, find housing, get a National Insurance number and apply for benefits or find employment. The Committee was told that administrative delays during this period "often result in people becoming destitute".³
3. If a person is refused asylum, they usually have 'no recourse to public funds', and are not eligible for housing or welfare benefits and may be excluded from local authority support. They are expected to leave the UK. If there is a temporary barrier preventing them from leaving the UK they can apply to the Home Office for hardship support, a non-negotiable package of accommodation and subsistence of £35.39 per week on an 'Azure' payment card (rather than cash) for food, clothing and toiletries (called 'section 4 support'). There are strict eligibility criteria for this support. The claimant must demonstrate that they are likely to become destitute in 14 days, and that they are taking reasonable steps to leave the UK.

Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme

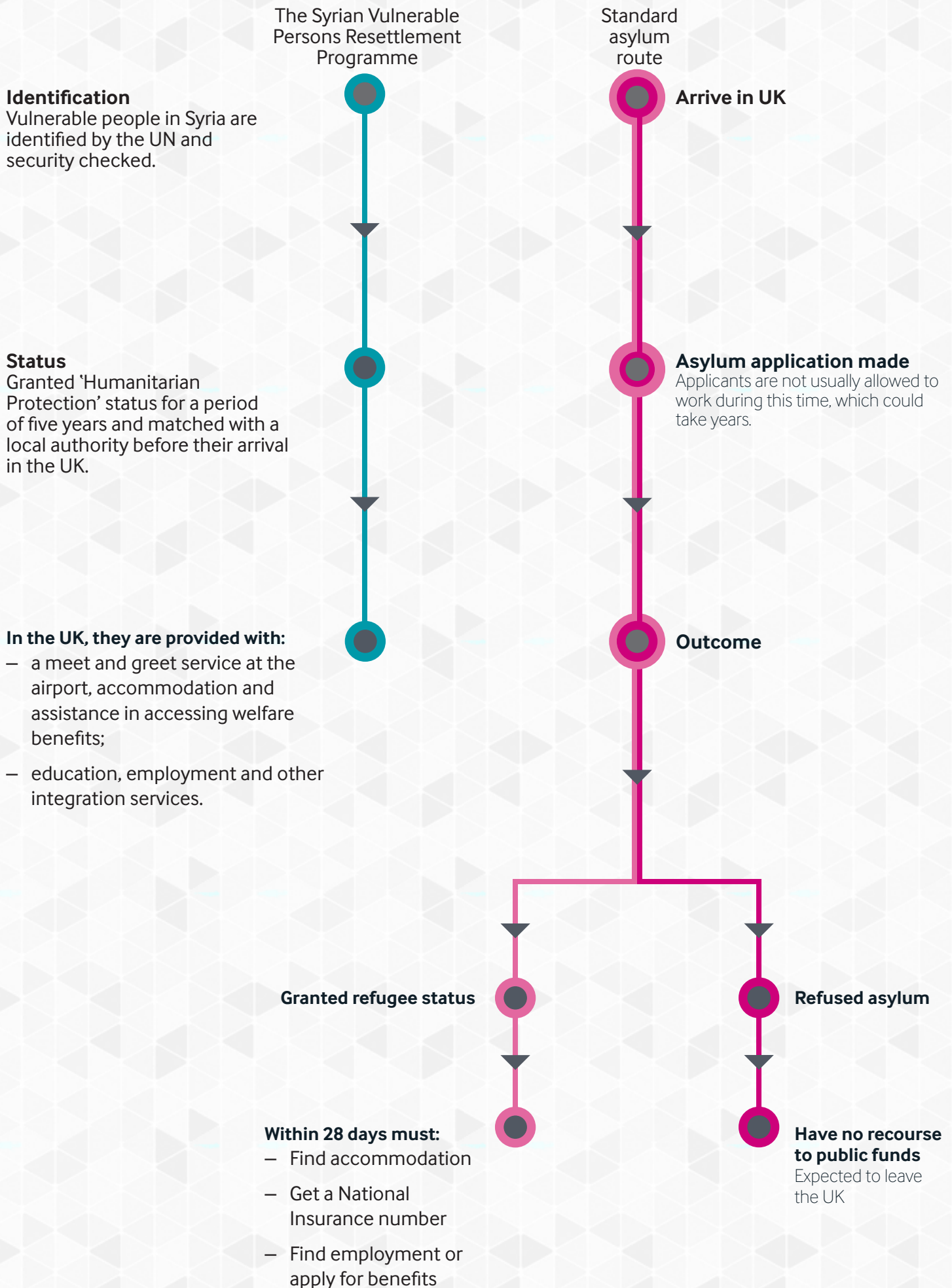
4. In January 2014, the UK Government announced that it would establish a programme to offer resettlement to some of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees – the Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme, later known as the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme (SVPRP). People accepted under this programme are granted refugee status without having to apply for asylum through the standard process. Unaccompanied children are dealt with under separate schemes (see chapter 6).
5. Following an expansion to the programme in September 2015, the UK Government committed to resettle 20,000 Syrians in the UK by 2020.

¹ UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Figures at a glance.

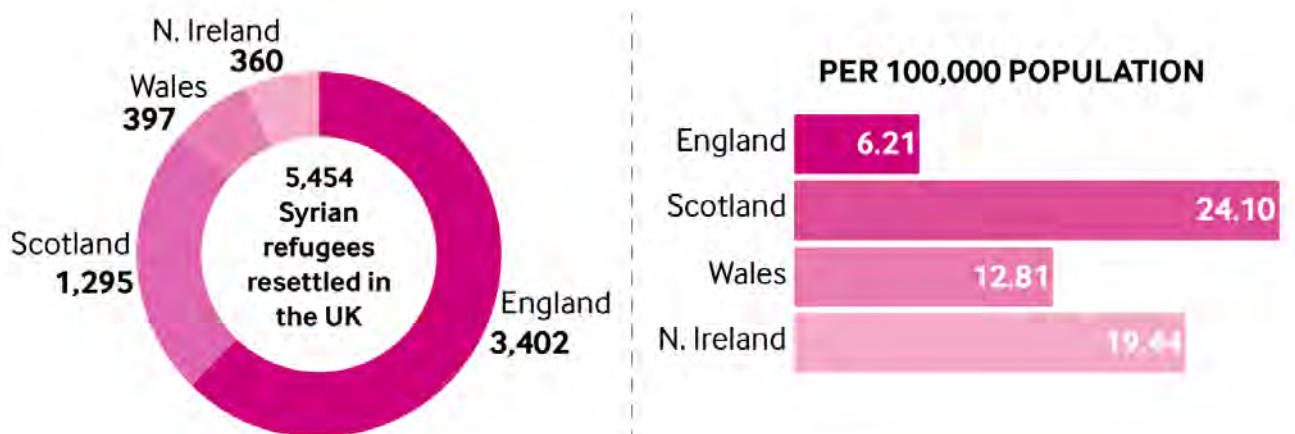
² Estimate published by the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership in 2013.

³ Written evidence, City of Sanctuary, Committee's reference RAS 21.

Routes to Asylum in the UK



6. According to the latest available statistics, 5,454 people have been granted humanitarian protection in the UK under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme:⁴



The Committee's approach

7. Asylum policy is not devolved and is the responsibility of the UK Government, but refugees and asylum seekers in Wales rely upon devolved public services which are the responsibility of the Welsh Government. The Committee wanted to examine how much support was available for refugees and asylum seekers in Wales and how well Wales was responding to the large-scale displacement of Syrians.

8. The terms of reference for the inquiry were to consider:

- the pace and effectiveness of the Welsh Government approach to resettling refugees through the UK Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Programme (SVPRP);
- 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.

9. As part of the inquiry, the Committee:

- held a **public consultation** which received 47 responses;
- visited the **African Community Centre** in Swansea and the **Oasis Centre and Trinity Centre** in Cardiff;
- **visited** Glasgow (as guests of the **Scottish Refugee Council** and **Glasgow Refugee, Asylum and Migration Network**) and Edinburgh (as guests of the Scottish Parliament's **Equalities and Human Rights Committee**);
- held 10 **oral evidence sessions** with a wide range of stakeholders and the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children (the Cabinet Secretary); and
- **corresponded** with the Home Office and Clearsprings Ready Homes Ltd.

⁴ Home Office, **Immigration statistics, October to December 2016**, published 23 February 2017.

10. The Committee is very grateful to everyone who took the time to contribute to this inquiry.

Committee Members' views

11. This report was agreed by seven out of eight Committee Members as representing their views on the evidence they considered and the recommendations they decided to make to the Welsh Government. One Member, Gareth Bennett AM, did not agree the report.

02. The Welsh approach

The Welsh Government is responsible for many of the services that support refugees and asylum seekers in Wales, such as health, education and housing. Asylum itself is the responsibility of the UK Government's Secretary of State for the Home Department (the Home Office). The Committee heard that this can create significant challenges because two governments with different approaches, working with the same local authorities and other delivery partners, are responsible for different areas of refugees' and asylum seekers' lives.

12. The Committee's engagement with stakeholders and research during the inquiry highlighted a number of developments at UK and international levels that will affect Welsh Government services. These include:

- the establishment of new asylum dispersal areas beyond Cardiff, Swansea, Newport and Wrexham and the need to accommodate the increasing number of spontaneous arrivals;
- targets set by the UK Government, which aims to resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees by 2020;
- a National Transfer Scheme for unaccompanied asylum seeking children (although negotiations ceased after the UK Government decided to limit the number of unaccompanied refugee children allowed into the UK under the so-called "Dubs amendment" to 350);
- the Vulnerable Children's Relocation Scheme, which aims to resettle 3,000 children and families from the Middle East and North Africa;
- the renewal of the Home Office asylum accommodation contract in 2019 (see chapter 4);
- the **findings** of the January 2017 House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee inquiry on asylum accommodation;
- the potential deterioration of security and human rights in various countries (Syria, Turkey, Eritrea etc.), which could lead to increased number of asylum applications; and
- the UK's withdrawal from the European Union, and the effect on the UK's current obligations under the Common European Asylum System and the Dublin Framework on the distribution of refugees throughout Europe.

Leadership

13. The Home Office emphasised the importance of "close collaboration between devolved and non-devolved public services for all asylum seekers and refugees",⁵ and cited examples of successful joint working in relation to the SVPRP.

14. The Cabinet Secretary characterised the Welsh Government's role as being "the middle person":

"The Home Office has direct responsibility, local authorities provide services, and we provide the overarching principle of health, education et cetera...our

⁵ Letter from the Minister of State for Immigration to the Committee Chair, **4 January 2017**.

position on this is limited...Notwithstanding that, when there are issues in the system that are Welsh related, I have had contact with senior Ministers in Westminster, and they've been resolved. So, we do have leverage there.”⁶

15. Naomi Alleyne, Director of Social Services and Housing at the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), told the Committee that there should be more communication between the Welsh Government and the Home Office prior to the publication of advice and guidance.⁷ Alicja Zalesinska, Director of Tai Pawb, made a case for more partnership working between advocacy service providers and public authorities, including the UK Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).⁸

16. UNISON highlighted that “the pace of the actual resettlement of families is dictated by the preparedness of local authorities”. They asserted that some local authorities have only resettled a small number of refugees and stated that “more needs to be done”. They also pointed to the importance of putting in place local support mechanisms to “give the families the best possible chance of a successful resettlement and welcome into our communities”.⁹

17. The WLGA told the Committee that the Welsh Government:

“...has supported local authorities and partners in their response to the humanitarian crisis in Syria and demonstrated leadership, through the First Minister, in bringing key stakeholders together in September 2015 to discuss and help coordinate the response from Wales.”¹⁰

18. However, City of Sanctuary reported that “some City of Sanctuary groups in Wales have experienced low engagement from local authorities”.¹¹ Some witnesses felt that the Welsh Government’s role at a practical level was less obvious. Rocio Cifuentes, the Director of the Ethnic Youth Support Team (EYST), based in Swansea, told the Committee:

“... I’m not clear what role the Welsh Government have had in deciding which families come... it’s direct between the local authority and the Home Office, which, to me, doesn’t seem right.”

19. Ms Cifuentes wanted the Welsh Government to “aim to be much stronger and much more of an equal partner” and to ensure that existing activities were “better funded and supported and strategically joined up”.¹² City of Sanctuary called for the Welsh Government to “take a more proactive approach” on the SVPRP “by promoting best practice”.¹³

The Delivery Plan

20. The Welsh Government published a refreshed Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan (the Plan) in March 2016, which describes priorities including housing, health, education and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC).

⁶ Oral evidence, Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children, **19 January 2017**, paragraph 7.

⁷ Oral evidence, Naomi Alleyne (WLGA), **15 December 2016**, paragraph 46.

⁸ Oral evidence, Alicja Zalesinska (Tai Pawb), **11 January 2017**, paragraph 174.

⁹ Written evidence, UNISON, **RAS 19**.

¹⁰ Written evidence, WLGA, **RAS 32**.

¹¹ Written evidence, City of Sanctuary, **RAS 21**.

¹² Oral evidence, Rocio Cifuentes (EYST), **15 December 2016**, paragraphs 187 to 250.

¹³ Written evidence, City of Sanctuary, **RAS 21**.

21. The Committee heard from a number of stakeholders that the Plan was not fit for purpose in the current climate. Oxfam Cymru was “disappointed” with the quality of the plan, and argued that it lacked “concrete and accountable” objectives, or as the British Red Cross put it “SMART” actions,¹⁴ in areas of devolved responsibility as well as “any provision to mitigate impacts of UK Government legislation or policy”.¹⁵ City and County of Swansea called the plan “weak” and said that there were “no substance/resources behind the actions or obligation by the WG to assist in delivery”.¹⁶

22. Rocio Cifuentes told the Committee that the Plan “focused too much on the direct support needs of refugees and asylum seekers in Wales”. She argued that attention should also be given to “the context that they live in” and to “challenging misconceptions amongst the wider population living in Wales”. Ms Cifuentes thought that the reason for the limited “scope and potential” of the Plan was that the Welsh Government “didn’t reach out enough beyond Cardiff”. She called for:

“a much more holistic understanding of the issue of refugees, understanding that the main challenge that they face is actually how they are perceived, rather than direct issues regarding housing and schooling, which are issues that everybody shares.”¹⁷

23. Stakeholders also highlighted a lack of awareness of the Plan. The WLGA commented that the Plan “has limited profile or impact across local authorities”.¹⁸ Torfaen County Borough Council said it had “a limited profile in terms of its existence outside of those service areas and agencies working directly with the programme” which meant that there was a reliance on “those staff working directly in this area to really make the plan a reality”.¹⁹ Newport and District Refugee Support Group could not find “any evidence of awareness, let alone incorporation of the delivery plan in local (Newport City Council) strategies”. The Group suggested that this was “because the plan is very vague about responsibilities and time frames” and suggested that it would be useful “if the delivery plan would be included in other plans and strategies of Welsh and UK Government”.²⁰

24. Naomi Alleyne, Director of Social Services and Housing at the WLGA, set out what she saw as the next steps for the Plan:

“...our view is that it [the delivery plan] could do with a revision and an updating in terms of the changed agenda that we do have, and the opportunity to really embed integration and address the issues that are being told to us by asylum seekers and refugees.”²¹

25. UNISON drew attention to the financial constraints already being faced by public services, and argued that it would be “unreasonable to expect services to absorb more demand without additional finances to deliver”.²²

¹⁴ Written evidence, British Red Cross, [RAS 15](#).

¹⁵ Written evidence, Oxfam Cymru, [RAS 10](#).

¹⁶ Written evidence, City and County of Swansea, [RAS 28](#).

¹⁷ Oral evidence, Rocio Cifuentes, [15 December 2016](#), paragraph 159.

¹⁸ Written evidence, WLGA, [RAS 32](#).

¹⁹ Written evidence, Torfaen Council, [RAS 35](#).

²⁰ Written evidence, Newport and District Refugee Support Group, [RAS 4](#).

²¹ Oral evidence, Naomi Alleyne (WLGA), [15 December 2016](#), paragraph 11.

²² Written evidence, UNISON, [RAS 19](#).

26. The Wales Strategic Migration Partnership (WSMP), which is funded by the Home Office and hosted by the WLGA, told the Committee that the Plan “needs to address much greater complexity, broader geographies, different resettlement programmes, and different levels of expertise and infrastructure across the twenty two local authorities in Wales”.²³ Conwy, Gwynedd and the Isle of Anglesey Local Authorities explained this in more detail:

“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 resettled 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.”²⁴

27. The Committee received a number of specific recommendations for how to improve the plan, including:

- a comprehensive monitoring framework and a cross-department commitment;²⁵
- SMART indicators to monitor the impact on refugee women and girls;²⁶
- 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;²⁷
- effective communication to manage expectations of refugees,²⁸ including avoiding situations where refugees thought they were coming to Manchester or Bristol and were unaware that they were coming to rural mid-Wales;²⁹
- consistency throughout services in Wales;³⁰
- at least one refugee coordinator per local authority, funded by the Welsh Government;³¹
- an all-Wales induction toolkit to assist with the settling in process, building on the success of the useful ‘Welcome to Wales’ guide in English and Arabic as part of the ‘understanding

²³ Written evidence, WSMP, [RAS 34](#).

²⁴ Written evidence, Conwy, Gwynedd and the Isle of Anglesey Local Authorities, [RAS 29](#).

²⁵ Written evidence, Welsh Women’s Aid, [RAS 30](#).

²⁶ Written evidence, Welsh Women’s Aid, [RAS 30](#).

²⁷ Written evidence, British Red Cross, [RAS 15](#).

²⁸ Written evidence, UNISON, [RAS 19](#).

²⁹ Written evidence, Ceredigion County Council, [RAS 38](#).

³⁰ Written evidence, UNISON, [RAS 19](#).

³¹ Written evidence, UNISON, [RAS 19](#).

Wales’ pack and a helpful booklet for young people on the same topic in an ‘easy to read’ format’;³² and

- improved training for public sector professionals to increase understanding of refugee and asylum-seeker issues.³³

28. The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children committed to revising the Plan in 2017, taking into account the findings of this inquiry. He said that:

“...over the last 12 months there’s been a lot of very quick movement in the system. I believe our policies are rapidly going out of date...our policies have to be fit for purpose and that’s why we’ve triggered a review of the strategy.”³⁴

The Syrian Refugee Task Force and Operations Board

29. The Welsh Government established a Syrian Refugee Task Force and Operations Board to lead a Wales-wide approach and co-ordinate the work of all organisations to maximise efficiency. The work of the Task Force and Operations Board is supported by the WSMP.

30. There was positive feedback about these arrangements from local authorities. Torfaen Council said that the Operations Board had “maintained a strategic overview” and described the WSMP as being key in ensuring “that a consistent co-ordination process has been undertaken”.³⁵ Ceredigion County Council said that the WLGA and the WSMP had been “particularly effective in enabling the sharing of good practice and working through issues as they arise”.³⁶

31. Dr Gill Richardson, Executive Director of Public Health at Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB), told the Committee that once the Task Force had been set up, “co-ordination became better and more streamlined”. She indicated that better communication from the Home Office would have been helpful in the initial stages. Dr Richardson highlighted the difficulties caused by the “inability to share which local authorities had accepted families with [the] Welsh Government”, and therefore with health services. She said that with assistance from Welsh Government officials, health and local government colleagues had established “a health framework with a pathway” which meant that meeting a family’s health needs could be factored into a local authority’s decision on whether to accept the family.³⁷

32. Some of the evidence the Committee received was less positive. Siân Summers-Rees, Chief Officer of City of Sanctuary UK and Ireland and Chair of Asylum Justice, told the Committee that according to the experiences of local groups around Wales, the response of local authorities to the SVPRP had been “mixed”.³⁸ Oxfam Cymru reported that it was “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” and called for “greater strategic leadership” from the Welsh Government “in responding to humanitarian crises, providing a greater urgency and

³² Written evidence, City and County of Swansea, [RAS 28](#).

³³ Written evidence, Torfaen Council, [RAS 35](#).

³⁴ Oral evidence, Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children, [19 January 2017](#), paragraph 2.

³⁵ Written evidence, Torfaen Council, [RAS 35](#).

³⁶ Written evidence, Ceredigion County Council, [RAS 38](#).

³⁷ Oral evidence, Dr Gill Richardson (AB UHB), [15 December 2016](#), paragraph 311.

³⁸ Oral evidence, Siân Summers-Rees (City of Sanctuary), [7 December 2016](#), paragraph 117.

'troubleshooting' to ensure local authorities, communities and service providers can respond quickly to such challenges".³⁹

33. Welsh Women's Aid felt that the Operations Board should include "representation from violence against women services in Wales".⁴⁰ There were also concerns that the Operations Board had not met since June 2016,⁴¹ although the Committee was told that sub-groups had met in the interim.

34. Naomi Alleyne from the WLGA argued that it was important to ensure that:

"these systems or these structures are sustainable moving forward, because this is a five-year programme, and we need to ensure that we can maintain that interest, the sustainability, the changes to policy or practice that are required as time goes on, that we learn more experience and that people settle more within different communities."⁴²

A "two-tier system"?

35. Stakeholders highlighted that the Welsh Government's Syrian Refugee Task Force and Operations Board perpetuated in Welsh policy the "two-tier system" of asylum which they said had been created by the establishment of the UK Government's SVPRP. The Committee heard that those arriving through this programme received "bespoke" assistance and "fast-tracking of administrative support",⁴³ in "stark contrast with the support other refugees receive" through the standard asylum route.⁴⁴ Twelve stakeholders referred to this issue including the Welsh Refugee Coalition, Displaced People in Action (DPIA) and the WLGA.

36. Hayley Richards, Policy and Advocacy Officer at Oxfam told the Committee that the Home Office "are fully aware that a two-tier system exists". She explained that as part of the separate asylum route created for Syrians by the Home Office, "there is a fast-track process through DWP for the national insurance number...paperwork to be sorted out" and said she understood this all happened with 48 hours under the fast-tracked process. Ms Richards's view was that the "fast-track system should be available for all newly recognised refugees and not just Syrian refugees".⁴⁵ Alicja Zalesinska, Director of Tai Pawb, said she "would support a call for parity of approach between the Syrian scheme and the general refugee schemes where, say, the national insurance number applications are expedited, benefits applications are expedited".⁴⁶

37. Furthermore, the Cabinet Secretary told the Committee that the Welsh Government's community cohesion co-ordinators (see chapter 3) only work directly with refugees resettled through the SVPRP, and not with spontaneously-arrived refugees.⁴⁷

³⁹ Written evidence, Oxfam Cymru, [RAS 10](#).

⁴⁰ Written evidence, Welsh Women's Aid, [RAS 30](#).

⁴¹ Oral evidence, Hayley Richards (Oxfam), [7 December 2016](#), paragraph 247.

⁴² Oral evidence, Naomi Alleyne (WLGA), [15 December 2016](#), paragraph 40.

⁴³ Written evidence, Welsh Refugee Coalition, [RAS 14](#).

⁴⁴ Written evidence, City of Sanctuary, [RAS 21](#).

⁴⁵ Oral evidence, Hayley Richards (Oxfam), [7 December 2016](#), paragraph 221.

⁴⁶ Oral evidence, Alicja Zalesinska (Tai Pawb), [11 January 2017](#), paragraph 174.

⁴⁷ Oral evidence, Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children, [19 January 2017](#), paragraph 193.

38. The Welsh Refugee Council urged the Committee to:

“acknowledge and address this two-tier system by seeking commitments from Welsh Government to...demonstrate leadership & proactively promote positive messages & narratives about all refugees being welcome in Wales, as well as the benefits of migration to Wales.”⁴⁸

39. The Cabinet Secretary told the Committee that the Welsh Government seeks “to act appropriately for all migrants and our services” and explained that the Task Force had been established because “that was a pressure point that we thought we had to act on and have something very specific to support that process”. However, the Cabinet Secretary did inform the Committee that he was “looking to expand that provision, so therefore it looks at a broader principle of asylum seekers and refugees”. The Cabinet Secretary assured the Committee that “if there is a two-tier system, it’s not intentional” and agreed to discuss the potential expansion of the work of the Operations Board at its next meeting.⁴⁹

40. The Welsh Government subsequently confirmed that the Operations Board had met on 27 February 2017 (for the first time since 13 June 2016) and agreed revised terms of reference including an expanded remit and change of name to Wales Refugee and Asylum Seeker Operations Board. At the meeting, the Operations Board agreed that the Delivery Plan should be refreshed during 2017, and the Welsh Government confirmed that this work would begin “as soon as possible”.⁵⁰

The Scottish approach

41. During the Committee’s visit to Scotland in December, the Scottish Government told Members that it aims to provide ‘an enabling statutory environment’ for refugee resettlement in Scotland, which includes a legal duty to provide guardians for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

42. Its ‘New Scots’ refugee strategy (which is being refreshed) is centred on the principle of support and integration ‘from day one’. The Scottish Government also:

- leads the Refugee Taskforce, which “co-ordinates Scotland's response, working with local authorities, public agencies and third sector organisations to ensure that any refugees coming to Scotland will be able to integrate successfully”;
- established the Scotland Welcomes Refugees website, which outlines the government action and provides information on how people can help;
- funds various integration networks, including the Bridges Programme, which supports the social, educational and economic integration of refugees, asylum seekers, migrants, and anyone for whom English is a second language;
- provides young refugees with access to the Young Scot National Entitlement Card, which gives host of benefits, discounts, rewards, public transport discounts, and access to services such as libraries and leisure facilities in their local authority; and
- provides advice to professionals supporting refugees and asylum seekers.

⁴⁸ Written evidence, Welsh Refugee Council, RAS 09.

⁴⁹ Oral evidence, Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children, 19 January 2017, paragraphs 22 and 32.

⁵⁰ Letter from the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children to the Committee Chair, 16 March 2017.

43. The Scottish Refugee Council, which is an independent charity, operates an annual budget of around £2.4m a year, which derives from a combination of different grants and fundraising. The Council receives more than £1.1million from the Scottish Government, of which around £0.5m is a strategic grant. (In comparison, in 2014-15, the Welsh Refugee Council’s income was £616,000, down from £1.1million in 2013-14, of which £362,000 came from the Welsh Government).⁵¹ The Scottish Refugee Council provides a number of services, including:

- the Family Keywork Service, which is an asylum advice service for families (which include a keyworker);
- the Guardianship Service for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children;
- running community cohesion publicity campaigns such as ‘Fancy a Cup of Tea with a Refugee?’;
- conducting research on issues such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and refugee women’s employability; and
- running the annual Refugee Festival Scotland and media awards.

44. The Scottish Refugee Council is campaigning for the introduction of a “Refugee Integration Bill”, which would:

“set out refugees’ rights to access and enjoy the full benefit of Scottish public services, enshrine national standards for integration in law, and simplify the many provisions in Scots law that are relevant to refugee integration.”

The impact of the UK Immigration Act 2016

45. The purpose of the Immigration Act 2016 is to “tackle illegal immigration by making it harder to live and work illegally in the UK”.⁵² Witnesses told the Committee that the Act is likely to have a big impact on devolved areas including housing and the safeguarding of children, and was likely to increase destitution.

46. Hayley Richards, Policy and Advocacy Officer at Oxfam, told the Committee that her greatest concern about the Welsh Government’s approach to refugees and asylum seekers was how it is “dealing with non-devolved issues”. She explained:

“...the Immigration Act impacts on a variety of devolved policy areas, such as housing and looked-after children, and there seems to be total disparity to how the Welsh Government approached the Welfare Reform Act 2012, for example, where there was a significant amount of research commissioned by the Institute for Fiscal Studies. There were action plans developed on what actions the Welsh Government could take to mitigate negative impacts of welfare reform on people living in Wales, but, to our knowledge, there’s been no such action taken with regard to the Immigration Act or potential changes to the

⁵¹ Welsh Refugee Council, Trustees’ **Annual Report and Accounts** for the year ended 31 March 2015.

⁵² Immigration Act 2016 **Explanatory Notes**.

immigration rules, and what those impacts would be on people in Wales and how we could mitigate those impacts.”⁵³

47. The Welsh Refugee Coalition called for the Welsh Government to:

“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.”⁵⁴

48. Schedule 11 of the Act terminates support to failed asylum seekers who do not demonstrate that they are taking steps to return to their country of origin. Elinor Harris, Services Manager for International Family Tracing and Refugee Support at the British Red Cross, explained this change:

“If you are in Home Office accommodation and your asylum claim is refused and you have children, then currently that accommodation continues. One of the things that the Immigration Act does, which will come in sometime next year, is that it takes away that provision. That’s something that really needs to be thought about in advance, because there is a decision then for social services departments about how they support those children and families.”⁵⁵

49. If an asylum seeker’s claim fails, they are deemed to have ‘no recourse to public funds’ (NRPF). While this means they cannot access most public funds (including most benefits and local authority housing), people with NRPF are not prevented from receiving assistance from social services in certain situations. The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 introduced reforms to the support available for destitute migrants. The effect of the reforms was that a person’s need for care and support must be independent of the impact on their health and well-being of being destitute or the anticipated effect of being destitute.

50. Naomi Alleyne of the WLGA was concerned about the implications of these provisions for local authorities, which have duties to “support those who are vulnerable and in destitution”, because the provisions could “lead to increase of destitution or increase of people and families in that area”.⁵⁶ She said that the WLGA would like “more discussions with Welsh Government around how we can assess what the implications of that could be and how we respond to it”.⁵⁷

51. Alicja Zalesinska, Director of Tai Pawb, predicted an increase in demand for local authorities’ services, particularly from people with families. She was concerned for “the people who, perhaps, are not that aware of what they can get” and thought that “we might see more rough sleepers”.⁵⁸

52. Tai Pawb also told the Committee:

“The eligibility rules for asylum support [...] are set to change considerably due to the Immigration Act 2016’s reforms to Section 95 of the Immigration and

⁵³ Oral evidence, Hayley Richards (Oxfam), **7 December 2016**, paragraph 181.

⁵⁴ Written evidence, Welsh Refugee Coalition, **RAS 14**.

⁵⁵ Oral evidence, Elinor Harris (British Red Cross), **7 December 2016**, paragraph 289.

⁵⁶ Oral evidence, Naomi Alleyne (WLGA), **15 December 2016**, paragraph 101.

⁵⁷ Oral evidence, Naomi Alleyne, (WLGA), **15 December 2016**, paragraph 36.

⁵⁸ Oral evidence, Alicja Zalesinska (Tai Pawb), **11 January 2017**, paragraph 199.

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.”⁵⁹

Right to Rent checks

53. The 2014 Immigration Act provided for Right to Rent checks, making it compulsory for landlords to check the immigration status of all new adult tenants. 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).

54. The 2016 Act makes it an offence to rent to a person “who is disqualified as a result of their immigration status”. This is currently only applicable in England, but the UK Secretary of State has the power to enable any of the residential tenancies provisions to apply in relation to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

55. Tai Pawb told the Committee that “we know that it is the UK Government’s intention to extend the ‘Right to Rent’ checks to Wales” and that they were “concerned that these checks will lead to destitution and an increase in homelessness, putting more pressures and costs on already stretched local authorities”. They predicted “an increase in homelessness presentations and the number of No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) cases presented to social services”.⁶⁰

56. Tai Pawb also highlighted a lack of awareness about the Act among landlords in Wales, and said that the Act could potentially exacerbate “concerns of renting to anybody without clear immigration status or documentation and thus increasing unintended discrimination”.⁶¹ Tracey Sherlock, Policy and Communications Manager at the Welsh Refugee Council, explained that the impact could be “that landlords, particularly landlords who have a small portfolio, might shy away from renting properties to anybody that they suggest might be of questionable migration status”. She said that research already showed “that it’s likely that landlords are making that judgement about people from BME backgrounds in particular”.⁶²

57. The Cabinet Secretary told the Committee that the Welsh Government was “conscious of the Act” but he acknowledged that “we haven’t done an awful lot of work on the immigration Act in Wales, as it is, again, a non-devolved function, but it does have indirect consequences on what happens here in Wales”. He said that “we are monitoring that very carefully to see what that may or may not mean” but that so far the Government had not seen “any significant changes to how things are working on the ground”.

58. The Cabinet Secretary also told the Committee that the Welsh Government was “not aware of any specific date that [extended Right to Rent checks] will be introduced into Wales” but suggested that it could be “something that I will perhaps try to get some clarity from the Home Office on for the committee”. He confirmed that “at the moment, we are not aware of that being introduced here in

⁵⁹ Written evidence, Tai Pawb, [RAS 17](#).

⁶⁰ Written evidence, Tai Pawb, [RAS 17](#).

⁶¹ Written evidence, Tai Pawb, [RAS 17](#).

⁶² Oral evidence, Tracey Sherlock (Welsh Refugee Council), [7 December 2016](#), paragraph 206.

Wales any time soon”.⁶³ The Cabinet Secretary subsequently confirmed that he had written to the Minister of State for Immigration on 28 February 2017.⁶⁴

The Committee’s view

59. The Committee welcomes the Cabinet Secretary’s intention to revise the Delivery Plan in 2017, and trusts that this report, and the wealth of feedback and ideas about the Plan from our evidence, will be helpful. We agree with stakeholders that the Plan needs to be strengthened considerably, and in particular needs to be much more specific about what will be delivered, by whom, by when and with what resources – and how delivery and outcomes will be monitored.

60. The Committee was impressed by the quality of strategic leadership, cross-sectoral co-ordination and local delivery described by stakeholders in Scotland, and commends the Scottish approach to the Welsh Government. In particular, the Committee wants to see:

- standards for service provision similar to those in Scotland, as part of a concerted effort to help areas which have not historically received refugees and asylum seekers; and
- action to improve public perceptions, including publicity campaigns, an equivalent of the Scotland Welcomes Refugees website), a Family Keywork Service, and a media awards scheme.

61. It is clear to the Committee from the evidence received that there is a two-tier system for asylum, which results in unequal treatment of people arriving in Wales and can lead to tensions within communities. This disparity has its origins in the UK Government Home Office’s prioritisation of support for Syrian refugees, including the fast-tracking of their paperwork through the Department for Work and Pensions. But it has been reinforced by the Welsh Government’s approach, including the establishment of a Task Force and Operations Board specifically for Syrian refugees, and the support provided only to Syrian refugees by the community cohesion co-ordinators. We note the Cabinet Secretary’s view that if a two-tier system does exist, it is not intentional.

62. The Committee wants all local authorities in Wales to be fully prepared to resettle refugees and asylum seekers, and to build on the experience of implementing the SVPRP.

63. The Committee welcomes the decision by the Cabinet Secretary, in the light of our representations to him based on the evidence we heard, to expand the scope of what is now the Wales Refugee and Asylum Seeker Operations Board to include refugees and asylum seekers of all nationalities.

64. The Committee would like assurances from the Cabinet Secretary about the frequency, transparency and sustainability of these arrangements, including a clear work plan, regular meetings and published minutes.

Recommendation 1. The Welsh Government should commit to a specific timescale for conducting a speedy but comprehensive consultation on and revision of the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan. The revised Plan should include measurable actions, timescales and resources, and incorporate best practice from Scotland, including

⁶³ Oral evidence, Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children, **19 January 2017**, paragraphs 88 and 98.

⁶⁴ Letter from the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children to the Committee Chair, **16 March 2017**.

standards for service provision and initiatives aimed at improving public perceptions of refugees and asylum seekers.

Recommendation 2. The Welsh Government should commit to quarterly meetings of the Wales Refugee and Asylum Seeker Operations Board, and ensure that the Board has a clear work programme and publishes minutes of its meetings.

65. The Committee is concerned that the Welsh Government does not appear to have assessed the impact of the Immigration Act 2016 once it is implemented in Wales, and believes that given the potential financial implications, this should be rectified as soon as possible. The legal framework set out in the Immigration Act seems to contradict the preventative approach set out in Welsh legislation, such as the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

66. In the light of stakeholders' concerns, the Committee believes that the Welsh Government should, as a priority, investigate the timing and impact (including on race relations) of the extension of the Act's provisions about Right to Rent checks to Wales.

67. The Committee is also concerned about the impact of the Act upon failed asylum seekers, which make changes to a complex area of law and could put more vulnerable individuals and families at risk, as well as causing confusion, for them and for service providers, about what services are available. We view the denial of public funds to children in need as being in direct conflict with the spirit of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Committee believes that the Welsh Government should provide guidance for local authorities to understand the changes and ensure that they enable failed asylum seekers to access any services to which they are entitled.

Recommendation 3. The Welsh Government should undertake an immediate assessment of the impact the UK Immigration Act 2016 will have on Wales. This assessment should include establishing when the Right to Rent check will be commenced in Wales, and the impact the Act will have on the support available to failed asylum seekers and their families. The Welsh Government should discuss its assessment with the Home Office and seek additional funding to cover any extra costs arising from the legislation. The Welsh Government should then ensure that local authorities, landlords and other stakeholders are prepared for the impact of this change in the law, including publishing and disseminating comprehensive guidance.

03. Integration

Integration was a key theme in the evidence received by the Committee. Witnesses said it was crucial that efforts to integrate refugees and asylum seekers into local communities are supported so new Welsh citizens have the opportunity to contribute to Welsh society economically, socially and culturally, rather than becoming isolated.

Policy

68. The EU Common Basic Principles on Integration define integration as “a dynamic two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents”. This definition is expanded in the Eurocities Charter of Integrating Cities, which has been signed by 37 cities including Belfast, Dublin, London and Manchester:

“Integration is a two-way process, built on positive engagement by both newcomers and established residents. The process takes in all aspects of life: economic, social, cultural, civic and political, and continues a long time after arrival. Learning and speaking the official language of the city is crucial to this process and is essential to interaction. The greatest challenge we face is polarisation and conflict between newcomers and established residents when integration fails.”

69. The Welsh Government’s Community Cohesion National Delivery Plan, published in 2014 and refreshed for 2016-17 (the Cohesion Plan) sets out how local authorities will mainstream community cohesion under seven outcomes, one of which is immigration. Torfaen Council stated that this plan had “provided a blueprint for cohesion coordinators to explore how cultural orientation and community integration is embedded into the approaches of authorities receiving resettlements”.⁶⁵

70. Rocio Cifuentes from the EYST in Swansea felt that the term “community cohesion” needed to be “expanded”. She explained:

“We need to look at class inequalities in our society and the huge gap between rich and poor. If we’re talking about people not integrating, I think class gaps are the biggest and most entrenched issues that we face... It’s not an issue that is just about ethnic minorities, and I feel that the discussion around community cohesion needs to embrace and understand that far more effectively. Otherwise, it sounds to people like we’re just talking about a problem that we don’t want to talk about, which is immigration.”⁶⁶

71. Public Health Wales (PHW) highlighted “the important links between community cohesion and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act Well-being Plans and also the Strategic Equality Plans, which present opportunities to embed community cohesion issues across key plans and strategies”.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Written evidence, Torfaen Council, [RAS 35](#).

⁶⁶ Oral evidence, Rocio Cifuentes (EYST), [15 December 2016](#), paragraph 273.

⁶⁷ Written evidence, Public Health Wales, [RAS 36](#).

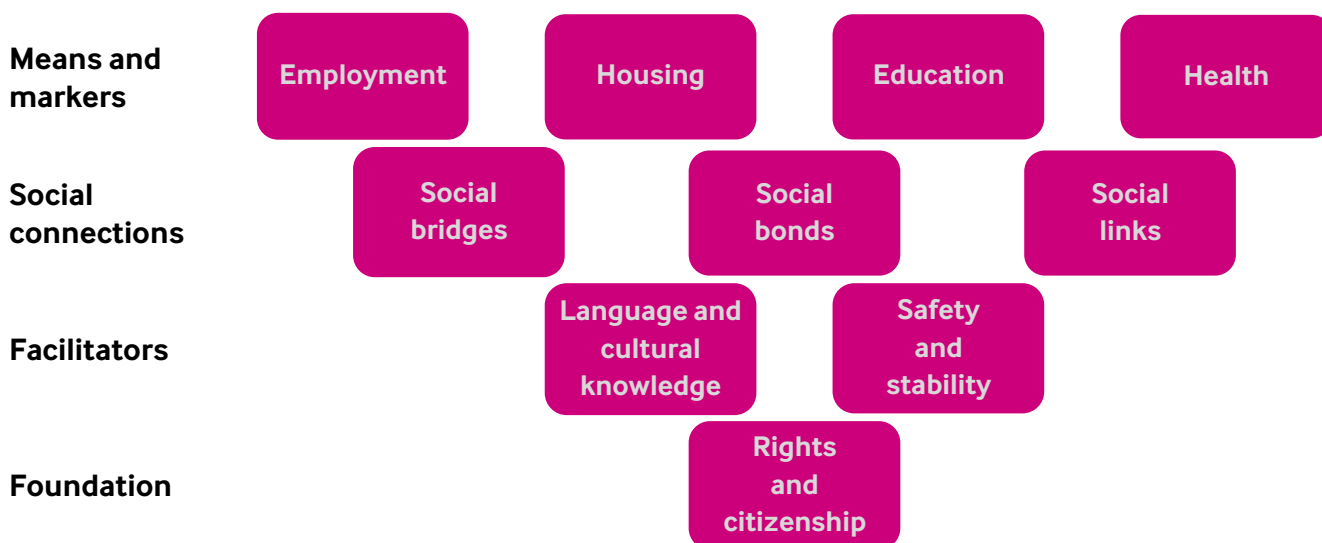
72. On a practical level, Hywel Dda UHB raised concerns that “the Community Cohesion Delivery Plan activities appear to be centred around Cardiff”. They acknowledged that “this may be where larger numbers of refugees and asylum seekers are resettled” but argued that “it will also be important to ensure that integration of refugees and asylum seekers resettled elsewhere in more remote, rural areas is similarly facilitated”.⁶⁸

73. The EYST said that the Cohesion Plan is “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”. They explained that “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”.⁶⁹ This is supported by [research](#) from 2008 by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation into immigration and inclusion in South Wales:

“There is a real need to avoid the common-sense, and now institutionalised, tendency to link together race equality, community cohesion and issues of community safety and extremism, and a related need to explore cohesion issues across settled and new communities, groups and areas.”

74. City and County of Swansea said that the Cohesion Plan had sometimes created “confusion over responsibilities such as Social Services which has ultimate responsibility for safeguarding and in terms of asylum seeker and refugee resettlement/integration agendas” and called for “clarity on overall responsibilities for these areas” and an emphasis in the Cohesion Plan on “the importance of safeguarding”.⁷⁰

75. The Committee heard during its [visit](#) to Scotland that the refreshed New Scots strategy may use the indicators of integration developed by Alastair Ager and Alison Strang in 2004 in a [report for the Home Office](#). This work aimed to establish a framework for a common understanding of integration, and design the framework for use by local projects and policy makers to assist them with the planning and evaluation of services for refugees.



⁶⁸ Written evidence, Hywel Dda UHB, [RAS 05](#).

⁶⁹ Written evidence, EYST, [RAS 33](#).

⁷⁰ Written evidence, City and County of Swansea, [RAS 28](#).

76. The Committee also received evidence about a wide range of approaches to community integration from across Wales, which we commend to local partnerships across the nation and to the Welsh Government. These can be found at the Annex A.

77. Stakeholders made suggestions to the Committee about ways to facilitate integration and community cohesion. These included:

- access to leisure and cultural sites;⁷¹
- greater use of grassroots groups;⁷²
- better dissemination of information on how refugees can engage with the provision of arts, culture and sport;⁷³
- greater awareness of the distinctive culture of Wales, including the significance of the Welsh language in education, culture and identity;⁷⁴
- increased use of websites such as [Help Refugees](#);⁷⁵ and
- more connections between young people, through putting their stories on social media, connecting with the Young Wales networks, and linking into any youth forums and youth groups.⁷⁶

78. The Committee heard that an essential part of integration was identifying, appreciating and harnessing the unique contribution that each refugee/asylum seeker could make to Welsh society – as Salah Rasool, Advice Caseworker at the Welsh Refugee Council put it, “empowering individuals and recognising their skills”.⁷⁷ Anne Hubbard from WSMP told the Committee that no systematic skills audit was taking place, and suggested that there should be “a skills strategy so that refugees are really able to rebuild their lives”.⁷⁸

79. The Cabinet Secretary told the Committee about the recent inspection by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, who “spent several days in Wales, talking to refugees around that very issue about integration and community cohesion”. The Cabinet Secretary said that at their feedback session, the High Commissioner had been “very pleased with the progress that’s happening in Wales” and was “very complimentary of local authorities, and particularly the Welsh communities and how welcoming they were”.⁷⁹

80. The Cabinet Secretary also referred to work undertaken with communities to prepare them for the arrival of asylum seekers and refugees, “to break down any barriers, any worries or any concerns that people have” and to the “School of Sanctuary programme”, which is based around the three

⁷¹ Written evidence, City of Sanctuary, [RAS 21](#).

⁷² Written evidence, Pobl i Bobl, [RAS 40](#).

⁷³ Written evidence, Pobl i Bobl, [RAS 40](#).

⁷⁴ Written evidence, Pobl i Bobl, [RAS 40](#).

⁷⁵ Oral evidence, Naomi Alleyne (WLG), [15 December 2016](#), paragraph 137.

⁷⁶ Oral evidence, Catriona Williams (Children in Wales), [15 December 2016](#), paragraph 267.

⁷⁷ Oral evidence, Salah Rasool (Welsh Refugee Council), [7 December 2016](#), paragraph 193.

⁷⁸ Oral evidence, Anne Hubbard (WSMP), [15 December 2016](#), paragraph 33.

⁷⁹ Oral evidence, Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children, [19 January 2017](#), paragraph 91.

principles of learn, embed and share.⁸⁰ He acknowledged that “we pay a significant amount of money to the regional working of community cohesion operations” and said that this would continue.⁸¹

81. The Cabinet Secretary also highlighted the “Welcome to Wales” pack as a success. Ceredigion Council described the pack as a “good idea” that was “very well received”, but also said that the packs “should have been checked for accuracy before they were presented to the refugees”.⁸²

Community cohesion co-ordinators

82. There are eight community cohesion co-ordinators in Wales, who work with Syrians resettled through the SVPRP. They do not work with spontaneous arrivals.

83. There was strong support from local authorities for the work of the co-ordinators. The WLGA described the “crucial role” the co-ordinators have played in “supporting local authorities in their planning and preparations for the arrival and resettlement of refugees” under the SVPRP, by:

- ensuring that local authorities and regions are kept updated and can provide feedback;
- sharing information across the region to help avoid duplication and create consistency;
- providing hands on support in the arrangements for the initial arrival of refugees into local areas; and
- monitoring community tensions and offering advice and support on engaging with local communities to prepare areas for the arrival of refugees.⁸³

84. The Reverend Canon Aled Edwards from DPIA described the assistance that the co-ordinators also provide to local organisations:

“...when we confront...intensely difficult moral decisions about breaches of confidence when we suspect, for example, that people may be trafficked or are about to be abused. We will talk with each other, but we will talk with these officers, seek their advice and act on it. And from the point of view of an organisation, where we are extremely vulnerable at the rock face of the issues, having those key staff members there is immensely useful to us.”⁸⁴

Accessibility and affordability of services

85. Stakeholders told the Committee that integration was made more difficult for refugees and asylum seekers because they faced challenges in accessing essential services. Transport was cited as a key barrier.⁸⁵

86. Roisin O’Hare, asylum seeker nurse at ABUHB, told the Committee that many refugees and asylum seekers in the Newport area, for example, were keen to volunteer in local communities, but could not afford to travel to and from the volunteering opportunities.⁸⁶

⁸⁰ Oral evidence, Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children, [19 January 2017](#), paragraph 67.

⁸¹ Oral evidence, Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children, [19 January 2017](#), paragraph 91.

⁸² Written evidence, Ceredigion Council, [RAS 38](#).

⁸³ Written evidence, WLGA, [RAS 32](#).

⁸⁴ Oral evidence, Aled Edwards (DPIA), [11 January 2017](#), paragraph 302.

⁸⁵ Oral evidence, Sian Summers-Rees (City of Sanctuary), [7 December 2017](#), paragraph 5.

⁸⁶ Oral evidence, Roisin O’Hare (ABUHB), [15 December 2016](#), paragraph 423.

87. The Welsh Refugee Coalition gave another example:

“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.”⁸⁷

88. This was supported by the experiences shared with the Committee on visits to Cardiff and Swansea. The Committee heard that families were struggling to afford to send children on school trips, and even buy school uniforms.

89. The Committee was also told on our visits that the reliability and affordability of transport was affecting refugees’ and asylum seekers’ ability to access vital appointments and town centre facilities as well as employment opportunities beyond their immediate communities.

90. Several respondents to the Committee’s consultation referred to transport in the context of accessing English language tuition.⁸⁸

English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) provision in Wales

91. The evidence received by the Committee suggested that that language is essential to integration, and saves money elsewhere (for example, the provision of interpretation services). Faruk Ogut, Resettlement Project Co-ordinator at DPIA, told the Committee that an ESOL class is “the main thing that asylum seekers and refugees ask each time”, even before “their basic needs”.⁸⁹

92. This is supported by research such as the independent review for the UK Department for Communities and Local Government by Dame Louise Casey into opportunity and integration, which found that “language was fundamental to integration of immigrant communities” and that “further funding should be made available to ESOL”. In addition, the UK’s All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Integration (APPGSI) report into the integration of immigrants (published on 5 January 2017) stated that “all immigrants should be expected to have either learned English before coming to the UK or be enrolled in compulsory ESOL classes upon arrival”.

93. ESOL provision is one of the areas where devolved and non-devolved responsibility is not clear. The Delivery Plan contains a commitment to “improve the flexibility of English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL) [sic] provision” through “ongoing delivery of the ESOL Policy for Wales”. The ESOL policy was last updated in 2014, before the Syrian refugee crisis began, and the Committee was not able to establish what the outcomes of the objectives (in the Delivery Plan or ESOL policy) have been.

94. Although the Minister of State for Immigration asserted that education in Wales is a devolved matter,⁹⁰ the Home Office is funding a new ESOL co-ordinator for Wales to “help and support local authorities on how they can best develop ESOL resources”. Anne Hubbard, Director of the WSMP, implied that this extra capacity was unlikely to be sufficient. She said that as the SVPRP has developed, “we’re starting to look at more of the integration issues around English for speakers of

⁸⁷ Written evidence, Welsh Refugee Coalition, [RAS 14](#).

⁸⁸ This was mentioned in written evidence from Oxfam Cymru (RAS 10), the Welsh Refugee Coalition (RAS 14), Children in Wales (RAS 20) and City of Sanctuary (RAS 21).

⁸⁹ Oral evidence, Faruk Ogut (DPIA), [11 January 2017](#), paragraph 248.

⁹⁰ Letter from the Minister of State for Immigration to the Committee Chair, [28 February 2017](#).

other languages, around community sponsorship, and around keeping up the momentum going forward”. However, she emphasised that “it is complicated” and “I just simply don’t have the time to respond to all the enquiries or give the support that I feel local authorities and their partners need on some of the questions around all of this—around the funding, around the process”.⁹¹

95. The lack of ESOL provision in Wales was a key concern for witnesses. The Committee heard that classes are oversubscribed: people are waiting 1-2 years to access them, they are mainly run by volunteers and they are only available in some areas. Dr Mike Chick from the University of South Wales noted that from his experience, there is “still alarmingly inadequate ESOL provision in place across Wales” and that in areas where there is no history of FE colleges’ offering classes, the local authorities need more support. He suggested that others could learn from his experience of enabling ESOL university students to volunteer to teach refugees and asylum seekers as part of their training.

96. Dr Chick said that refugees and asylum seekers who are based at Lynx House in Cardiff are “getting perhaps four or six hours provision per week, not in a joined-up syllabus that leads to an accredited qualification, but rather in a sort of patchwork provision that deals on a survival basis rather than a professional basis”. Dr Chick described the predicament of refugees and asylum seekers who are not part of the SVPRP:

“Yet that’s [the ESOL provision] not available to the refugees and asylum seekers who aren’t part of that resettlement scheme... They are desperate and, for up to 12 months, the only places they can go to access ESOL courses—English-language provision—are third sector drop-in, if you like, survival classes... yet it’s not enough. It doesn’t contain enough hours of language provision that, for example, we’d provide at the university, if there was a Chinese student or an Omani student who wished to begin their degree in September. Upon assessing their language levels, we would provide them with a 24-hour per week English-language course to get their linguistic competency up to speed.”⁹²

97. Dr Chick emphasised the role that universities could play, because they have experience in providing language tuition to international students.⁹³ He reported that many higher education institutions in the UK also offered scholarships and subsidies to refugees and asylum seekers, but that in Wales only Cardiff University did so.⁹⁴

98. Dr Chick also highlighted that most ESOL courses only have one entry point per year, meaning that people arriving after September have to wait months for the next intake.⁹⁵

99. Oxfam noted that ESOL provision needs to be adapted for women with small children, and transport is often a barrier for people in remote areas.⁹⁶ The Welsh Refugee Coalition considered that

⁹¹ Oral evidence, Anne Hubbard (WSMP), **15 December 2016**, paragraph 8.

⁹² Oral evidence, Dr Mike Chick, **11 January 2017**, paragraphs 28 and 42.

⁹³ Oral evidence, Dr Mike Chick, **11 January 2017**, paragraphs 98 to 99.

⁹⁴ Oral evidence, Dr Mike Chick, **11 January 2017**, paragraph 94.

⁹⁵ Oral evidence, Dr Mike Chick, **11 January 2017**, paragraph 13.

⁹⁶ Written evidence, Oxfam Cymru, **RAS 10**.

“there is no evidence of ESOL provision versus ESOL need”, and suggested that an assessment of skills upon arrival could help to plan provision more effectively.⁹⁷

100. Stakeholders also highlighted the need for access to Welsh language classes,⁹⁸ and told the Committee that there was some provision for this, for example in North West Wales.⁹⁹

101. The Cabinet Secretary confirmed that “the responsibility for ESOL is with the Welsh Government”. He acknowledged that “the [ESOL] system is under pressure”, and that “childcare is often a barrier to many services”. He went on to note that the Welsh Government is “introducing the childcare pledge”, and “will give that further consideration within our views around what ESOL is doing currently and how we can maximise that”.¹⁰⁰

The role of the media

102. One of the key conclusions of the Committee’s visit to Scotland was that media, terminology and political leadership are key drivers in public attitudes towards refugees and asylum seekers. The Scottish Government and the Scottish Refugee Council use the term “New Scots”, having acknowledged that terms like “asylum seeker” have been “debased”.

103. The Coventry University report, Beyond fear and hate: Mobilising people power to create a new narrative on migration and diversity (October 2016) cites numerous examples of good practice from around the world. It found:

“Negative political and media debates on migration and diversity undermine the integration of those who are newly arrived and they do far more than that. They also threaten relationships within and between long established communities, undermining a common sense of identity and solidarity and raising questions about the values on which societies are based.”

104. The Committee heard concerns from the Welsh Refugee Council and Oxfam Cymru that some local authorities were seeking to prevent the media from contacting and reporting about newly-arrived refugees due to concerns about community tensions and hate crime. The WLGA told the Committee that this was a misperception, and that local authorities have been:

“very concerned about protecting the privacy of refugees who are arriving, particularly in areas that may not be that diverse, where people can be identified, but also around protecting the interests of those who’ve been through quite a traumatic time”.¹⁰¹

105. The WLGA noted that “the issue of immigration was one of the priority concerns raised by a large number of voters [in recent elections and the European Union referendum]” and that “this has led in some areas to increased community tensions and reported hate crimes and demonstrations against the arrival of refugees in local areas”.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Written evidence, Welsh Refugee Coalition, [RAS 14](#).

⁹⁸ Written evidence, Newport and District Refugee Support Group, [RAS 4](#).

⁹⁹ Written evidence, Conwy, Gwynedd and the Isle of Anglesey Local Authorities, [RAS 29](#).

¹⁰⁰ Oral evidence, Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children, [19 January 2017](#), paragraphs 46 and 54.

¹⁰¹ Oral evidence, Naomi Alleyne (WLGA), [15 December 2016](#), paragraph 141.

¹⁰² Written evidence, WLGA, [RAS 32](#).

106. Many respondents, including the WSMP, noted that the community goodwill resulting from the refugee crisis hadn't been "fully tapped into or harnessed".¹⁰³ Pobl i Bobl stated that while North West Wales is lacking in formal integration services, "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".¹⁰⁴

107. Rocio Cifuentes from EYST called for:

- "far stronger messaging from politicians filtered through" the full range of media
- campaigns planned around "key points in the calendar" such as Black History Month, Refugee Week, and UN Day against race discrimination;
- "a far more effective communications strategy that looks to reach the most deprived communities in Wales by whatever media they are mostly using".

108. Ms Cifuentes cited the South Wales Evening Post as being "very supportive" and a "really good example of supportive media around the issues of refugees and asylum seekers".¹⁰⁵

109. City of Sanctuary argued that the Welsh Government should "do more to raise awareness, challenge myths and stereotypes and promote the positive contribution of people seeking sanctuary" because this was "essential to community cohesion generally". They emphasised the particular importance of ensuring "positive messages are heard in relation to the welcome of those on the SVPRP in places which previously had little experience of refugees".¹⁰⁶ The Welsh Refugee Council also described awareness-raising as "essential" to community cohesion:

"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."¹⁰⁷

110. The Cabinet Secretary provided the Committee with examples of awareness-raising, including:

- Welsh Government Equality and Inclusion Grant funding for "the Welsh Refugee Council to develop media programmes which promote good practice by challenging discrimination against refugees and asylum seekers";
- funding for the Trinity Centre 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";
- the Welsh Refugee Council's 'A guide when making media representations with Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Wales'; and

¹⁰³ Oral evidence, Anne Hubbard (WSMP), [15 December 2016](#), paragraph 29.

¹⁰⁴ Written evidence, Pobl i Bobl, [RAS 40](#).

¹⁰⁵ Oral evidence, Rocio Cifuentes (EYST), [15 December 2016](#), paragraph 257.

¹⁰⁶ Written evidence, City of Sanctuary, [RAS 21](#).

¹⁰⁷ Written evidence, Welsh Refugee Coalition, [RAS 14](#).

- a BBC documentary which charted the life and journey of Syrian refugees resettled in the UK, which featured the reunion of one family and life in the UK for another and provided information on the entitlements of refugees in the UK.¹⁰⁸

The Committee's view

111. The Committee was pleased to hear of the efforts being made across Wales to encourage the effective integration of refugees and asylum seekers into our communities, and shares the Cabinet Secretary's pride that these efforts have been recognised by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. However, we want to see more regular and systematic monitoring and evaluation, by the Welsh Government and local delivery partners, of the services available to help refugees and asylum seekers settle in communities in Wales, and to help established residents welcome them. The Committee considers that the Ager/Strang indicators of integration framework would provide a helpful starting point for proper evaluation as well as for planning future services.

112. The Committee believes that the Welsh Government needs to review the Community Cohesion National Delivery Plan 2016-17, and the role of the community cohesion co-ordinators, in the light of the feedback received during this inquiry and continuing developments in terms of the local and international challenges around immigration and asylum. The Committee values the work of the community cohesion co-ordinators, but was surprised to learn that they only provide support to people arriving through the SVPRP. The Committee believes that the co-ordinators should be able to work with all refugees and asylum seekers, to avoid reinforcing the two-tier system and to promote community cohesion.

113. The Committee notes the examples the Cabinet Secretary provided of efforts to harness community spirit and media coverage to raise positive awareness of refugees and asylum seekers in Wales. We would welcome more information about the intended, and actual, outputs and outcomes from these activities and how they fit within a wider strategic approach. The Committee also acknowledges that the right balance must be struck between publicising the mutual benefits of welcoming refugees and asylum seekers into Welsh communities whilst also respecting their privacy and recognising their vulnerability. The Committee was impressed by the approach being taken in Scotland, and believes that a more coherent and proactive national strategy is needed in Wales.

Recommendation 4. The Welsh Government should work with partners to review the Community Cohesion National Delivery Plan 2016-17. The subsequently improved Plan should include a communications strategy that emphasises the benefits of immigration to Welsh society and dispels myths and inaccuracies about refugees and asylum seekers. It should also include a Wales-wide publicity campaign similar to the one already undertaken in Scotland.

Recommendation 5. The Welsh Government should expand the role of the community cohesion co-ordinators beyond the SVPRP to all refugees and asylum seekers to support the delivery of the revised Community Cohesion National Delivery Plan.

114. The Committee acknowledges the importance of ensuring that refugees and asylum seekers can access services and opportunities to contribute to Welsh life, including education, employment and volunteering. We agree with stakeholders that transport is a key barrier to integration and would like the Welsh Government to explore ways to help with travel costs.

¹⁰⁸ Written evidence, Welsh Government, [RAS 47](#).

Recommendation 6. The Welsh Government should consider extending concessionary transport schemes to refugees and asylum seekers, including children, to enable them to have greater access to education, employment, and volunteering opportunities.

115. The Committee is concerned about the paucity of ESOL provision for refugees and asylum seekers, and the lack of basic data about supply and demand. This is particularly concerning given the fundamental importance of language to integration and, therefore, well-being. We would like to see the Welsh Government leading work with partners at all levels to ensure that ESOL (and Welsh, where it is the community language) courses are available, that where possible they reflect the trades and professions of refugees and asylum seekers, and that barriers to take-up such as a lack of childcare are addressed.

116. The Committee would like to see the best practice it encountered in the evidence it received, such as in Carmarthenshire and Rhondda Cynon Taf, emulated across Wales. We recognise the important role that universities can play in expanding provision, given the skills, experience and opportunities they can provide.

Recommendation 7. The Welsh Government should publish a detailed analysis of the current provision of ESOL courses and its assessment of future demand. It should then work with local authorities to join up skills and capacity within both Further Education colleges and Higher Education institutions as part of a new action plan to be published before the start of the 2017/18 academic year. The action plan should:

- fill gaps in provision;
- ensure that refugees are offered appropriate classes as soon as possible following their arrival in Wales; and
- address barriers to accessing classes.

04. Life during the asylum process

The Committee heard concerns from stakeholders about the provision of essential services whilst people are awaiting the outcomes of their asylum applications. The concerns focused in particular on the quality of accommodation, health, and advice and advocacy.

The quality of accommodation

117. The Committee received a significant number of representations about, and evidence of, poor quality accommodation provided to asylum seekers awaiting the outcomes of their asylum applications. In Wales, this accommodation (which comprises Initial Accommodation in Cardiff and Dispersal Accommodation in Cardiff, Swansea, Newport and Wrexham) is provided by Clearsprings Ready Homes Ltd under a Home Office contract worth £119 million over five years. The Home Office contract (called the COMPASS contract) has been subject to a significant amount of scrutiny and criticism. The House of Commons Home Affairs Committee published a [report into asylum accommodation](#) on 31 January 2017, which chimed with the evidence to this inquiry.

118. In December 2016, the Home Office [extended the contract to 2019](#), with an accompanying increase in “the amount of money [for] the provision of welfare officers and staff property management”.

119. Numerous witnesses raised the issue of the quality of asylum accommodation in Wales.¹⁰⁹ Tai Pawb collated evidence of specific issues, which included:

- size of accommodation and overcrowding;
- fixtures and fittings within the accommodation – including broken floors, boilers not working, inadequate furniture, and 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); and
- enforced room sharing without appropriate risk assessment, including children and vulnerable adults.

120. The Committee received a number of photos and videos of asylum accommodation in Cardiff and Swansea, which were passed to the Cabinet Secretary.¹¹⁰ The Cabinet Secretary told the Committee he would be prepared to raise specific issues with the Home Office if evidence could be provided.

121. Concerns were raised about the effectiveness of the complaints and inspection processes (which form part of the Clearsprings contract with the Home Office). Tai Pawb had “serious concerns about the adequacy of scrutiny” of the accommodation, and cited the previous issues with wristbands

¹⁰⁹ These included Oasis ([RAS 01](#)), Welsh Refugee Council ([RAS 09](#)), Oxfam ([RAS 10](#)), Asylum Justice ([RAS 11](#)), Welsh Refugee Coalition ([RAS 14](#)), and Migrant Help ([RAS 41](#)).

¹¹⁰ Examples can be found on the Committee [inquiry webpage](#).

and red doors as examples of “the Home Office’s poor oversight of private contractors housing extremely vulnerable people”.¹¹¹

122. Anne Hubbard from the WSMP drew the Committee’s attention to two mechanisms for residents and local authorities to raise concerns with Clearsprings:

- an operational support forum, which was created by the WSMP because “the complaints process [...] that Clearsprings have is possibly not the most effective”. It is “a platform for local authorities to engage with the Home Office and the provider around the delivery of the contracts, around the accommodation”.
- A ‘residents’ forum’ “was previously chaired by Displaced People in Action, and it was a safe space where asylum speakers could talk about all the issues they’ve got in terms of accommodation and support. After each meeting they would send me a report of those conversations, and Clearsprings and the Home Office would take action on some of the issues that were raised”.¹¹²

123. Clearsprings told the Committee:

“The complaints procedure is detailed in the occupancy agreement and welcome pack which provides occupants with the ability to raise complaints in writing, verbally, by email or by telephone. In addition to this the voluntary sector have copies of our policy and complaints form. Once a complaint is received we confirm within 24hrs that we have received it and we attempt to resolve the complaint within 5 working days. The complaint outcome and any failure to meet the contractual timescales are reported to the Home Office as part of the monthly contract management process.”¹¹³

124. However, many organisations, including Tai Pawb, told the Committee that residents are reluctant to report complaints through this process as they fear it will affect their asylum application.¹¹⁴ According to Home Office records, there were seven complaints regarding asylum accommodation in Wales between April 2016 and February 2017.¹¹⁵

125. While the accommodation is managed through a UK Government contract, Welsh local authorities do have a variety of powers to enforce housing standards. These powers derive primarily from the Housing Act 2004, and do not depend on the residential status of the occupier. Therefore a complaint could be made to the relevant local authority on that basis. Cardiff Council has previously served overcrowding notices on Clearsprings.

126. Some witnesses suggested that Clearsprings accommodation should be covered by the Rent Smart Wales landlord licensing regime, which was introduced by the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. Landlords and agents will only be covered by the Rent Smart Wales scheme if they let or manage a property under a ‘domestic tenancy’, which covers assured, assured shorthold and regulated tenancies. The accommodation provided by Clearsprings will be provided under a licence agreement, not a domestic tenancy, so is not covered by the Rent Smart Wales scheme. The Cabinet Secretary

¹¹¹ Written evidence, Tai Pawb, [RAS 17](#).

¹¹² Oral evidence, Anne Hubbard (WSMP), [15 December 2016](#), paragraph 68.

¹¹³ Letter from Clearsprings Ready Homes Ltd to the Committee Chair, [18 January 2017](#).

¹¹⁴ Written evidence, Tai Pawb, [RAS 17](#).

¹¹⁵ Letter from the Minister of State for Immigration to the Committee Chair, [28 February 2017](#).

told the Committee that he was not aware of this, and indicated that he would ask his officials to look into the matter.¹¹⁶

127. A range of respondents called for the Welsh Government to:

“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.”¹¹⁷

128. Witnesses agreed with the suggestion that responsibility for awarding the asylum accommodation contract, and for monitoring the quality of the accommodation provided under it, should be devolved.¹¹⁸

129. Witnesses also suggested that the Welsh Government or local authorities should be responsible for monitoring the quality of the accommodation.¹¹⁹

130. Clearsprings indicated in a letter to the Committee that they would be contacting organisations which had raised concerns with us. The Committee was subsequently informed by the Welsh Refugee Coalition that there is now ongoing positive engagement with Clearsprings to explore issues relating to the quality of asylum housing in Wales and to make improvements to complaints procedures.¹²⁰

Health

131. Public Health Wales (PHW) highlighted 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”. They drew the Committee’s attention to two pieces of work in this field:

- 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 (SVPRS)**, and
- 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.

132. PHW also highlighted the International Health Coordination Centre’s briefing on ‘**Refugees and Asylum Seekers: Public Health implications for Wales**’, published in November 2015, which “provided a focus on the impact the crisis has had in the UK and Wales”.¹²¹

133. Faruk Ogut from DPIA told the Committee that:

“[when] asylum seekers [...] come to Cardiff as a dispersal area, not all of them go through a screening process. So, people are dispersed without going

¹¹⁶ Oral evidence, Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children, **19 January 2017**, paragraph 6.

¹¹⁷ Written evidence, Welsh Refugee Coalition, **RAS 14**.

¹¹⁸ Oral evidence: Alicja Zalesinska (Tai Pawb), **11 January 2017**, paragraph 126; Shehla Khan (EYST), **15 December 2016**, paragraph 212; Roisin O’Hare (ABUHB), **15 December 2016**, paragraph 353.

¹¹⁹ Oral evidence, Hayley Richards (Oxfam), **7 December 2016**, paragraph 200.

¹²⁰ Email correspondence between officials, 8 March 2017.

¹²¹ Written evidence, Public Health Wales, **RAS 36**.

through the screening process in Cardiff. This has been an issue for a long, long time, and this issue should be dealt with effectively, because some people with really long-term illnesses are dispersed, or pregnant women are dispersed, without going through the screening with the Cardiff Health Access Practice.”¹²²

134. Clearsprings Ready Homes Ltd confirmed to the Committee that they are not contractually obliged to ensure asylum seekers in their accommodation undergo health screenings, but they are required to signpost each person or family unit in Initial Accommodation (currently at Newport Road in Cardiff) to the Cardiff Health Access Practice (CHAP) who arrange for initial health screening to be undertaken.¹²³

135. Robert Goodwill MP, the UK Minister of State for Immigration, told the Committee that it is up to individuals as to whether they take up the services offered to them, but that there was “direct action” to help “any service user who immediately presents themselves with an obvious or urgent health care requirement”.¹²⁴

136. The Committee heard that mental health was a key challenge for refugees and asylum seekers, and that there was a lack of support for professionals to engage with their specific needs.¹²⁵

137. The Cabinet Secretary told the Committee that the lead-in time is important to understand what a person’s needs are, “socially, physically and mentally, and how we can define the right placement for that person”. He also said:

“When we have some very specific cases that are very high need, some of those cases that you perhaps refer to may not be suitable for a placement in a very rural environment, because access to mental health services or to clinical services quickly is more pressured.”¹²⁶

138. ABUHB noted that the charity Freedom from Torture has regional centres in Glasgow, London, Manchester, Birmingham and Newcastle, which provide 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. They suggested that a regional centre should be established for professionals in Wales.¹²⁷

Advice and advocacy

139. Asylum Justice and Oxfam argued that legal advice “should be provided from ‘day one’ as it is a fundamental starting point for asylum seekers arriving in Wales”. Both organisations considered that there was a “lack of good quality legal advice available for asylum seekers in Wales and [...] the lack of solicitors able to lodge judicial review applications in asylum related matters”.¹²⁸

¹²² Oral evidence, Faruk Ogut (DPIA), [11 January 2017](#), paragraph 227.

¹²³ Letter from Clearsprings Ready Homes Ltd to the Committee Chair, [18 January 2017](#).

¹²⁴ Letter from the Minister of State for Immigration to the Committee Chair, [28 February 2017](#).

¹²⁵ Written evidence, Welsh Refugee Coalition, [RAS 14](#).

¹²⁶ Oral evidence, Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children, [19 January 2017](#), paragraphs 144 and 145.

¹²⁷ Written evidence, ABUHB, [RAS 25](#).

¹²⁸ Written evidence, Asylum Justice, [RAS 11](#).

140. Asylum Justice also stated that the provision of such advice is even more important in the context of the significant cuts to legal aid and asylum support over the last eight years.¹²⁹ Oxfam stated that access to specialist legal advice should not depend on where people are dispersed around the UK, especially with the future increase in dispersal areas in Wales.¹³⁰

141. City of Sanctuary noted that “whilst there is some specialist ‘move on’ advice funded by the Welsh Government, it is limited due to capacity and there is no specialist education and employment advice”. They highlighted the previous Refugee Integration and Employment Service as good practice, which offered mentoring as well as advice. The network also noted that there is a pilot underway between UKVI and DWP in England, which is “providing [refugees with leave to remain access to] specialist JobCentre Advisers to speed up the ‘move-on’ process. They considered that “if successful in preventing homelessness and destitution we would welcome the roll-out of this initiative in Wales as soon as possible”.¹³¹

142. The Committee heard that refugees are vulnerable to homelessness and destitution during the 28 days they have to move out of asylum accommodation, and people need advice on housing, employment, benefits and education early on to prevent destitution.

143. The Cabinet Secretary told the Committee that in February 2017 the Welsh Government had awarded the contract for a three-year, pan-Wales, £1 million Refugee, Asylum Seeker and Migrant (RASM) Inclusion Service.¹³²

The Committee’s view

144. The Committee was deeply concerned about the issues raised by stakeholders, and the evidence it received, regarding the quality of asylum accommodation in Wales provided by Clearsprings Ready Homes Ltd. We welcome the Cabinet Secretary’s commitment to raise these matters with the Home Office.

145. The complex relationship between the Home Office, the Welsh Government and local authorities in relation to asylum accommodation means that there is a risk that no one takes responsibility for protecting the right of asylum seekers (and everyone else) to a standard of living adequate for their health and well-being. It is clear from the evidence received by the Committee that this risk has become reality.

146. The Committee wants the Welsh Government, the Home Office and local authorities to be absolutely clear about respective responsibilities, and resources available, to ensure high standards of asylum accommodation in Wales, and that they communicate that shared understanding to other stakeholders.

147. The Committee would like all asylum seekers in Wales to feel confident in raising concerns about the quality of their accommodation, in the knowledge that this will not in any way be detrimental to their asylum applications, and that their complaints will be taken seriously and resolved quickly. The Committee believes that the process would be improved considerably if there was an independent complaints process, with a central register of complaints, rather than the current local arrangements managed by Clearsprings, which do not enable national monitoring, but do give

¹²⁹ Written evidence, Asylum Justice, [RAS 11](#).

¹³⁰ Written evidence, Oxfam Cymru [RAS 10](#).

¹³¹ Written evidence, City of Sanctuary, [RAS 21](#).

¹³² Letter from the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children to the Committee Chair, [9 February 2017](#).

asylum seekers the impression that the Home Office is receiving their complaints as well as processing their applications. The Committee would like to see training being offered to Clearsprings staff on equalities so that asylum seekers can be sure that the people responsible for resolving their complaints understand their needs.

148. The positive engagement between Clearsprings and the Welsh Refugee Coalition in response to the Committee's representations is a welcome start. But this momentum must be maintained. To help those currently seeking asylum, all partners, from the Home Office and Clearsprings to the Welsh Government, local authorities and the third sector, need to meet regularly and to provide as much guidance as possible about how complaints can be made and acted upon.

Recommendation 8. The Welsh Government should convene regular meetings of all partners in the asylum accommodation process to review complaints procedures, guidance and dissemination, and monitor how live complaints cases are being addressed. These meetings should be appropriately advertised so that asylum seekers and those supporting them are aware of the discussions and the outcomes, and are engaged in the process.

149. The Committee shares stakeholders' concerns about the contractual arrangements for providing asylum accommodation in Wales. We believe that there should be greater involvement in, and oversight of, the contract by local delivery partners. The Committee welcomes the Cabinet Secretary's commitment to undertake further work on whether tenancies for asylum seekers should fall within the registration scheme run by Rent Smart Wales.

Recommendation 9. The Welsh Government should undertake urgent negotiations with the Home Office to reform the asylum accommodation system in advance of the contract renewal process in 2019. The reforms should include:

- the full involvement of delivery partners in the development, awarding and monitoring of the contract;
- an independent complaints process for asylum seekers in Wales, including a central register of complaints, systematic monitoring of progress in resolving them and communication of timescales to tenants; and
- equalities training for contractors' staff.

Recommendation 10. The Welsh Government should ensure that asylum seekers' landlords are covered by a registration scheme, either as an extension of or complement to Rent Smart Wales. The scheme should include an obligation on local authorities to conduct in-depth inspections of properties accommodating asylum seekers and report regularly on standards of accommodation.

150. The Committee welcomes the funding for a new National Support Service for refugees and asylum seekers, but is concerned that the limited budget may not meet demand. We believe that it is essential that the Service is robustly monitored and evaluated. The Service should include:

- stronger support for health professionals to understand and respond to the mental health needs of refugees and asylum seekers.
- legal advice; and
- support for health screening, in line with the Public Health Wales guidance.

Recommendation 11. The Welsh Government should ensure through the new Refugee, Asylum Seeker and Migrant Inclusion Service, that there is sufficient provision of legal advice; regular reminders about the importance of health screenings as well as help for people to attend them; and mental health support, overseen by a 'Freedom From Torture' mental health professionals group. The Service should be underpinned by a robust monitoring and evaluation framework.

05. Life after the asylum process

The Committee heard that asylum seekers face a range of challenges once they receive the outcomes of their applications. Those whose are unsuccessful have few legal rights and are likely to be at risk of destitution. Those who are successful must still overcome a number of barriers before they can play a full part in Welsh life. The Committee was told that a phrase often used by refugees and asylum seekers is

“I used to be someone.”¹³³

Destitution

151. Destitution is when a person who is not accessing public funds, is living in extreme poverty and is unable to meet basic needs, for example income, food, shelter, healthcare, and who is forced to rely on irregular support from family, friends, charities or illegal working to survive.

152. Destitution generally occurs when a person’s asylum claim has been turned down and they are expected to leave the UK. The British Red Cross stated that “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”.¹³⁴ They observed that the current Delivery Plan does not address destitution; Torfaen Council called this a “huge gap in public policy in Wales”.¹³⁵

153. The number of destitute people in Wales is not known, but the number of people referred to the British Red Cross for destitution support in Newport and Cardiff has doubled in recent years (from 564 cases in 2013, to 1,027 in 2015).

154. There were calls from respondents to replicate good practice from Northern Ireland. Neil McKittrick, Refugee Operations Support Manager at the British Red Cross, explained that the Northern Ireland crisis fund provides a small amount of money for those who have issues with benefits, unemployment, have suffered family breakdown or domestic violence. 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 tracking system collects data on service users to help identify trends and influence policy changes. The British Red Cross recommended that the Welsh Government should expand the eligibility criteria for the Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF) so that it could be used in a similar way to the Northern Ireland crisis fund.¹³⁶

155. The Cabinet Secretary’s position was although he felt the Welsh Government has a duty to enforce the human rights of all people living in Wales, he considered that refused asylum seekers’ experiencing destitution in Wales are “a matter for the UK Government”.¹³⁷

156. In terms of expanding the DAF criteria, the Cabinet Secretary said that although “the current discretionary assistance fund isn’t eligible for this process” the Welsh Government “are seeking a new

¹³³ Oral evidence, Aled Edwards (DPIA), **11 January 2017**, paragraph 284.

¹³⁴ Written evidence, British Red Cross, **RAS 15**.

¹³⁵ Written evidence, Torfaen Council, **RAS 35**.

¹³⁶ Oral evidence, Neil McKittrick (British Red Cross), **7 December 2016**, paragraph 211.

¹³⁷ Oral evidence, Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children, **19 January 2017**, paragraph 42.

contract, and [...] have put in with that contract to look at how this may cover some destitution issues".¹³⁸

The move-on period

157. Evidence from advice and advocacy services highlighted that people in priority need, such as new refugees, spend lengthy periods in temporary and often unsuitable or 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. Where dedicated housing officers exist, with experience and understanding of refugees' needs (for example in Swansea), the evidence presented to the Committee suggested that housing outcomes are much improved for refugees.¹³⁹

158. The Welsh Refugee Coalition and Tai Pawb called on the Welsh Government to "consider issuing guidance to local authorities to class all new refugees as vulnerable [...] so that they are regarded as in priority need for housing". 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 the case in other areas.¹⁴⁰

159. Local authorities in Wales have a duty under section 73 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 to help to secure accommodation for all applicants assessed as homeless for a period of 56 days. Stakeholders highlighted that those awarded refugee status have only 28 days to secure accommodation, and suggested that this period should be extended to 56 days to bring it in line with the homelessness duty.

160. The Minister of State for Immigration informed the Committee that the Home Office and the Department for Work and Pensions were working to ensure that new recognised refugees applied promptly for any welfare benefits for which they may be eligible and receive the first payment of any benefit for which they qualify before their Home Office support ends. He indicated that this work would be evaluated and that the 28-day period would be changed "if the evaluation shows that to be necessary".¹⁴¹

Employment

161. In general, asylum seekers are not allowed to work while awaiting the outcome of their application. They can only apply for permission to take up jobs on the UK's official shortage occupation list if:

- they have waited for over 12 months for an initial decision on their asylum claim; and
- they are not considered responsible for the delay in decision-making.

162. City of Sanctuary told the Committee that refugees face various barriers to employment that are not addressed by the Delivery Plan, including unfamiliarity with the UK system and complex job application process, confusion over entitlements and lack of UK-based work experience.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ Oral evidence, Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children, **19 January 2017**, paragraph 85.

¹³⁹ Written evidence, Welsh Refugee Council, **RAS 09**.

¹⁴⁰ Written evidence, Tai Pawb, **RAS 17**.

¹⁴¹ Letter from the Minister of State for Immigration to the Committee Chair, **28 February 2017**.

¹⁴² Written evidence, City of Sanctuary, **RAS 21**.

163. The Welsh Refugee Council and EYST raised concerns that the barriers to employment faced by refugees are exacerbated by agencies such as Job Centre Plus, with their emphasis on moving people into work regardless of experience or qualifications. The Committee heard that such agencies do not “look beyond English language skills, as well as overlooking skills, experience and qualifications gained overseas”.¹⁴³

164. The WLGA stated that:

“more emphasis should be placed on the ‘assets’ of refugees and migrants, e.g. (highly) skilled refugees and migrants who are eager to contribute to Welsh society, for example, the Certification and Qualification Framework Wales should be better promoted, coordinated and resourced to enable refugees to have their skills and qualifications recognised to Welsh/UK standards.”¹⁴⁴

165. The WLGA told the Committee that this would have “significant impact on their level of employability and income, their health and sense of belonging” and would decrease the level of poverty experienced by many refugees.¹⁴⁵

166. The Welsh Refugee Coalition highlighted that:

“the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) [...] enable[s] sanctuary seekers to have prior learning recognised and limit[s] the need to repeat training and education unnecessarily.”

167. They reported that some colleges are not aware of CQFW, and “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”.¹⁴⁶

168. Some witnesses, including City of Sanctuary, also highlighted the need for a specialist employment and education service to ensure that the previous skills and experience of refugees and asylum seekers were recognised and used.¹⁴⁷

169. Some respondents, including the Welsh Refugee Coalition,¹⁴⁸ suggested that the Welsh Government should invest in systematic support for the transfer and recognition of qualifications, as well as work with business and industry to create training and internship programmes that maximise the use of refugees’ skills. Public Health Wales noted that action area 6 of the Delivery Plan aims to “ensure refugees and asylum seekers are empowered to utilise their skills and knowledge to achieve their full potential as members of Welsh society”.

170. PHW stated that 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

¹⁴³ Written evidence, Welsh Refugee Council, [RAS 09](#).

¹⁴⁴ Written evidence, WLGA, [RAS 32](#).

¹⁴⁵ Written evidence, WLGA, [RAS 32](#).

¹⁴⁶ Written evidence, Welsh Refugee Coalition, [RAS 14](#).

¹⁴⁷ Written evidence, City of Sanctuary, [RAS 21](#).

¹⁴⁸ Written evidence, Welsh Refugee Coalition, [RAS 14](#).

the necessary experience and confidence which may enhance their knowledge, life skills and employability.”¹⁴⁹

171. City of Sanctuary’s evidence also emphasised the importance of volunteering opportunities for asylum seekers and refugees, but identified various barriers to doing so. These included confusion over the volunteering entitlement and conditions for asylum seekers.¹⁵⁰

Access to higher education

172. Witnesses highlighted the barriers to higher education for refugees. Dr Mike Chick told the Committee that “asylum seekers are still treated as international students and thus are prevented from attending university due to the financial burden” and that neither are they able to receive funding for what are called ‘pre-sessional language courses’. He called for asylum seekers to be treated as home students,¹⁵¹ and referred to the Welsh Refugee Coalition’s claim that:

“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.”¹⁵²

173. Since 2002, the Wales Deanery has run the Wales Asylum Seeking and Refugee Doctors Group (WARD) scheme, which addresses the education and training needs of refugee and asylum seeker doctors in Wales by helping them pass the language tests required to work in the NHS. A drop-in centre is also provided in partnership with DPIA which includes medical journals, access to the internet and other facilities. Newport and District Refugee Support Group suggested that the Welsh Government should lobby the UK Government to grant people who have completed the scheme leave to remain.¹⁵³

The Committee’s view

174. The Committee is concerned about the risk of destitution for people whose asylum applications are refused, as well as those whose applications are still being processed. The fact that the UK Government is ultimately responsible for immigration does not override the moral duty upon the Welsh Government to help people in Wales who are in desperate need. Although we would urge the Welsh Government to continue to make representations to the Home Office about the impact of decisions on reserved matters upon devolved public services, we also want to see action from the Welsh Government to mitigate these effects.

175. We believe that granting small amounts of money, through the Discretionary Assistance Fund, to asylum seekers and refused asylum seekers who are destitute would not only help protect them when they are at their most vulnerable, and help prevent greater difficulties in the future, but also enable some tracking of individuals’ destinations and outcomes following the asylum process.

Recommendation 12. The Welsh Government should include specific actions to help asylum seekers and refused asylum seekers avoid destitution in its revised Refugee and

¹⁴⁹ Written evidence, Public Health Wales, [RAS 36](#).

¹⁵⁰ Written evidence, City of Sanctuary, [RAS 21](#).

¹⁵¹ Written evidence, University of South Wales, [RAS 45](#).

¹⁵² Written evidence, Welsh Refugee Coalition, [RAS 14](#).

¹⁵³ Written evidence, Newport and District Refugee Support Group, [RAS 04](#).

Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan, including creating a small grants fund for asylum seekers and people with no recourse to public funds, through the Discretionary Assistance Fund.

176. The Committee believes that every effort should be made to ensure that people who are successful in claiming asylum and choose to settle in Wales can do so successfully. To that end, the Committee agrees with stakeholders that new refugees who are deemed vulnerable should be assessed by all local authorities as being in priority need for housing, as often happens in Swansea.

177. We certainly want the 28-day moving-on period to be extended to 56 days in line with housing law in Wales, to help reduce the risk of homelessness.

Recommendation 13. The Welsh Government should do more to help people awarded refugee status to find suitable accommodation in Wales. It should check that local authorities are informed when asylum seekers in their areas are awarded refugee status, and ask local authorities to consider whether a new refugee is vulnerable and therefore regarded as in priority need for housing alongside other vulnerable groups.

Recommendation 14. The Welsh Government should make representations to the Home Office about extending the 28-day move-on period to 56 days.

178. The Committee welcomes the contribution that refugees and asylum seekers make to the Welsh economy and to Welsh society, but is concerned that there is a significant amount of untapped potential due to barriers to securing employment. It is clear to the Committee that a key challenge for refugees and asylum seekers is having their previous learning and skills recognised in the UK. The CFQW is a key tool for gaining that recognition, and the Committee was concerned to hear that there is a lack of awareness amongst FE colleges.

179. The Committee believes that higher education should be accessible to refugees and asylum seekers on the same basis as to home students.

180. The Committee would also like to see more opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers to volunteer, and believes that this would maximise the economic and social contribution of refugees and asylum seekers as well as having positive effects on individuals' well-being.

Recommendation 15. The Welsh Government should do more to help refugees and asylum seekers access education and employment by:

- promoting the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales as widely as possible, both to refugees and asylum seekers and service providers;
- requiring Welsh universities to treat refugees as home students; and
- creating more opportunities for public sector internships and volunteering opportunities designed for refugees and asylum seekers.

06. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC)

Unaccompanied children are treated differently in the asylum system, and the SVPRP. The Committee heard that these 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”.¹⁵⁴

181. Asylum seeking children and families experience a number of barriers, and are 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.¹⁵⁵

182. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in June 2016 issued a series of recommendations in respect of asylum seeking, refugee and migrant children. These recommendations reflected a number of concerns put forward by non-government coalitions 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
- high risk of destitution.¹⁵⁶

183. Hawliau asserted that numbers were increasing and described the effects of this:

“...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.”¹⁵⁷

184. The Cabinet Secretary told the Committee that there were around 27 UASC in Wales,¹⁵⁸ and in subsequent correspondence explained that this was a “snapshot”, derived from a number of sources, relating to the period following the closure of the Calais “Jungle” camp and covering arrivals through a number of routes. He pointed out that not all of those children had settled or would settle in Wales, because some would move to other parts of the UK to be reunited with their families. The Cabinet

¹⁵⁴ Written evidence, Children in Wales, [RAS 20](#).

¹⁵⁵ Written evidence, Children in Wales, [RAS 20](#).

¹⁵⁶ Written evidence, Children in Wales, [RAS 20](#).

¹⁵⁷ Written evidence, Hawliau, [RAS 23](#).

¹⁵⁸ Oral evidence, Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children, [19 January 2017](#), paragraph 113.

Secretary emphasised that the number of UASC in Wales changes constantly, and revealed that work was underway to “establish and maintain a data collection and reporting system”.¹⁵⁹

185. When he was challenged by the Committee about the apparently very low number of UASC in Wales, the Cabinet Secretary asserted that this was due to the allocations made by the Home Office: “It’s not that at this end we’re being restrictive. It’s just that there’s nothing coming through the system”.¹⁶⁰

186. The Minister of State for Immigration told the Committee that the UK Government was “very keen to see a more equitable distribution of UASC across all parts of the UK” and explained the current low number in Wales was partly due to the pre-National Transfer Scheme arrangements whereby placements were “principally defined by the location in which [UASC] were first identified or encountered”.¹⁶¹

Guardianship

187. A significant number of witnesses called for the Welsh Government to establish a Guardianship Service. Guardianship is different to advocacy as it is proactive rather than reactive, according to Children in Wales.

188. Respondents highlighted that “despite [...] recommendations being made by the UN Committee in their Concluding Observations of 2002 and 2008 [...], Wales still remains without a statutory specialist national independent guardianship service”.¹⁶²

189. Children in Wales highlighted that the Welsh Government had previously made commitments to explore the potential for such a service (in the Refugee Inclusion Strategy 2008 and the consultation document for the current Delivery Plan), but that the work had not progressed.¹⁶³

190. The Scottish Government told the Committee that the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act ensures that all children who arrive in Scotland alone and separated from their families have the legal right to an independent ‘Guardian’ to advise and assist them. It costs £200,000 a year to support 200 children. A Unicef cost/benefit analysis of guardianship schemes found that for every £1 spent, between £1.25 and £2.39 could be saved.

191. The WLGA emphasised that the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 underlines the importance of advocacy. It reported that:

“every local authority across Wales has arrangements in place to provide statutory advocacy to children and young people and work is currently underway to implement a national approach to the provision of statutory advocacy to help improve access and consistency. As with any other entitled child or young person an UASC should be entitled to advocacy”.¹⁶⁴

192. Asylum Justice told the Committee that the main provider of independent advocacy services – the ‘Fair and Square’ project’ run by Tros Gynnal Plant – closed in February 2016. This project was the

¹⁵⁹ Letter from the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children to the Committee Chair, 9 February 2017.

¹⁶⁰ Oral evidence, Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children, 19 January 2017, paragraph 115.

¹⁶¹ Letter from the Minister of State for Immigration to the Committee Chair, 28 February 2017.

¹⁶² Written evidence, Children in Wales, RAS 20.

¹⁶³ Written evidence, Children in Wales, RAS 20.

¹⁶⁴ Written evidence, WLGA, RAS 32.

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.¹⁶⁵

193. Committee Members who spoke to UASC during the Committee’s visits noted the importance of peer support, alongside advocacy services, in helping children settle in Wales.

194. The Cabinet Secretary informed the Committee “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”.¹⁶⁶

195. He expanded on the calls for a Guardianship Service:

“We’re conscious of the Scottish guardianship scheme. Two elements of this: we’ve got the advocacy programme [..]

Also, we are one of the test areas for the independent child trafficking advocates [ICTA] service, which is funded by the Home Office, which does some very similar work. It’s not directly related to unaccompanied asylum seekers.

[..] we’re just seeing how that pans out, really—whether those two pieces of work with the advocacy service and the ICTA work closely enough together that we don’t need a guardianship scheme. It’s something that I haven’t written off, but it’s something that I’ll give further consideration to as we move forward. It’s understanding whether what we’ve got is working or not.”¹⁶⁷

196. The Code of Practice on part 10 of the 2014 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. It does not specifically mention asylum-seeking children.

197. The Cabinet Secretary stated that “until April 2016, Tros Gynnal operated an advocacy project for refugees and asylum seeking children living in Wales”. He reported that the Welsh Government “was notified in November 2015 that the funding for this project was coming to an end” but explained that “funds to support refugees and asylum seekers were already committed under the Equality & Inclusion Grant until April 2017”.¹⁶⁸

198. In terms of “the gap in child-centred services”, the Welsh Government is 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”.¹⁶⁹

199. To support local authorities in resettling unaccompanied children in particular, the Cabinet Secretary said that the Welsh Government has:

- created a short-term position to build social care capacity;

¹⁶⁵ Written evidence, Asylum Justice, [RAS 11](#).

¹⁶⁶ Written evidence, Welsh Government, [RAS 47](#).

¹⁶⁷ Oral evidence, Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children, [19 January 2017](#), paragraph 160.

¹⁶⁸ Written evidence, Welsh Government, [RAS 47](#).

¹⁶⁹ Written evidence, Welsh Government, [RAS 47](#).

- agreed funding of £350,000 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; and
- established a children’s sub-group of the Refugee Taskforce to support the coordination of these schemes across public services.¹⁷⁰

Age assessments

200. When UASC arrive and claim asylum in the UK, many have no documentary proof of their age, or the documents they do have are not reliable. In these circumstances, the immigration authorities have to determine whether or not the young people are under 18 so that they can, if they are eligible, be subject to the additional protections for children which are part of the asylum process. The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health explained that 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”.¹⁷¹

201. There was a perception that there is insufficient training available to social workers in Wales on conducting age assessments. Siân Summers-Rees from City of Sanctuary and other witnesses called for a designated person in each local authority to conduct assessments. The Committee heard that conducting accurate assessments could reduce judicial review costs for local authorities when decisions are overturned.¹⁷²

202. The WSMP’s guidance on age assessments does not include any monitoring arrangements. Cheryl Martin, Development Officer, Child Poverty at Children in Wales, told the Committee that it was “totally unrealistic” to expect social workers to read and understand 84 pages of guidance to undertake effective assessments.¹⁷³ Dr Gill Richardson from ABUHB considered that methods used to assess age should not be used to determine eligibility for support. She said that the WSMP guidance is “not validated by health”, and had “no input from paediatricians”.¹⁷⁴

203. Oxfam also highlighted concerns about the age assessment process and safeguarding issues for young people going through this process. Oxfam asserted that:

“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”.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁰ Written evidence, Welsh Government, [RAS 47](#).

¹⁷¹ Written evidence, RCPCH, [RAS 07](#).

¹⁷² Oral evidence, Siân Summers-Rees, [7 December 2016](#), paragraph 140.

¹⁷³ Oral evidence, Cheryl Martin (CIW), [15 December 2016](#), paragraph 242.

¹⁷⁴ Oral evidence, Dr Gill Richardson (ABUHB), [15 December 2016](#), paragraph 416.

¹⁷⁵ Written evidence, Oxfam, [RAS 10](#).

Children’s mental health

204. Professor Bill Yule from the British Psychological Society (BPS) highlighted the trauma experienced by unaccompanied asylum seeking children. He told the Committee:

“Those of us who do assess these kids for legal purposes have always assumed that many of them—boys, as well as girls—have been sexually assaulted, but it’s far too sensitive to raise in an initial meeting. The House of Lords quote a Save the Children paper, a study of a group of such children, where 50 per cent were found to have sexually transmitted diseases.”¹⁷⁶

205. The BPS called for “the government, psychologists and other professionals to work together to uphold the legal obligations under the UN Convention of 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”. They recommended that this vulnerable group of children need:

- prompt, holistic assessment of their overall wellbeing and medical, psychological, welfare and educational needs;
- 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;
- multidisciplinary assessments in cases where the ages of minors is disputed in the legal asylum determination process;
- effective support of any families who are supporting the minors;
- adequate training and ongoing support for foster carers and staff in residential settings hosting unaccompanied minors;
- adequate and prompt training for health and social care staff and teachers receiving unaccompanied minors; and
- adequate training for health service commissioners and local authorities to ensure adequate systems are in place to allow prompt access to social, health and educational systems.¹⁷⁷

The Committee’s view

206. The Committee was surprised at the low number of unaccompanied children arriving in Wales, and was unable to ascertain whether this was due to a lack of capacity and capability within local authorities in Wales, or to a reluctance on the part of the Home Office to allocate more children to Wales. After the Committee had finished taking evidence on this inquiry, the UK Government announced that it was capping at 350 the number of unaccompanied refugee children allowed into the UK under the so-called “Dubs amendment”, and the WLGA indicated in the media that negotiations with the Home Office had ceased (although the Minister of State for Immigration wrote to the Committee that the UK Government was continuing to engage with local authorities).¹⁷⁸ The

¹⁷⁶ Oral evidence, Prof Bill Yule (BPS), [15 December 2016](#), paragraph 381.

¹⁷⁷ Written evidence, BPS, [RAS 03](#).

¹⁷⁸ Letter from the Minister of State for Immigration to the Committee Chair, [28 February 2017](#).

Committee believes that Wales should welcome more unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in the future and that the Welsh Government should show leadership in ensuring this continues.

207. The Committee appreciates that the Welsh Government is continuing to put in place advocacy and other services to support unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. However, these are essentially reactive services which do not reflect the vulnerable position of UASC and their specific needs. It is clear that every UASC should have a designated person, or Guardian, responsible for supporting them. This has been strongly recommended to the Committee by stakeholders in Wales as well by the UN, and the evidence from Scotland suggests that it would save public money in terms of reducing pressures on other services. The Committee is convinced that the Welsh Government should go beyond its original commitment to explore this further, and commit to establishing a Guardianship service for Wales.

Recommendation 16. The Welsh Government should establish a Guardianship service for Wales, supported by peer networks, as part of reaffirming Wales' commitment to welcome unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

208. The Committee acknowledges the significant challenges and risks associated with age assessments, as well as the basic principle that an individual should receive the support they need regardless of age. However, the Committee believes that it remains important to ascertain an asylum-seeker's age and therefore legal status so that appropriate services can be provided. The Committee accepts that arrangements may vary in different parts of Wales, and that this is a matter for local partners.

Recommendation 17. The Welsh Government should ensure that there is a designated and suitably trained person in each local authority to undertake age assessments of asylum-seeking children.

209. The Committee received powerful evidence from Professor Bill Yule about the psychological trauma experienced by refugee children, and its causes. These children's acute needs must be met by high quality, specialist mental health services.

Recommendation 18. The Welsh Government should ensure minimum standards of mental health support for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children with trauma, in line with the British Psychological Society's recommendations.

Seven Steps to Sanctuary

As set out in the Welsh Refugee Coalition manifesto.

1. A WELCOMING WALES

Sustaining Wales' commitment to welcome refugees and 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.

07. Nation of Sanctuary?

Stakeholders were strongly supportive of the idea that Wales should be a Nation of Sanctuary.

210. The Welsh Refugee Coalition worked with over twenty organisations to publish a manifesto setting out “Seven Steps to Sanctuary” in advance of the May 2016 National Assembly for Wales election. The Coalition describes the Seven Steps as “the top priority political actions that the Welsh Government needs to commit to and deliver to create a Nation of Sanctuary”. The Coalition claims that this work “had some influence on the manifestos of five of the political parties in Wales” and provided “a strong base to ensure that the rights of refugees and asylum seekers are recognised within the next programme of government”.

211. A number of stakeholders referred to their commitment to the Seven Steps, including:

- Welsh Refugee Council;¹⁷⁹
- City of Sanctuary;¹⁸⁰
- Displaced People in Action;¹⁸¹
- Together Creating Communities;¹⁸²
- Wrexham Council;¹⁸³ and
- Oxfam.¹⁸⁴

212. City of Sanctuary told the Committee that it supports the Wales Cities of Sanctuary project, which is co-ordinated by 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’”. City of Sanctuary called for the Welsh Government to work “proactively to support the City of Sanctuary movement to build a culture of welcome and hospitality across all spheres of society in Wales”.¹⁸⁵

213. The Cabinet Secretary told the Committee that “we absolutely agree with this principle”. However, he said that “the problem is within the detail” because “some of these functions are non-devolved”. The Cabinet Secretary did make the commitment that if “there’s any way that we can take some of those steps out and have the status, then I’d be happy”.¹⁸⁶

The Committee’s view

214. The Committee acknowledges that as asylum and immigration are not devolved, the Welsh Government does not necessarily have at its disposal all the policy and legislative levers to unilaterally

¹⁷⁹ Written evidence, Welsh Refugee Council, [RAS 09](#).

¹⁸⁰ Written evidence, Children in Wales, [RAS 20](#).

¹⁸¹ Written evidence, DPIA, [RAS 46](#).

¹⁸² Written evidence, Together Creating Communities, [RAS 18](#).

¹⁸³ Written evidence, Wrexham Council, [RAS 44](#).

¹⁸⁴ Written evidence, Oxfam Cymru, [RAS 10](#).

¹⁸⁵ Written evidence, Children in Wales, [RAS 20](#).

¹⁸⁶ Oral evidence, Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children, [19 January 2017](#), paragraph 185.

offer sanctuary in Wales. However, stakeholders believe, and the Committee agrees, that Wales can become a Nation of Sanctuary simply by taking actions which do fall within the Welsh Government's responsibilities. The Cabinet Secretary accepts that principle. It appears to the Committee that the organisations involved in developing the Seven Steps have taken particular care to phrase them in such a way that they focus on the devolved response to asylum rather than to asylum policy itself. The Welsh Government should acknowledge this care and attention and take the Seven Steps, working with people across Wales to ensure that we do become the world's first Nation of Sanctuary.

Recommendation 19. The Welsh Government should take the Seven Steps to make Wales a Nation of Sanctuary.

Annex A – Case studies

Newport

215. Newport and District Refugee Support Group gave a number of examples of projects they had been involved in:

- Paint back (Communities First);
- the Bike Project (Dyffryn Link, Police);
- the Allotment Project (Welsh Church Fund);
- section 4 food voucher exchange in partnership with churches;
- Community Space Partnership (seven communities, with Big Lottery funding)
- the Young Asylum Support Service delivered by the Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations; and
- Refugee Week activities between 2002 and 2011.¹⁸⁷

216. Roisin O’Hare from ABUHB, told the Committee that when she meets asylum seekers who have arrived in Newport, one of the key issues is to “find out what their interests are, what their previous occupation was, to then, at the end, come to some sort of plan, a signposting plan, of where they can go to engage in the community in those areas... signposting them to the nearest ESOL classes... antenatal groups and midwifery... Mother and toddler groups... Also, there are ones specifically that are run for asylum seekers and refugees in the area. Sometimes that’s a good stepping stone to getting them out of the house and then further engage with the community”.¹⁸⁸

Carmarthenshire

217. Syria Sir Gâr is a voluntary support group which has been set up to provide informal support to the refugee families, over and above what can be provided through the SVPRP. It 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. Syria Sir Gâr 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”.¹⁸⁹

218. Support is also provided by the Ethnic Youth Support Team (EYST) under a five-year contract awarded by Carmarthenshire County Council. “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. 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.” Welsh Government ‘Welcome

¹⁸⁷ Written evidence, Newport and District Refugee Support Group, [RAS 04](#).

¹⁸⁸ Oral evidence, Roisin O’Hare (ABUHB), [15 December 2016](#), paragraph 421.

¹⁸⁹ Written evidence, Carmarthenshire County Council, [RAS 27](#).

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.¹⁹⁰

North West Wales

219. The support from local residents, community leaders and voluntary groups in North West Wales, "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".¹⁹¹

Ceredigion

220. There has been work by Ceredigion County Council with the local population to help with integration and manage 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." 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, and welcome cards were made by children and families and given to the refugees when they arrived in Ceredigion.¹⁹²

Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan

221. Close working with neighbourhood partnerships in the Cardiff and Vale UHB area "provides an opportunity to support local communities by multi agency working" and creates "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".¹⁹³

Swansea

222. Awareness sessions are delivered in schools around Swansea by EYST, "probably two or three times a week" about refugee awareness, Islamophobia and diversity. "It's tailored to what the school asks for, but it's a very popular service that we run, very much in demand and very effective".¹⁹⁴

Bangor

223. Pobl i Bobl, based in Bangor, 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". 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".¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁰ Written evidence, Carmarthenshire County Council, [RAS 27](#).

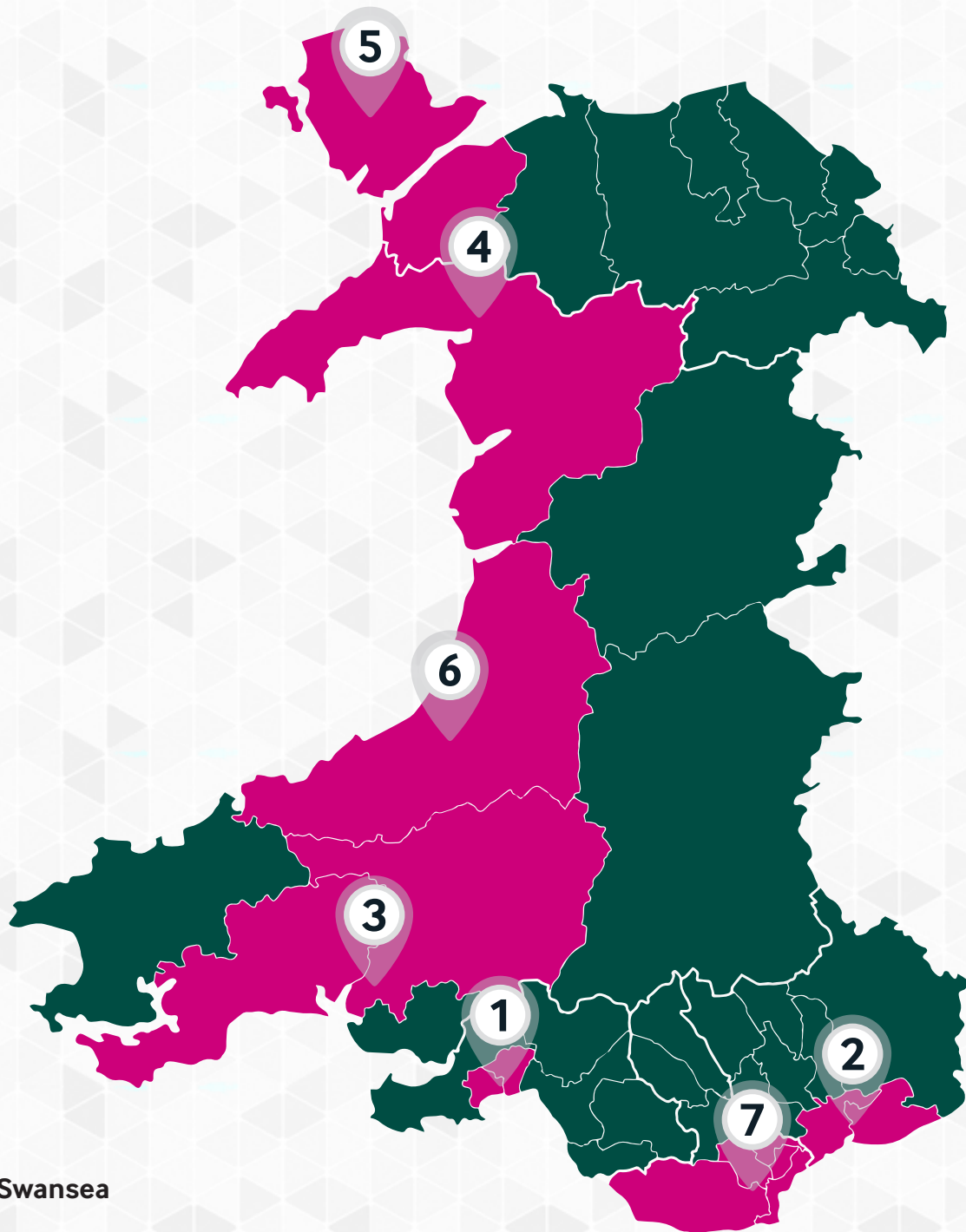
¹⁹¹ Written evidence, Conwy, Gwynedd and the Isle of Anglesey Local Authorities, [RAS 29](#).

¹⁹² Written evidence, Ceredigion County Council, [RAS 38](#).

¹⁹³ Written evidence, Cardiff and Vale UHB, [RAS 39](#).

¹⁹⁴ Oral evidence, Rocio Cifuentes (EYST), [15 December 2016](#), paragraph 271.

¹⁹⁵ Written evidence, Pobl i Bobl, [RAS 40](#).



1 Swansea

2 Newport

3 Carmarthenshire

4 Gwynedd

5 Anglesey

6 Ceredigion

7 Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan

Annex B – Consultation responses

The following responses were submitted and are published on the website.

Reference	Organisation
RAS 01	Oasis
RAS 01a	Oasis
RAS 02	Gesajda Asllani, Coleg Sir Gâr
RAS 03	The British Psychological Society
RAS 04	Newport & District Refugee Support Group
RAS 05	Hywel Dda University Health Board
RAS 06	Churches Together
RAS 07	The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Care
RAS 08	The Children's Society
RAS 09	Welsh Refugee Council
RAS 10	Oxfam Cymru
RAS11	Asylum Justice
RAS 12	Hiraeth Hope
RAS 13	Estyn
RAS 14	Welsh Refugee Coalition
RAS 15	British Red Cross
RAS 16	Children Displaced Across Borders
RAS 17	Tai Pawb
RAS 18	Together Creating Communities
RAS 19	UNISON
RAS 20	Children in Wales
RAS 21	City of Sanctuary
RAS 22	National Association of Schoolmasters and Women Teachers
RAS 23	Hawliau

RAS 24	Stonewall Cymru
RAS 25	Aneurin Bevan Univerity Health Board
RAS 26	Equality and Human Rights
RAS 27	Carmarthenshire County Council
RAS 28	City and County of Swansea
RAS 29	Conwy, Gwynedd and the Isle of Anglesey Local Authorities (North West Wales)
RAS 30	Welsh Women Aid
RAS 31	Hay Brecon and Talgarth Refugee Support
RAS 32	Welsh Local Government Association
RAS 33	Ethnic Youth Support Team.
RAS 34	The Wales Strategic Migration Partnership Final
RAS 35	Torfaen County Borough Council
RAS 36	Public Health Wales
RAS 37	The Royal College of Psychiatrists
RAS 38	Ceredigion County Council
RAS 39	Cardiff and Vale University Health Board
RAS 40	Pobl i Bobl
RAS 41	Migrant Help
RAS 42	Space4U
RAS 43	Merthyr Tydfil Housing Association
RAS 44	Wrexham County Borough Council
RAS 45	University of South Wales
RAS 46	Displaced People in Action

Annex C – Schedule of oral evidence

The following witnesses provided oral evidence to the Committee on the dates noted below. Transcripts of all oral evidence sessions are available.

Date	Name and Organisation
7 December 2016	Sian Summers-Rees, City of Sanctuary UK and Ireland and Chair of Asylum Justice Hayley Richards, Oxfam Neil McKittrick, British Red Cross Elinor Harris, British Red Cross Tracey Sherlock, Welsh Refugee Council Salah Rasool, Welsh Refugee Council
15 December 2016	Naomi Alleyne, Welsh Local Government Association Anne Hubbard, Wales Strategic Migration Partnership Catriona Williams, Children in Wales Cheryl Martin, Children in Wales Rocio Cifuentes, Ethnic Youth Support Team Shehla Khan, Ethnic Youth Support Team Professor Bill Yule, British Psychological Society Dr Gill Richardson, Aneurin Bevan University Health Board Roisin O’Hare, Aneurin Bevan University Health Board
11 January 2017	Dr Mike Chick, University of South Wales Alicja Zalesinska, Tai Pawb Canon Aled Edwards, Displaced People in Action Faruk Ogut, Displaced People in Action
19 January 2017	Carl Sargeant AM, Welsh Government Maureen Howell, Welsh Government Alistair Davey, Welsh Government John Davies, Welsh Government