

PIW 16

National Assembly for Wales

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Inquiry into: Poverty in Wales: Strand 1

Response from: British Red Cross

British Red Cross in Wales' response to the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee Inquiry into Poverty in Wales

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This response addresses two of the three terms of reference for Strand 1 Poverty and Inequality:

- The impacts of poverty, particularly destitution and extreme poverty, on different groups of people.
 - How legislation, policy and budgets targeted at tackling poverty and reducing inequality are co-ordinated and priorities across the Welsh Government.
1. The British Red Cross helps millions of people in the UK and around the world to prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies, disasters and conflicts. We are part of the global Red Cross and Red Crescent humanitarian network and we refuse to ignore people in crisis. We support more than 90.000 people every year in Wales. Through our work in Wales we are faced with extreme cases of poverty and destitution everyday, particularly amongst asylum seekers living within the dispersal areas of Wales. The British Red Cross provides short-term crisis support to asylum seekers and failed asylum seekers who find themselves destitute, many of whom come to us as a last resort, having exhausted all alternatives, with nowhere else to turn. We feel strongly that the depth of suffering and humanitarian need experienced by those living in Wales, who come to Britain to seek sanctuary, needs to form part of this committee inquiry.
 2. The British Red Cross defines someone who is destitute as:

“ A person who is not accessing public funds, is living in extreme poverty and is unable to meet basic needs, e.g. income, food, shelter, healthcare, and who is

forced to rely on irregular support from family, friends, charities or illegal working to survive.”

3. We support a government's right to control its borders, and to remove asylum seekers who have not been granted protection but stand-by the principle that destitution should not be an outcome of the asylum process. We also acknowledge that immigration is a non-devolved matter but also celebrate that Wales, as stated in the Programme for Government is a country which is committed to creating ***a fair society free from discrimination, harassment and victimisation with cohesive and inclusive communities and reducing poverty, especially persistent poverty amongst some of our poorest people and communities, and reducing the likelihood that people will become poor (Programme for Government)***. The Welsh Government has demonstrated this resolve by enabling asylum seekers, living in Wales, access to primary and secondary healthcare. However, we feel that Wales can do more to address the severe suffering of these individuals who find themselves destitute living within our communities.
4. We provide support to asylum seekers in Wales, many of whom are families, who find themselves destitute for a range of reasons. These include people seeking asylum and those who have had their asylum claim rejected and have not returned home or are too frightened to return home. Many failed asylum seekers choose to remain in the UK living a life of destitution over returning to their home country, living with no or very limited access to support from the UK Government. Although asylum seekers are entitled to limited state support, as are failed asylum seekers if they are destitute and taking steps to leave the UK, this amounts to only 50 per cent of standard income support. Many of those who have had their claim rejected and are eligible for Section 4 support experience delays in receiving it or difficulty accessing it leaving them with nothing. Others feel unable to apply for Section 4 support as they fear for their safety if they return to their country of origin.

Unable to work, cope with or access the limited income they are entitled to from the UK Government, many asylum seekers become reliant on the help of friends and support from faith groups and charities. In many cases they experience overcrowded living conditions, street homelessness, physical and mental illnesses and malnourishment.

5. We operate three clinics in Newport, Swansea and Cardiff, where we provide small amounts of money or vouchers and clothing to asylum seekers and failed asylum seekers who are destitute, a maximum of £10 a week per individual for up to 12 weeks. Our destitution support is funded by British Red Cross charitable funds and amounts to £12,000 per year in Wales. Unfortunately, as we rely on using our own funding, the amount is limited and, therefore, intended to support asylum seekers and failed asylum seekers who have no recourse to public funds.

However, our clinics are regularly attended by refugees who have been granted status but due to delays in the system they are often left for long periods without any state support.

We have also forged strong links with local foodbanks and distribute growing numbers of vouchers directly.

6. Currently, we are relying on British Red Cross charitable funds to support these individuals living in Wales who are unable to buy even the most basic of items to live, when funding and public donations are becoming more and more challenging to secure. In Northern Ireland the Stormont Executive has established a crisis fund for migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. The fund will provide a small amount of money for those who have issues with benefits, unemployment, have suffered family breakdown or domestic violence. The fund follows the success of a short pilot project, which supported 1,252 people, in 2012 and looked at whether small amounts of money could provide a significant bridge to allow people to get back on their feet.
7. We call on the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee, through this inquiry, to examine the dire humanitarian situation that many asylum seekers and refugees experience on a daily basis in Wales. We ask that the committee consider what else the Welsh Government can do to support asylum seekers and refugees living in Wales who find themselves destitute with no or very limited money to support themselves or their families. We would willingly work with the committee to examine this area of destitution further.
8. **The following case studies are from our destitution support services:**

Case study 1

Mary* escaped Uganda after suffering sexual and physical abuse from her father and other members of the community. On seeking asylum in the UK her claim was refused and her support was cut. She begged for food from friends and received a weekly food parcel from a refugee organisation. After four years, Mary was detained when immigration officials raided a house she was staying in. It came to light that there had been a mix up by the Home office with Mary's case, which they later admitted. Her case is still waiting to be resolved.

Case study 2

Adam*, a University student in Sudan, fled when problems broke out in Darfur and he was detained and tortured after being accused of inciting fellow students. Adam applied for asylum in the UK but was refused after a year. He now lives in Cardiff and spends his days searching for food by visiting different people he knows. He has no income at all, no regular food or shelter. Adam really wants to support himself and tries to occupy himself by going to language classes and reading at the library. We have only been able to support Adam in a limited way by providing him with a £10 food voucher every week, and clothes and toiletries.

Case Study 3

Ching Lan* along with her two very young children from China were granted refugee status and consequently evicted from their NASS accommodation and rehoused by the council in Swansea. However, the family were not yet receiving any state financial support and had no money to buy food or essentials. We helped her to make a National Insurance application, together with job seekers allowance, child benefit and child tax credit. Ching Lan was required to sign on at the job centre meaning a 12 mile walk with her two small children. We were able to speak to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) who agreed that she could sign on at her local post office. She still had to wait a further four days before she received state support.

Case study 4

Dhari, a 63 year old gentleman from Kuwait was granted leave to remain in the UK and now lives in Swansea. He was receiving no financial support and was unable to support himself with even the basics to survive. He came to us for help in December 2013 and we were still struggling to secure any payments from the DWP by March.

For further information about the difficulties faced by new refugees please read the British Red Cross report 'The Move-on Period: An Ordeal for New Refugees (2014)

www.redcross.org.uk/moveonreport

*Names have been changed to protect the identities of these individuals.