

RAS 19

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: UNISON Cymru

Response from: UNISON Cymru

## **UNISON Cymru/Wales response to the inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales**

- 1.1 In Wales we clearly have a duty to fulfil the humanitarian and legal responsibilities towards refugees and asylum seekers. The public sector needs the resources to support resettled refugees and asylum seekers.
- 1.2 UNISON is committed to the humanitarian support of refugees. UNISON believes that a caring and compassionate response to the refugee crisis requires Wales to receive and proactively assist more asylum seekers.

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

- 2.1 Whilst Welsh government has a strategic and coordinating role in supporting local authorities with the resettlement process the pace of the actual resettlement of families is dictated by the preparedness of local authorities. Some authorities have resettled very small number of refugees and we believe that more needs to be done. It is essential that local authorities have the necessary support mechanisms in place locally to give the families the best possible chance of a successful resettlement and welcome into our communities.
- 2.2 It is also important that the expectations of refugees are appropriately managed through effective communication and that there is consistency throughout services in Wales.

### **The effectiveness of the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan**

- 3.1 The eight points of the delivery plan appear to cover most elements of the refugees/asylum seeker needs and requirements. The plan

provides the foundation to assist councils with integration of families/individuals with the wider community.

- 3.2 The aspects of the plan that cover Gender Based Violence, Hate Crime, Modern Slavery and Community Cohesion are often areas that can be overlooked and if this plan is followed at a local level, it will assist in the protection of resettled families. It must be noted that statistics around hate crime, bullying and harassment of young people, trafficking, female genital mutilation, and violence against women have all increased.
- 3.3 Each local authority should appoint at least one refugee coordinator whose role addresses the issues outlined above. Welsh government should make funding available to enable councils to do this.
- 3.4 Additionally, there needs to be better cohesion and communication between agencies providing support for refugees.

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

- 4.1 Whilst there is a national operational delivery group assessing the support and advocacy requirement for unaccompanied children, progress has been limited with some of the barriers being lack of social worker capacity, mental health support provision and appropriate registered accommodation. We feel that a relaxation on the requirement to place 16/17 year old children in registered children's accommodation would allow local authorities a greater ability of securing supported accommodation which might be more appropriate at a local level.
- 4.2 There also needs to be greater access to interpreters, particularly for those from vulnerable groups.

### **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**

- 5.1 The national delivery plan provides the basis for successful integration. To ensure this happens at a local level, the community cohesion officer plays a lead role in both the operational delivery of the resettlement process and beyond. For example, a link may be

maintained with the local police to help address any cohesion issues that may arise after resettlement.

- 5.2 Each local authority should appoint at least one refugee coordinator whose role addresses the issues outlined above. Welsh government should make funding available to enable councils to do this.
- 5.3 Additional resource will be required for public services to be able to respond to the additional demand put onto local services. Social services, mental health, pre and postnatal care are all areas that are likely to experience additional demands. The costs associated with translation will also be a factor needing consideration.
- 5.4 Public services are already suffering as a result of austerity. It is unreasonable to expect services to absorb more demand without additional finances to deliver – particularly as this would likely add to the negative public perception of refugees.
- 5.5 Furthermore, it is essential that our public sector workers are provided with the necessary knowledge and skills to enable them to respond to the needs of refugees with confidence.
- 5.6 There is currently a lack of funded English provision available to refugees. Refugees who have found safety in the UK want to rebuild their lives and be part of their new communities. They have a huge obstacle to restarting their lives, because there aren't enough English classes.
- 5.7 The barriers to integration into the community can be even higher for women as classes with childcare facilities are rare. This means they are at greater risk of becoming further isolated at home, rather than being able to get involved in their new communities and make friends.
- 5.8 ESOL classes should be publically funded and provided by the public sector, including through further education institutions across Wales.
- 5.9 In addition to English language, we need to ensure that refugees who settle in Wales are provided with the opportunity to develop the necessary skills to enable them to enter the workplace, including CV writing, work experience, and interview practice.
- 5.10 More widely, work needs to be undertaken to raise awareness and understanding within communities about the refugee crisis and the local impact. Public sector workers, and the public more widely, should be able to access the necessary support to enable people to

confidently challenge discriminatory behaviour and respond to prejudice.

- 5.11 UNISON has recently drawn attention to the dramatic reduction in spending on youth services in Wales. Since 2012 £6.1 million has been removed from these services, causing 360 jobs to be lost and more than 100 youth centre closures. It is obvious that young refugees and community cohesion would benefit from strong and sustainable youth services and we repeat our call for better funding here.