

SP 03

Y Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb, Llywodraeth Leol a Chymunedau

Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee

Ymchwiliad i'r Adolygiad Blaenoriaethau ar gyfer y Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb,

Llywodraeth Leol a Chymunedau

Inquiry into the Priorities for the Equality, Local Government and Communities
Committee

Ymateb gan: Oxfam Cymru

Response from: Oxfam Cymru

Oxfam Cymru: Priorities for the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee

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1. Introduction

Oxfam works with others to overcome poverty in three ways:

- by developing projects with people living in poverty that improve their lives and show others how things can change
- by raising public awareness of poverty to create pressure for change
- by working with policymakers to tackle the causes of poverty.

For further details about Oxfam's work, see www.oxfam.org.uk/.

1.1 Oxfam has a long history of working with asylum-seekers and refugees, particularly in Wales over the last decade and we represent the Welsh Refugee Coalition on the Syrian Resettlement Operations Board and are working with the Coalition to establish Wales as a Nation of Sanctuary.

1.2 We are part of the [City of Sanctuary](#) movement and the [Still Human Still Here coalition](#), which campaigns to end the destitution of thousands of refused asylum-seekers in the UK. We also endorse the [Asylum Aid Women's Asylum Charter](#), the findings and recommendations of which are supported by our programme experience.

1.3 In May 2015, we completed a three year '[Sanctuary in Wales](#)' project supported by the Big Lottery Fund in the four asylum dispersal areas of Wales – Cardiff, Swansea, Newport and Wrexham – alongside our partners [Oasis Cardiff](#), [African Community Centre](#), [Displaced People in Action](#), [BAWSO](#) and [Business in the Community](#). Over 450 women participated in this project and our submission is based on what we learnt from their experiences and issues the women identified as being important to them. Some of these women reflected their experiences in this short video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9F-8b72mBUU>

2. Oxfam Cymru strongly recommends that the Committee prioritise scrutiny of the Refugee and Asylum Seeker (RAS) Delivery Plan to determine its suitability and effectiveness.

2.1 We welcomed the publication of the Delivery Plan at the end of the last Assembly term, however we have serious concerns about its quality and ability to deliver. In our view the Delivery Plan is not good enough and will not enable people to rebuild their lives and make a full contribution to society or to address the significant barriers to inclusion that exist here in Wales. For example:

2.1.1 There is no clear monitoring or obvious accountability mechanism associated with the Plan. Many of the outcomes mentioned are not outcomes for people and there is no budget attached to delivery of the Plan.

2.1.2 There is no recognition of or action to support destitute asylum-seekers or refugees – with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). Wales is the only devolved administration without a NRPF network.

2.1.3 The Plan includes no detail of the significant change on a global scale or the changes in UK Government immigration legislation and how this will impact people living in Wales or how the Welsh Government will respond – for example access to justice and legal support.

2.1.4 There is a lack of evidence based policy making with no independent advocacy service for asylum-seekers living in Wales. The Welsh Government could be accessing Welsh specific data from the UK Government on the use of Language Line and Migration Help for example so that trends in advice can be picked up and acted upon.

2.1.5 Oxfam is concerned about the lack of advocacy support (in particular face-to-face) for unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee young people in Wales. A previous commitment to *‘explore the need for a Guardianship model for Wales...’* as exists in Scotland does not appear in the final Plan.

2.1.6 There is no mention of the role of Global Education and global citizenship in schools to support integration and community cohesion and the development of ethical and informed citizens.

3 The Committee should prioritise scrutiny of the accessibility and quality of public service delivery for refugees and asylum-seekers in Wales.

3.1 Our evidence suggests that refugees and asylum-seekers experience significant barriers to accessing the services that they need and also that the quality of service delivery varies considerably. For example:

3.1.1 There are ongoing issues with the quality of housing for asylum-seekers and the lack of accessible, confidential and responsive avenues of redress when housing issues arise.

- 3.1.2 The cost of transport is a significant barrier, particularly for asylum-seekers. This limits access to mainstream services, including schools, colleges and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes, and can lead to problems with isolation and loneliness.
- 3.1.3 There are significant issues with the availability of interpreters and the use of Language Line which can prevent effective access to health services in Wales for both refugees and asylum-seekers.
- 3.1.4 Mental health support for refugees and asylum-seekers, particularly for those that have experienced serious trauma, is inadequate.
- 3.1.5 English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision needs to be assessed and reviewed on a national level to determine whether demand is being met effectively and to remove barriers to access, particularly for women.
- 3.1.6 The 'move-on'ⁱ process does not work effectively and can lead to destitution.
- 4 The Committee should seek to review the processes and the pace at which Wales is resettling refugees e.g. through the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS) and schemes for Unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) and also to support family reunification as a safe and legal route to the UK.**

4.1 Syrian resettlement in Wales through SVPRS

The most recent [Home Office statistics](#) show that only 78 Syrian refugees had been resettled in Wales up to March 2016ⁱⁱ, this compared to over 600 Syrian refugees in Scotland and just under 200 in Yorkshire. Wales has a proud history of welcoming vulnerable people in their time of need (for example 4,500 Belgian refugees during the First World War). Asylum dispersal areas such as Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham have more experience in welcoming asylum-seekers and refugees than other areas of Wales. It is important that there is a national response to the refugee crisis to share expertise. We need to significantly increase the number of resettlement places in Wales. How we respond to this humanitarian crisis is a defining moment in our history. As a globally responsible nation Wales should commit to resettling our fair share of the world's refugees.

4.2 Unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC)

Despite announcements by the UK Government in May 2016 to expand resettlement schemes specifically for unaccompanied asylum seeking children and children 'at risk', to our knowledge not even one unaccompanied asylum seeking child has been brought to the UK from continental Europe. The Committee should look to scrutinise why this is the case and why Wales is currently unable to support UASC.

4.3 Safe and legal routes

Family Reunion is no longer practically accessible to refugees living in Wales due to cuts to Legal Aid. This can effectively result in a breach of Article 8 of the Human Rights Act – right to a private and family life. [Red Cross research](#) shows that family reunion can be very complex and without expert advice, difficult issues can stop or delay the reunion from happening. This lack of legal support also leaves most often women and children stranded in dangerous situations and causes lasting damage. Even if a family reunification application is successful, no support is available to ensure practicalities such as flights are covered to enable the reunification to take place. The Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan does not make clear what the Welsh Government will do to support family reunification as a means of providing a safe and legal route to the UK.

5. Conclusion

According to the [United Nations](#), there are now 65.3 million forcibly displaced people worldwide including 21.3 million refugees and 40.8 million people internally displaced within their own borders. Wales' response to this crisis is both slow in terms of the pace of resettlement and poor in terms of the overall number of people resettled. In addition, Oxfam's evidence shows that there are significant failings in terms of access to services and the quality of service experienced by asylum-seekers and refugees living in Wales. The Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan does not address either of these issues. Wales needs to do more and the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee must play a role in assessing progress to date, how our response can be improved and how public services in Wales can work with asylum-seekers and refugees to address barriers to inclusion.

ⁱ Under current guidelines, an asylum-seeker granted refugee status has 28 days to move out of Home Office accommodation. In practice, Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) systems, such as National Insurance number (NINo) allocations are not processed within this timescale which impacts on a local authorities ability to meet housing needs. The fast-track NINo service, available to Syrian refugees resettled in the UK via the Syrian VPRS, should be available to all refugees to avoid destitution occurring during the 'move on' period.

ⁱⁱ Home Office statistics for Q2 and Q3 will be published on 25th August and 1st December respectively.