

RAS 04

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Grŵp Cymorth Ffoaduriaid Casnewydd a'r Ardal

Response from: Newport and District Refugee Support Group

Introduction

1 Newport & District Refugee Support Group (N&DRSG) is a voluntary organisation which was founded in 1999 by as a response to the arrival of people arriving in Newport seeking safety from the war in South Europe. The organisation has no political or religious affiliations. In addition to awareness raising and information sharing meetings we started weekly drop-ins for people seeking safety and refugees only in 2002. Since 2010 the drop-ins have been open anyone from another country arriving or residing in Newport

2 We organised and have been involved in successful projects such as Paint back (Communities first), the Bike Project (Dyffryn Link, Police), the Allotment Project (Welsh Church Fund), section 4 food voucher exchange in partnership with St Mary's Church, Bethel Church and others, Community Space Partnership (7 communities/ Big Lottery) and we were instrumental in the development of the Young Asylum Support Service which was delivered by GAVO. We have been the main organiser for Refugee Week activities in Newport between 2002 and 2011 - with the 2009 presentation of the Refugee Inclusion Strategy by Brian Gibbons as highlight.

3 Our activities have varied in response to the presenting needs of new arrivals; we organised separate drop-ins for families with children to accommodate the difference in interest they had in the activities provided at the general drop-in, hosted the legal advice services of Asylum Justice when informed that these were urgently needed and exchanged Section 4 vouchers to provide people with some cash to enable using transport and buying cheaper/cultural appropriate goods.

4 I Start (International Support Training Advocacy Resettlement Touchpoint) is a new scheme which envisages to provide an equal-opportunity, safe and empowering environment for newly-arrived asylum seekers, refugees and European migrants in the Newport area. The first part of the scheme: a four-week rolling orienteering course has recently started to provide new arrivals

with key information about important paperwork, keeping safe in their accommodation, while out and about and training, education and employment opportunities. The course has been developed in cooperation with new arrivals, police, health – and accommodation providers.

We discussed the consultation at the recent Drop-in, and have included the responses of new (and not so new) arrived people in our response below.

Syrian resettlement scheme

5 It is very encouraging and pleasing to see that all Local Authorities in Wales have said that they are prepared to help Syrian refugees, and that the Welsh Assembly Government has put a task force together to support the Local Authorities in this. It is interesting to see that the people who come to the UK through this scheme receive significantly more support with their integration than people seeking asylum and refugees who have arrived through the ‘normal’ asylum route. It appears an acknowledgement that this dedicated integration support is needed, but we don’t understand why people who have come through the usual route don’t receive the same level of support although they have gone through the same or very similar circumstances.

6 The Refugee Integration Strategy states that integration of people should start from the moment they arrive, but although we appreciate the efforts of N&DRSG and other voluntary organisations in Newport, the integration support for new arrivals coming through the ‘normal’ route is not planned, structured or resourced. There are also a number of other UK government schemes to help unaccompanied asylum seeking children which will need a lot of attention and resources and we are concerned that the focus and urgency of these recent schemes will distract any attention for the needs of people who have arrived through the ‘normal’ routes.

The pace and effectiveness of the Welsh Government’s approach to resettling refugees through the UK Government’s Syrian Resettlement Scheme

7 We are unable to make any comments because we don’t have sufficient information about this. The numbers of resettled people seem low, but we understand that Local Authorities have many other matters which need their attention and appreciate that it may be difficult for some to find houses and

the services they need to help refugees because they don't have much experience of this.

The effectiveness of the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan

8 We could not find any evidence of awareness, let alone incorporation of the delivery plan in local (Newport City Council) strategies. We don't know the reason for this, but it may be because the plan is very vague about responsibilities and time frames. It would be more helpful if the plan was more detailed and had so-called 'SMART' actions and it would be clear who would be responsible.

At the moment it seems that the delivery-drive depends mainly on voluntary sector organisations, who have varying levels, periods of –and criteria for funding, meaningful input from people seeking asylum and refugees and their services are not always coordinated. It seems that the additional input from 'Citizens of Sanctuary' in contributes to better coordination of services in Swansea and Cardiff. On the other hand it is good to have local support organisations who can respond to local needs and have knowledge of local resources, networks and opportunities. It may be more useful for the plan to become a framework where organisations can be responsible for parts of the plan.

9 It would also be useful if the delivery plan would be included in other plans and strategies of Welsh and UK Government. One of the Drop-in participants noticed that Wales is trying to recruit General Practitioners from other parts of the world, while there are a number of people seeking asylum who have successfully participated in the WARD scheme of the DPIA which is funded by Welsh Government and could be employed were it not for their current migration status. It would appear to be more efficient to lobby UK Government to amend legislation to grant people who have successfully completed the WARD scheme leave to remain.

General observations

Drop-in participants had the following general observations most of which are not directly related to the refugee delivery plan:

10 What is good

It is very good to have the WARD scheme for doctors; it would be good to have a similar scheme for other professionals and crafts people (we explained about the CQFW: there is no awareness about this, and our experience is that colleges are not sufficiently aware nor funded to provide this option)

It is good to have to share accommodation with people of different cultures, religions and nationalities which we normally would not want to engage with: this helps us to understand and respect people and to see that it is possible to live in peace together.

There are different charities that help us with different things and for some things that they do the same we can choose where it is most convenient or we feel most comfortable.

It is better to live in Wales than in England because there is less racism in Wales.

11 What is not so good

It is not so good that people seeking asylum are not allowed to work once they have completed the WARD scheme.

We would like the Welsh Government to allow us to work – or talk to the Home Office to allow us to work.#

The very low allowance doesn't allow us to buy books to study English because the library doesn't have enough books about English language.

It is very difficult to have access to training and education (due to cost and/or eligibility criteria)

There is no equality in the waiting times for the asylum application: some people get a decision within weeks, others have to wait years.

We can't open a bank account – which makes our life more expensive and unhealthy. We need a bank account to order bus tickets, a leisure card and to buy things on the internet which is often much cheaper.

It is not good that it is impossible, or takes a very long time to transfer people in asylum accommodation when it is necessary: e.g. mobility, mental health, violence.

12 What could be done to make things better

Make it easier and cheaper/free to access training and education

Use the WARD scheme to get more GPs in Wales.

Increase the asylum allowance.

Allow us to do paid work.

Provide Welsh language classes for people seeking asylum.

Have refugee specialists (champions) in the Job Centres.

Have interpreters in the Job Centre.

Develop and coordinate an anonymous complaints procedure.

Trish Johns

Chair

I START

(Newport & District Refugee Support Group)