



CLYMBLAID  
FFOADURIAID  
CYMRU  
WELSH  
REFUGEE  
COALITION

## Nation of Sanctuary — making the vision a reality

### A journey in seven steps

#### Introduction

The Welsh Refugee Coalition's manifesto for the 2016 Senedd election, [Seven Steps to Sanctuary](#), called on the next Welsh Government to adopt the aim of making Wales the world's first Nation of Sanctuary. We are proud and heartened at the response this vision received; with political parties, communities, and people seeking sanctuary themselves uniting around the idea that Wales should be a place where people seeking sanctuary can be safe and play a full part in their new home.

In 2019, the Welsh Government officially adopted the aim and published its [Nation of Sanctuary action plan](#). This was a welcome step and a significant milestone in demonstrating what can be done with devolved powers, while also providing a powerful counterpoint to policy and media coverage around immigration and asylum that is often deeply negative. However, there remains a significant gap between this vision and the reality of daily life for people seeking sanctuary, who continue to face barriers to meeting some of their essential needs, accessing public services, and ability to fully contribute while rebuilding their lives in Wales. **We need to make the vision a reality.**

This Manifesto sets out our call to the next Welsh Government to reaffirm the commitment to the Nation of Sanctuary vision, and build on the initial plan to realise it, based on the steps we outline. This should include developing a new strategy with clear actions, dedicated budget, cross-departmental commitments, timescales and a clear monitoring and evaluation framework. Crucially, it must include a commitment across Government to ensure that everyone is able to access all public services when they need them.

2020 has been an unprecedented year, and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have exposed and deepened many of the issues with our asylum and immigration system. This has included the in-built destitution of the asylum system; the Home Office's slow and poor quality decision making; terrible conditions in asylum accommodation and the hostility and inhumanity towards people making desperate journeys to reach the UK. We have seen the

Nation of Sanctuary vision actively undermined by the UK Government through the opening of entirely unsuitable accommodation at the barracks in Penally with no prior engagement or consultation. This has all taken place against the backdrop of an escalating climate crisis, continued instability in many parts of the world and a global reckoning with racism and the legacies of imperialism.

The Black Lives Matter movement has emphasised the need to ensure equality for those from Black and Ethnic Minority communities. We welcome the development of the Welsh Government's Race Equality Action Plan, but it must be recognised that without supporting those from refugee and migrant backgrounds, we can never hope to have a truly equal Wales.

Over the coming years, people around the world will continue to be forced from their homes due to war, torture, persecution and natural disasters, in search of safety and a better life for themselves and their children. Wales, and the UK, must continue to uphold the right to seek asylum, while doing what we can to address the causes that force people from their homes.

While immigration and asylum policy remains the responsibility of Westminster, there are significant devolved powers that can and should be used to ensure we do all we can to protect the right to seek sanctuary, and ensure that people forced to flee and the communities that welcome them are supported.

This manifesto takes the form of a journey, based on an individual's move through the stages of seeking and securing sanctuary. Along the way it provides a roadmap for the next Welsh Government to improve that journey at every step, and make the Nation of Sanctuary vision a reality.

### **A note on terminology**

Terminology in this area can be unfamiliar or confusing to many people, here are some definitions.

In this manifesto we use **people seeking sanctuary** to refer to all those who have moved to a new country seeking protection, including refugees and people seeking asylum.

#### **Asylum seeker**

An asylum seeker is someone who has made a claim for asylum from the UK Government and is waiting for a final decision on this claim, including those who may have initially had their claim refused.

#### **Refugee**

A refugee is someone who has been officially recognised by the UK Government as having valid grounds for protection and residency in the UK. This includes people who have been identified and provided with safe passage from other countries, as well as former asylum seekers who have had a positive decision on their claim.

#### **Migrant**

A migrant is anyone who has moved to another country different to the place of their birth or the country where they hold citizenship. This can be for many reasons, including work, fleeing persecution or joining loved ones, and includes all refugees and people seeking asylum.

#### **No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)**

A person can have a 'no recourse to public funds' condition imposed in the UK, meaning they have no entitlement to the majority of welfare benefits, including income support, housing benefit and a range of allowances and tax credits. This condition might for instance be applied to someone whose asylum claim has been rejected, though it may still be possible for them to submit new evidence to support their case.

## **Our key priorities**

- 1. Make the Nation of Sanctuary vision a reality** through a new strategy with clear actions, dedicated budget, cross-departmental commitments, timescales and a robust monitoring and evaluation framework.
- 2. Introduce a cross-cutting commitment on access to all Welsh public services** for everyone who needs them, regardless of immigration status.
- 3. Ensure integration from day one** through orientation, language support, training and targeted support to develop skills and employment opportunities.
- 4. Ensure access to health and social services, in particular specialist mental health services**, with better interpretation support and steps to overcome cultural barriers.
- 5. Improve access to education for migrant, refugee and asylum seeking children and young people**, including education-related financial support, transport, school meals and childcare.
- 6. Develop effective support for employability and progression** once in employment, through specific career pathways to priority sectors, volunteering, work related language skills and other training.
- 7. Secure safe and dignified accommodation for all**, including projects to support and provide advice to people made homeless and destitute, widening the pool of suitable accommodation and ensuring digital access for people in asylum accommodation.

## **The journey**

### **1. Pre-arrival**

Wales has a long and proud history of internationalism and welcoming people seeking sanctuary. In an increasingly unsettled global context, it is crucial that the next Welsh Government plays its part as a globally responsible Wales on the world stage, as well as advocating for positive reforms to UK Government immigration and asylum policy.

#### **The next Welsh Government should:**

- Develop a new Nation of Sanctuary strategy with clear actions, dedicated budget, cross-departmental commitments, timescales and a robust monitoring and evaluation framework.
- Deliver a Nation of Sanctuary public communication campaign, to make the positive case for welcoming people seeking sanctuary to Wales, challenge negative conceptions and celebrate the contributions of people seeking sanctuary.
- Continue to work collaboratively with local authorities, the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership and UK Government to participate in refugee resettlement schemes.
- Work collaboratively with local authorities to advocate for a fairer and properly funded asylum dispersal system that ensures the wellbeing of people seeking asylum and supports communities to welcome them. This should reflect the lessons from the successes of the planned resettlement schemes.
- Seek the creation of a Shortage Occupation List (SOL) for Wales, in line with Scotland, to allow Wales to meet its own particular needs when it comes to workforce shortages and permit people seeking asylum who are qualified for roles on the SOL to work while awaiting the outcome of their asylum claim.
- Advocate for the establishment and protection of safe routes to seek sanctuary across the world, including family reunion.
- Challenge the UK Government's hostile environment policies and advocate for progressive reforms to the asylum system, including the right to work for people seeking asylum; increased asylum support rates; improved decision making by the Home Office and reform of asylum accommodation and dispersal. Actively oppose new legislative measures that further curtail the rights and entitlements of people seeking asylum.

## **2. Arrival in Wales**

People seeking sanctuary will arrive in Wales through one of two routes: either through refugee resettlement schemes, or making an individual claim to asylum once they are in the UK. The way in which someone arrives will greatly affect their experience of life in Wales, access to support and ability to start a new life. The next Welsh Government must do what it can to ensure that everyone is supported, and commit to the principle of 'integration from day one' for everyone who arrives here.

### **The next Welsh Government should:**

- Ensure effective initial orientation on arrival so that individuals are better prepared, understand their rights and are able to access services and support.
- Introduce a cross-cutting commitment on access to all Welsh public services for everyone who needs them, regardless of immigration status.
- Maintain and increase investment in asylum seeker support services, including legal advice, advocacy and information services.
- Fund free Welsh and English lessons for all people seeking sanctuary, including digital and face to face methods and sufficient support for progression to higher levels. Include cultural awareness and orientation as part of language learning.
- Strongly oppose and challenge the use of unsuitable sites for initial accommodation for people seeking asylum, such as the Ministry of Defence barracks in Penally.
- Ensure effective screening and onward referral for newly arrived people for vulnerabilities including mental health issues, trauma and underlying health conditions.
- Ensure that all people seeking sanctuary are registered with GPs and dentists and are included in vaccination programmes.

## **3. Time in the asylum system**

Time in the asylum system can be a demoralising and distressing experience, with many people waiting months or years feeling that their life is on hold<sup>1</sup>. While awaiting a decision, people seeking asylum are housed in Home Office accommodation that is often poor quality and are given an allowance of £5.66 a day to meet all their living needs while not being allowed to work other than in exceptional cases. While the Welsh Government has no power over the asylum system itself, there are steps it can take to support people seeking asylum in Wales while they await an outcome on their claim.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/asylum-seeker-decision-home-office-six-months\\_uk\\_5fbfdde2c5b63d1b770a5456](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/asylum-seeker-decision-home-office-six-months_uk_5fbfdde2c5b63d1b770a5456)

### **The next Welsh Government should:**

- Seek the devolution of responsibility and provision for asylum accommodation, dispersal and support in Wales, in order to ensure higher standards, improved oversight and an end to housing that is unsafe, unsuitable and unsanitary.
- Remove barriers to access health services by improving staff awareness and understanding through training.
- Ensure that people seeking sanctuary understand their rights when accessing services, particularly healthcare.
- Develop and fund high quality specialist mental health and trauma services, including the establishment of a service for survivors of torture.
- Roll out free internet access in asylum accommodation.
- Extend free public transport concession passes to all people seeking asylum and remove any barriers to accessing passes for eligible refugees.
- Expand the WARD programme (Wales Asylum Seeking and Refugee Doctors<sup>2</sup>), which supports doctors to retrain while they are awaiting a decision on their asylum claim, to other professions. This could include other roles in the health sector, construction, teaching, hospitality, IT, agriculture and interpretation and translation services. This will enable people seeking asylum to have prior experience and qualifications recognised, retrain and register with professional bodies in order to work as soon as possible.
- Provide skills assessments, clear guidance on volunteering and signposting to training and volunteering opportunities. Continue to advocate for lifting the ban on working for people seeking asylum.
- Ensure that everyone has access to high quality, supportive interpretation when accessing public services. Provide training, support and oversight to interpreters.
- Building on the extended franchise in 2021 for residents with leave to remain, extend the right to vote in Welsh elections to people seeking asylum.

#### **4. Time in the asylum system: children, young people and more vulnerable groups**

Time in the asylum system can be particularly challenging for those with additional needs and more vulnerable and marginalised groups, including children and young people, women, LGBT+ people, disabled people and survivors of torture, trafficking and slavery. The Welsh Government and Welsh public services need to be responsive to the experiences of these groups and ensure that provision meets their needs.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.dpia.org.uk/projects/wales-asylum-seeker-refugee-doctors-ward-group/>

### **The next Welsh Government should:**

- Expand eligibility for educational grants to migrant, refugee and asylum seeking children and young people in Wales, including those with No Recourse to Public Funds. This should include the Educational Maintenance Allowance, Financial Contingency Fund, Free School Meals and the Pupil Development Grant.
- Expand the provision of the Government's free childcare offer to all families, including those seeking asylum and those with No Recourse to Public Funds.
- Waive fees for higher and tertiary tuition for refugees and people seeking asylum.
- Expand advocacy services to ensure that all children in asylum seeking families are entitled to an independent advocate and are supported through active participation.
- Increase support for existing Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children including greater advocacy resources for those challenging age assessments and a recruitment and training programme for appropriate adults to independently participate in the age assessment process.
- Provide clear guidance to schools and local authorities to ensure that children and young people from refugee backgrounds are not disadvantaged in access to school places and are supported if starting school midway through the academic year.
- Increase funding and capacity for specialist mental health services to support refugees and people seeking asylum, including for survivors of torture, trafficking and children and young people.
- Ensure effective safeguarding at the strategic and practical level, with greater understanding of safeguarding concerns for vulnerable groups and clear guidance and processes for raising and responding to concerns
- Explore the potential to provide safe housing for LGBT+ refugees and people seeking asylum.

### **5. Refused asylum claims**

Some people's claims for asylum are refused by the Home Office, and many subsequently face homelessness, destitution and vulnerability to exploitation, with restricted access to public funds meaning they are unable to access services or support. Home Office decision making has been shown time and again to be of poor quality, and many people who have been refused asylum go on to appeal and are granted leave to remain; recent Home Office figures show that 44% of asylum appeals are allowed<sup>3</sup>. The reality is that for many people it will not be safe or practical for them to return to their country of origin, and everyone who is

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/information/refugee-asylum-facts/top-10-facts-about-refugees-and-people-seeking-asylum/>



in this situation should be given access to high quality legal advice and services to counter the threat of homelessness and destitution and escape abusive situations.

**The next Welsh Government should:**

- Commit to further long-term funding to deliver the recommendations of the Welsh Government feasibility report on increasing accommodation and support services to people who have been refused asylum, including as recommended beyond the initial two years<sup>4</sup>.
- Ensure that a No Recourse to Public Funds condition is no barrier to anyone who needs to access refuge or specialist domestic abuse services.
- Fund free school meals for children from families on section 4<sup>5</sup> support and those with No Recourse to Public Funds, including those who have been refused asylum.
- Work with local authorities to ensure the most vulnerable destitute individuals are supported, including through clear new national guidance and funding.
- Increase the provision of legal aid funded advisors able to support those with refused asylum claims to challenge those refusals and ensure people are properly represented, with sufficient support for submitting fresh claims.
- Advocate for the extension of the current 14 day period for appealing a refused asylum claim and the 21 day move on period for those who have no further rights of appeal.

**6. Refugee status granted**

Once an individual has been granted asylum, they are recognised by the UK Government as a refugee, are free to settle in the UK and in theory are able to access the same services and benefits as everyone else. In reality this initial period can be a very unsettling time, with people given only 28 days to secure housing, employment and access to benefits.

Newly-recognised refugees would benefit from further advice and support to enable them to establish a new life in Wales.

**The next Welsh Government should:**

- Continue to fund and expand move-on support services to help newly-recognised refugees access housing, employment and benefits.
- Explore and implement alternative housing provision for newly-recognised refugees to protect them from homelessness.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://gov.wales/written-statement-support-those-no-recourse-public-funds>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.asaproject.org/uploads/Factsheet-2-section-4-support.pdf>

- Explore options for increasing the move on period to 56 days in line with the Housing Act 2014, including options for continuing to fund asylum accommodation for an additional 28 days to give local authorities and individuals an appropriate length of time to secure alternative accommodation.
- Work with housing providers and local authorities to improve access to housing for refugees, including expanding priority need to all new refugees.
- Roll out training for frontline public service provider staff on the rights and entitlements of refugees and migrants to public services.

## **7. A new life in Wales**

Refugees and migrants from all over the world have made great contributions to Welsh society, working in public services, building businesses, starting families and supporting others in their communities. However, the path to starting a new life is not always straightforward, and many refugees continue to face barriers to citizenship, employment and public services, as well as discrimination and hostility long after they have settled in Wales. It is crucial that the Welsh Government does all it can to ensure that everyone who calls Wales home, whatever their background, is included, supported and able to contribute to the best of their ability.

### **The next Welsh Government should:**

- Implement a holistic employment support strategy for people seeking sanctuary, with career pathways for key sectors, including initial access to work and job progression, with recognition of prior qualifications and learning and steps to professional registration. This should build on expanding the WARD programme and draw on Welsh Government Skills and Employment and ReStart reports<sup>6</sup>.
- Evaluate the ReStart employment support programme for refugees and seek to make improvements for a new round of the programme.
- Provide more targeted support to promote self-employment and help refugee-led businesses to start-up and grow.
- Engage with diaspora communities to better inform Wales's international development work.

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<sup>6</sup>

<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2020-03/refugee-employment-and-skills-support-study-summary.pdf>

<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2020-12/restart-refugee-integration-employer-engagement-opportunities.pdf>

- Ensure that the 'Right to Rent' policy which requires landlords to check the immigration status of tenants, and has been found to be racially discriminatory by the High Court, is not implemented in Wales.
- Invest in public information and community-based programmes to increase voter registration and turnout among migrant and BAME communities, in particular those who will be newly enfranchised in the 2021 election.
- Work with communities to tackle hate crime and include migrant communities in work to tackle racism.
- Communicate clearly that Welsh public bodies will not share data with the Home Office for immigration enforcement purposes.
- Support local community groups and befriending projects that are engaged in work to welcome people seeking sanctuary, facilitate opportunities for social contact and increase social cohesion. Seek to learn lessons from these projects to strengthen existing work on community cohesion in partnership with local services.
- Fund and work closely with advocacy groups for people seeking sanctuary, to enable them to raise issues that affect them, improve services and increase understanding of their experiences.

## **Acknowledgements**

Thank you to all those who helped develop this manifesto, including the many individuals with experience of seeking sanctuary themselves who shared their ideas and experiences with us.

## **Note on the Welsh Refugee Coalition**

The Welsh Refugee Coalition is a network of organisations working together across Wales in the interests of people seeking sanctuary and the communities that welcome them. We aim to ensure that our resources are used to best effect and to speak with a positive and unified voice on policies and practices affecting people seeking sanctuary.

If you would like to learn more about our work or joining the Coalition, please contact us via email at [coalition@wrc.wales](mailto:coalition@wrc.wales)

**Twitter:** [@RefugeeWelsh](https://twitter.com/RefugeeWelsh)

**Facebook:** [@nationofsanctuary](https://www.facebook.com/nationofsanctuary)

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