



Welsh Refugee Council |
Cyngor Ffoaduriaid Cymru

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David Bolt
Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration
VPRS Re-inspection Team
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London SW1V 1PN

17 December 2019

Dear David,

Re: Call for Evidence: UK Resettlement Schemes for Vulnerable Refugees

Welsh Refugee Council has been empowering asylum seekers and refugees to build new futures in Wales for almost 30 years. We deliver direct specialist support to refugees and asylum seekers through our bases in Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham. We work extensively with a range of community, voluntary and statutory sector partners and strive to contribute to the creation of a society where respect and equality for all are paramount and where human rights are enjoyed.

We work with asylum seekers and refugees at some of the most critical points of their lives. Our work can make the difference between someone with a failed asylum claim spiralling downward into destitution, untreated health problems, and homelessness – or it can create an alternative future where they find their feet and begin building a life in Wales thanks to improved language skills, access to benefits, legal help, and other support that they are entitled to.

Our services include supporting Refugees during the “Move On” period where they are given just 28 days once granted Refugee status to find housing and apply for mainstream benefits and support leaving many single refugees homeless. We provide advice, advocacy and

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casework support to asylum seekers through our Asylum Rights Programme (a partnership of seven charities: Asylum Justice, Bawso, DPIA, EYST, City of Sanctuary, TGP Cymru and Welsh Refugee Council) who are facing difficulties accessing their basic rights and services in the UK resulting in homelessness, destitution and struggling to fulfil their potential and meet essential needs. We also provide a safe play area for refugee and asylum seeking families providing a vital space where children can be children whatever their backgrounds and experiences and giving a lifeline to parents. We deliver community English classes at a range of levels free to access to those from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds at our offices in Cardiff and Newport.

In addition, we are currently contracted to deliver the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS), soon to be renamed the Vulnerable Persons Relocation Support Service, in one Local Authority area in South Wales. We have previously delivered the scheme in two other Local Authority areas. Our first families under the SVPRS arrived in May 2016 and we have since helped resettle a total of 24 families.

Under the scheme, Welsh Refugee Council provide a broad range of services to support the family's welcome and integration into life in Wales including, but not limited to:

- meeting new families arriving under the scheme from the airport and accompanying them to their new property;
- ensuring there is a grocery pack available to the family on arrival;
- attending briefings with the family and property managers to sign tenancy agreements and provide information on the property ensuring this is delivered in a language understood by the family;
- providing briefings on entitlements including healthcare and benefit payments and help to access this support;
- accompanying families to healthcare and jobcentre appointments;
- enabling families to access English language education;
- helping families access bank accounts;
- providing other orientation support as necessary.

While we understand the service is broadly the same in each area participating in the scheme, in reality we understand that delivery differs in each area. This is likely due to each Local Authority area participating in the scheme identifying what it feels are the most important areas of focus and then tendering services, or approaching service providers, to deliver against those outcomes. While we welcome that all 22 Local Authority areas in Wales welcomed refugees under the SVPRS, there was little experience among many Local Authorities in working with refugees outside of the four dispersal areas in Wales.

Many Welsh authorities tendered out local delivery of the schemes which led to a patchwork of different providers across Wales, while some kept delivery "in house". This approach had two main impacts:



- there was greater variation in the scheme as not only did each Local Authority's scheme look different, the delivery among those contracted to provide the scheme differed;
- it introduced an element of competition among third sector organisations with experience supporting refugees and asylum seekers both within Wales and across the UK meaning a potential "race to the bottom" as organisations compete for contracts, not only with those with experience supporting refugees but also those with no experience in delivering in this area. While larger contracts, such as the Welsh Government contracted Asylum Rights Programme, encouraged collaborative partnership bids inviting agencies working in a similar space and with complementary expertise to come together, the SVPRS contracts encouraged those same agencies into competition.

The aim within these contracts is ultimately to ensure the families are integrated into life in the UK however working with families over the past 3 years we have found there are a number of barriers to their accessing the employment market. Those arriving under the scheme are those who meet the UNHCR's vulnerability criteria and so often arrive with factors which makes their access to the labour market more challenging including that they are single parents, have considerable disabilities or illnesses or have dependents who do.

There is a need to build long term relationships with those resettled under the VPRS programme in order to effectively meet complex and ever-changing needs over time. This approach is not a straight forward one of providing practical support, but one that requires a great deal more involvement with the individual or family. This approach is labour and resource intensive.

English (or Welsh) language ability is a common barrier to enabling families to not only access the labour market, but also to access local services and integration more broadly. Through our service we ensure families are supported to access language classes and provide additional language support delivered through volunteers who attend the families' homes however this still does not always meet the demand or the needs of the resettled families.

Along with the University of South Wales, we co-funded research into analysis of the barriers to accessing education and employment for forced migrants in Wales. The paper shows:

"providing appropriate language support to individuals with vastly different learner backgrounds, different levels of competency and literacy, often rehomed in geographically dispersed areas, is a complicated and labour-intensive task...it is stated that funding can be allocated to overcome barriers to access such as childcare, transport, childcare support, disability, unfamiliarity with formal learning, transport to classes, and the availability of existing local ESOL infrastructure ([Home Office 2018, p. 19](#)). Despite this, our research findings



show that these barriers continue to prevent VPRS participants from accessing ESOL across the case study areas”¹

While this support may not meet all the needs of refugees resettled through the SVPRS route, it is still vastly superior to the support provided to those who arrive through either the “spontaneous” route or the family resettlement route. The latter groups often face huge barriers in terms of meeting even their most basic needs: housing, financial support, healthcare, education, language lessons, or employment support once they receive refugee status.

Within our Refugee Well Housing Project (Move On) and Asylum Rights Programme services, we regularly support forced migrants who are facing or experiencing homelessness and destitution as a direct result of the Home Office’s policies including:

- the 28 Move On period for refugees to access housing and benefits before their Asylum Support ends;
- the policy of making refused asylum seekers destitute;
- the No Recourse to Public Funds condition on certain types of leave;
- and a vast array of reasons why those in the asylum system may find themselves without accommodation or financial support.

We would welcome lessons from the SVPRS scheme being learned not only by those committed to taking part in the new Global Resettlement Scheme, but also by those who oversee policy relating to those who come through the asylum journey before receiving status, and their families who arrive through family reunion schemes. We strongly feel those arriving through these routes should receive a comparable level of support to those arriving through the VPRS routes and an increased level of funding provided by the Home Office to those areas hosting dispersal accommodation.

Yours sincerely,

Holly Taylor

Executive Director for Policy and Communications |
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Welsh Refugee Council | Cyngor Ffoaduriaid Cymru

¹ Dr Mike Chick and Iona Hannagan-Lewis, Language Education for Forced Migrants: Governance and Approach, 12 September 2019 <<https://www.mdpi.com/2226-471X/4/3/74/htm>> [Free to access]