

Welsh Refugee Council

Empowering asylum seekers and refugees to build new futures in Wales



Press Release

Date of issue: 22 March 2021

Embargoed :

Potential changes to Housing Accommodation for asylum seekers in Wales

After much protest about housing asylum seekers at Penally Army Camp in Pembrokeshire, Wales, the Welsh Refugee Council is pleased to know that the camp was closed on 21 March 2021.

Penally Camp's closure came as no surprise to many because of its unsuitability as housing accommodation for people seeking sanctuary. The Local Council and the Police, asylum support organisations and community residents, repeatedly voiced concerns about the decision to house people in the camp and its negative impact on the camp's residents and the local community.

Welsh Refugee Council says: *We were delighted to know that the camp was closed. People make dangerous journeys to access safety and other fundamental human rights. Adequate housing is a basic human right, and we want the Home Office to ensure that all asylum accommodation meets basic housing needs like that of the rest of Wales.*

According to reports, around 650 people have crossed the Mediterranean in small boats to get to safety in the UK for 2021. The UK Government has now published its plans, as part of a consultation in the coming weeks, to change the law so that asylum seekers will be sent to other countries while waiting for their asylum applications to be processed.

While we applaud the UK Government's efforts to explore improvements in housing accommodation for asylum seekers, we are concerned that people's basic human rights will be trampled because of a lack of accountability. Those who will be looking after people will not consider the other very complex sides of the asylum process, such as people's well-being, the continuation of day-to-day family life as asylum seekers, and accommodation linked to the positive development of family units.

Also, new claimants in the UK could be barred from claiming asylum because they can no longer exercise their rights to safety while living in the UK

Last Updated: 1 June 2020

Welsh Refugee Council | Cyngor Ffoaduriaid Cymru


120 - 122 Broadway, Cardiff | Caerdydd CF24 1NJ

info@wrc.wales

02920 489 800 | F: 02920 432 999

UK Registered Charity No: 1102449

Company Number: 4818136



One asylum seeker said, *I am an asylum seeker from Syria. I've lost my entire family because of living in an unsafe and unsuitable building, and I have friends who lived in Penally Camp. I don't know what I would do if I were asked to live there, and I worry a lot about that.*

Earlier last year, we expressed concerns about the lack of engagement by the Home Office and the importance of shifting the focus on improving accommodation for asylum seekers in Wales. The Home Office must ensure that people's humanity is at the forefront of policy decision making about where best to house people who wish to claim asylum in the UK.

Althea Collymore
Communication Manager


Notes to the editor

Asylum in Wales.

- Asylum seekers flee war, torture, and persecution. They are forced to leave their homes to seek safety elsewhere. Some will seek to come to the UK because of historic links through the Commonwealth, they have families or know community members in the UK or because they have some English language skills - but the reasons are often very complex.
- There are approximately 3,000 (from WMP portal) asylum seekers in HO accommodation and about 10,000 refugees (This figure is not exact and may be higher)
- Asylum seekers make up less than 0.1% of the Welsh Population.
- When someone applies for asylum, they are accommodated on a "no choice" basis and can be sent anywhere in the UK. People don't know they will be moved to Wales when they arrive in the UK.
- The asylum process is complex, it is not easy to get a positive decision, and about 60% of asylum cases are rejected.
-
- Most are effectively banned from working; they cannot claim benefits and cannot access any Council or Local Authority housing support. They rely on Home Office support of £39.60 per person a week

What systems are there in place for people in Wales

- They are housed in shared accommodation and some share rooms with total strangers.
- Wales is a welcoming nation with a wide range of support organisations and individuals working to support people when they are in Wales.
- Wales is working towards becoming a Nation of Sanctuary.

- 
- Welsh Refugee Council one of Wales leading charities supporting asylum seekers.
 - Welsh Refugee Council wants all asylum seekers and refugees in Wales to feel welcome, be respected and have access to safety and protection. (this is part of our vision, and it would be good to work it in your comment)

What are the difficulties of the asylum journey?

- There is currently no safe route to claim asylum in the UK. The UK Government's resettlement scheme for refugees was paused earlier in 2020. Currently, the only way to seek asylum in the UK is by making an application for asylum on UK soil.
- Under International law, you can enter a country through clandestine means to seek sanctuary.
- As people's movement has reduced because of coronavirus, most routes into the UK have been closed off, leaving people to make increasingly dangerous journeys. The numbers claiming asylum has nearly halved compared to last year due to restricted movement.
- October 2020 saw the first anniversary of the tragic deaths of 39 Vietnamese migrants seeking to enter the UK in a lorry. The recent news of the deaths of 4 people - including 2 children who lost their lives trying to cross the Channel- was devastating. We need safe routes for those seeking safety in the UK.
- Often people will cross continents, make the dangerous crossings of the Mediterranean and the Channel. They often seek the help of traffickers and smugglers who exploit people in exchange for helping them cross in highly dangerous conditions. That is why we need safe resettlement routes.