

Welsh Refugee Council

Empowering asylum seekers and refugees
to build new futures in Wales



Title: Impact of the Senedd Elections 2021 in Wales

As the dust settles on what has been an unusual election for the Welsh Senedd, dominated as it was by the continuing effects of the coronavirus pandemic, we reflect on what this means for refugees and asylum seekers in Wales.

Going into these elections, the three main parties' manifestos had little to say on asylum. This was despite the major changes to the system being considered by the Home Office and an ongoing debate about the suitability of housing asylum seekers in accommodation like Penally military training camp. Both Welsh Labour and Plaid Cymru committed to retaining the Nation of Sanctuary initiative but made few other references to the issue. Plaid did commit to ending the 'no recourse to public funds' rules which prevent most asylum seekers from accessing the benefits system, but the powers to do this sit with Westminster rather than the Senedd. The Welsh Conservatives made no mention of asylum at all. Whilst this lack of attention might be understandable given the all-consuming focus on Covid-19, refugees and asylum seekers in Wales continue to face significant challenges, many exacerbated by the pandemic. The minimal discussion of refugee and asylum issues by all parties in this election is worrying.


Given this lack of attention, what impact will the outcome of the elections have in Wales?

1. **A Welsh Labour minority government means the Nation of Sanctuary initiative is likely to continue.** Jane Hutt MS has been appointed as Minister for Social Justice with responsibility for asylum issues, and as Deputy Minister in the previous government Jane was heavily involved in the development of the Nation of Sanctuary initiative. Her appointment in a Welsh Labour government offers an opportunity for the Welsh Refugee Council and other groups representing and working with refugees and asylum seekers to campaign for further action.
2. **The Welsh Government can and should continue to argue for changes to Home Office policy.** Most of the issues that affect refugees and asylum seekers are not devolved and given the worrying nature of the Home Office's [proposals to change the asylum system](#), it is important that the Welsh Government show that there is an alternative. In contrast to popular assumptions, Welsh Labour have demonstrated

Welsh Refugee Council | Cyngor Ffoaduriaid Cymru

T: 0808 196 7273, 120 - 122 Broadway, Cardiff | Caerdydd CF24 1NJ

UK Registered Charity No: 1102449 Company Number: 4818136



that a humane, respectful, and welcoming approach to asylum seekers and refugees is not politically unpalatable to voters. Whilst there was limited discussion of asylum issues in this election, their continued support for the Nation of Sanctuary demonstrates that it is possible to advocate for greater protection and rights for those seeking sanctuary and still receive popular support. This is an argument the Welsh Government should actively promote over the next parliament.

- 3. We need to do more to get refugee and asylum issues on the agenda in elections:** It took sustained campaigning and influencing by the Welsh Refugee Council and other refugee and asylum organisations to make the Nation of Sanctuary initiative a reality. If Wales is to continue to make progress, politicians across the spectrum need to be aware of the very real challenges facing refugees and asylum seekers, and the steps Wales can take to alleviate them. We all hope that the next Senedd elections won't be about Covid-19. It will take a concerted effort to ensure that Wales' commitment to being a Nation of Sanctuary isn't forgotten as well.

At the Welsh Refugee Council, we believe that refugees and asylum seekers should be welcomed, respected and have access to protection, safety and dignity that enables them to contribute and fully participate in Welsh society. Find out how you can help by [getting involved](#), or write to your local AM and ask them what they are doing to ensure Wales becomes a Nation of Sanctuary.

Welsh Refugee Council
May 2021

