

we'll keep a

welcome...

Refugees and Asylum Seekers
LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTION LEAFLET

2008

www.keepawelcome.co.uk

In 2005, asylum seekers represented just 0.025% of the total foreign nationals entering the UK.

who are refugees and asylum seekers?

A refugee: is defined by the 1951 Geneva Convention as someone who has a well founded fear of persecution for reasons of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside their country of origin, and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it'.

An asylum seeker: is someone who is waiting for his or her application to be recognised as a refugee to be considered by the government.

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This local government election leaflet is supported by:

Amnesty International; Asylum Justice; Cardiff Asylum Seeker Support Group; Children in Wales; Church Action on Poverty; Wales TUC; Cytûn – Churches Together in Wales; Displaced People in Action; Newport and District Refugee Support Group; Oxfam; Refugee Voice Wales; Save the Children, Wales; Swansea Bay Asylum Seeker Support Group; Welsh Refugee Council.



fleeing persecution - why are they here?

- Asylum seekers come to the UK seeking protection. They do not come to the UK to claim benefits and in fact know very little about the asylum system before they arrive²
- ***The UK is home to less than 3% of the world's refugees - around 290,000 out of 8.4 million worldwide***
- Three quarters of the world's refugees are living in developing countries, often in camps. Africa and Asia between them host two thirds of the world's refugees. Europe hosts just 18%
- In 2006, the UK was 16th in the league table of industrialised countries for the number of asylum applications per head of population
- Asylum applications to the UK have fallen by almost three quarters over the last five years
- A single asylum seeker aged 25 or over gets just £39.34 a week, those aged 18 to 25 years old get £31.15. This is around two thirds the level of income support

our responsibility to protect

- The 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees, was the first international law to outline how refugees should be treated
- ***It was drafted in response to the horrors of the Holocaust, when fleeing Jewish refugees were denied asylum by many countries, and because of the millions of people who became refugees in Europe during and after World War II***
- One hundred and thirty four countries signed the agreement stating that anyone, anywhere, who is forced to flee persecution in their own country, will have their claim to asylum heard fairly and receive protection if they need it³

¹ The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR)

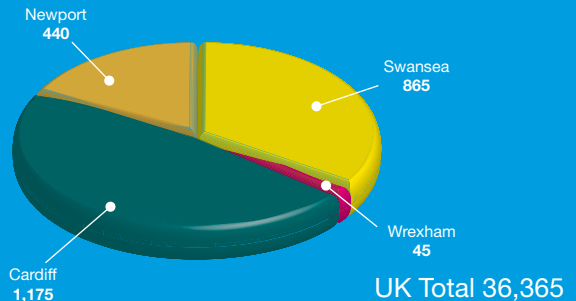
² Home Office, Understanding the decision-making of asylum seekers, July 2002

³ UNHCR

refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

- There are up to 3,000 asylum seekers in Wales and over 10,000 refugees
- The vast majority of asylum seekers are dispersed to: Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham
- There are around 110 unaccompanied asylum seeker children in Wales - children who have arrived without parents or guardians
- There are around 595 asylum seeking families in Wales with over 400 headed by a female⁴
- *Refugees and asylum seekers make up less than 0.5% of the Welsh population*
- Asylum seekers are not allowed to work to support themselves, despite the fact that many refugees are professionals such as doctors, engineers and teachers whose skills are in short supply in Wales

Regional distribution of asylum seekers (including dependants) in dispersed accommodation by Local Authorities as at end December 2006.



living in poverty

- Over 95% of people seeking asylum in Wales receive accommodation and support from National Asylum Support Services and without this, would be destitute
- *Asylum seekers are not allowed to work unless they have waited over 12 months for an initial decision on their case. They are forced to rely on state support, set at 30% below the normal level of income support. Many are living in poverty and experience poor health and hunger⁵*
- The vast majority of asylum seekers whose claims have been refused are not entitled to any legal source of income, and are destitute, surviving on the charity of friends, family and community groups
- A small number of asylum seekers whose claims have been refused qualify for support under Section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. This provides only for accommodation and either full board or vouchers - no cash
- Many asylum seekers whose claims have been refused cannot currently return home because there is no safe route of return or because their lives would be placed under threat

⁴Welsh Consortium for Refugees, Asylum Seekers & Migrants (WCRAS)


⁵Refugee Council - 'The truth about asylum' fact sheet

limited access to services

- Refugees and asylum seekers are among the more socially excluded and vulnerable people in British society
- *The cost of supporting and housing asylum seekers does not come out of local Council Tax. The full costs of housing and supporting asylum seekers are paid by the Home Office direct to the Council and private sector housing providers*
- Asylum seekers who are given housing support have no choice about where their accommodation is allocated. Accommodation provided to asylum seekers is not better than that provided to UK nationals
- In December 2003, around 80,000 asylum seekers were receiving Home Office support, compared with 15.5 million Britons on benefits (excluding retirement pensions), meaning that 0.5% of those claiming government support were asylum seekers
- Health authorities do not prioritise asylum seekers over local people. Asylum seekers are entitled to register with a local GP and do receive most services from the NHS, but they must go through the same processes as everyone else. Since 1st April 2004, unsuccessful asylum applicants have had to pay for non urgent in-patient hospital care

rebuilding lives in a new country

Refugees and asylum seekers have been forced to flee their homes and face a difficult challenge in rebuilding their lives in a new country. Most refugees and asylum seekers arrive with few if any family or friendship networks and are unfamiliar with the different systems and institutions. They may have qualifications, skills and work experience that are not recognised



what you can do?

In 2008 we will again be asking the party leaders in Wales and individual candidates to show their support and commit not to campaign negatively on issues of asylum and immigration.

As leaders in our communities, politicians have a responsibility to provide accurate information and to challenge dangerous myths on asylum and refugee issues. Wales benefits enormously from the economic, social and cultural contribution that refugees and asylum seekers make to our society. Sadly, basic misunderstandings around refugees and asylum seekers are widespread and lead to hostility and discrimination. We are lucky in Wales to have some strong leadership in this area.

We are keen to ensure that political campaigning in the Local Government Elections in May 2008 serves to strengthen rather than divide communities across Wales, and will be asking candidates to sign the following declaration:

“I commit not to use negative images of refugees and asylum seekers in the forthcoming election campaign. I will seek to promote a better understanding of refugees and asylum seekers in Wales.”

If you would like to assist us, please write to your local candidates, asking them to pledge their support.

You can use this leaflet here to help you campaign positively on issues of asylum and immigration.

Further details can be obtained from: www.keepawelcome.co.uk