

# The effects of UK policy making on refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

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# Outline

- UK asylum and immigration policy
- Refugees and asylum seekers in Wales
- UK and Welsh Government refugee integration policy – areas of similarity and divergence.
- Refugees and asylum seekers experiences of integration in Wales
- Conclusion: How do we build on Wales' more inclusive and welcoming approach when asylum and immigration are non-devolved matters?

# A note on terminology

- **Refugee**

“a person who is outside his/her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well-founded fear of persecution because of his/her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion; and is unable or unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country, or to return there, for fear of persecution”

1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees

- **Asylum Seeker**

“a person who has crossed an international border in search of protection, but whose claim for refugee status has not yet been decided” (Castles and Miller, 2009)

# Trends in asylum applications in the UK



# UK Immigration and Asylum Policy

- A raft of legislation since 1999 that has created a “hostile environment” for asylum seekers (Bloch and Schuster, 2005)
- 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act
  - Creation of National Asylum Support Service (NASS)
  - Dispersal of asylum seekers to accommodation in towns and cities away from London and south east (Wales became dispersal location in 2001)
  - Support: £37.75 per week
  - Asylum seekers unable to work

# How many asylum seekers currently live in Wales?

- Home Office do record numbers of asylum seekers dispersed to Wales
  - 2,888 living in Wales at end of 2017 (Section 95 supported)
  - 7.1% of all asylum seekers in the UK.
- Cardiff has traditionally hosted the largest proportion of asylum seekers (44.5% at end of 2017), followed by Swansea (31.4%), Newport (18.3%) and Wrexham (5.4%) (Home Office 2018).

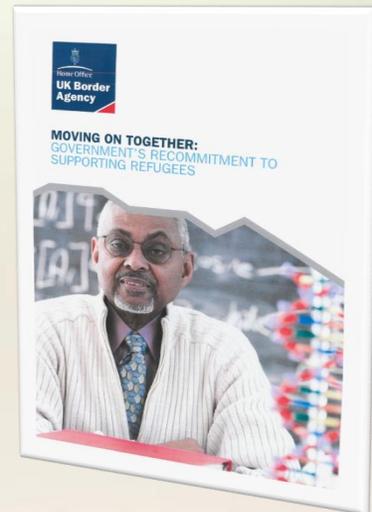
| Year ending | Number of Asylum Seekers in Wales | % of UK total |
|-------------|-----------------------------------|---------------|
| 2005        | 2,348                             | 4.7           |
| 2006        | 2,601                             | 5.4           |
| 2007        | 2,270                             | 5.3           |
| 2008        | 1,692                             | 5.4           |
| 2009        | 1,780                             | 6.2           |
| 2010        | 1,437                             | 6.5           |
| 2011        | 1,436                             | 6.9           |
| 2012        | 1,471                             | 7.3           |
| 2013        | 1,777                             | 7.6           |
| 2014        | 2,090                             | 7             |
| 2015        | 2,856                             | 8.3           |
| 2016        | 3,009                             | 7.6           |
| 2017        | 2,888                             | 7.1           |

# How many refugees currently live in Wales?

- Difficult to answer!
  - Once granted refugee status are able to move from dispersal locations
  - Refugee status not recorded in census data.
- Robinson (1999) estimated 3,500-3,600 refugees in Wales
- Crawley (2013) suggests between 6,000 and 10,000 refugees in Wales but this may be an underestimate.
- Stewart and Shafer (2015) – cities such as Cardiff becoming more popular places to settle.

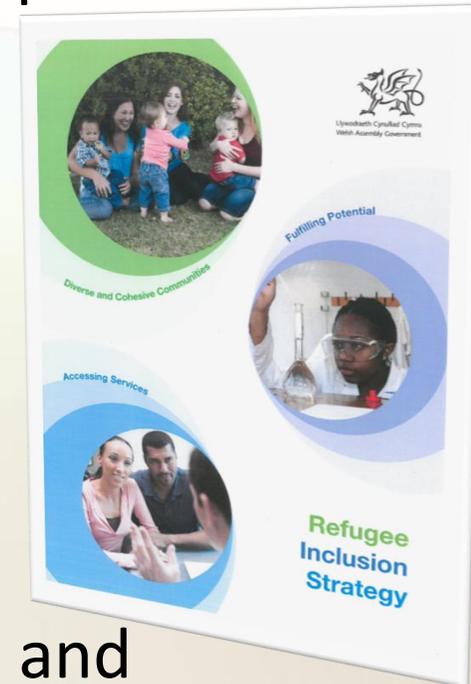
# UK Government approach to refugee integration

- Full and Equal Citizens (2000)
- Integration Matters (2005)
- Moving on Together (2009)
- Services such as Refugee Integration and Employment Service (RIES) scrapped in 2010 as part of Coalition Government austerity agenda.
- No new strategy implemented since 2009
- Dilemma: Deterrence of asylum seekers Vs. integration of refugees
- **Integration only begins once refugee status awarded**



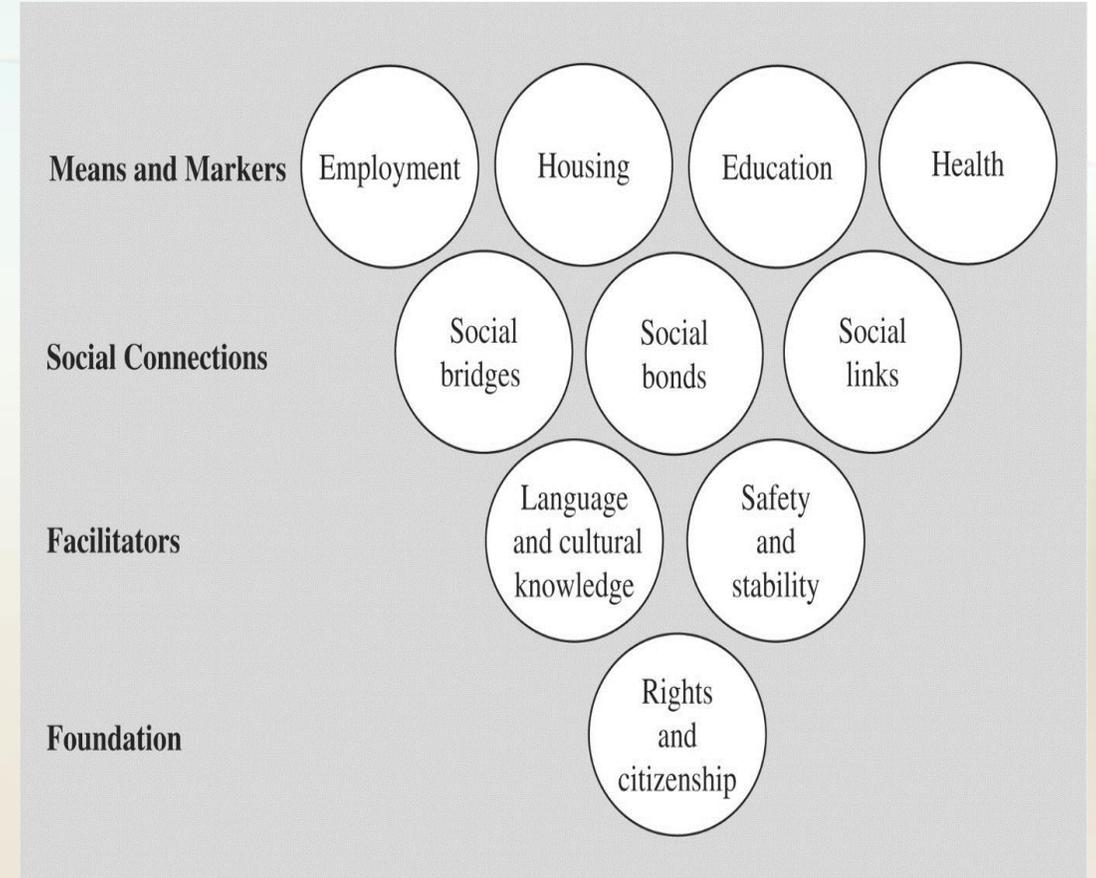
# Welsh Government Approach

- Welsh Government have devolved social policy making powers in many of the areas impacting on integration:
  - Education
  - Community cohesion
  - Health
  - Housing
  - Social services
- Inclusion rather than integration.
- **Begins on day one of arrival in Wales**
- Dilemma: Ability to realise this aspiration when asylum and immigration remain matters reserved to Westminster.



# Refugees and asylum seekers in Wales experiences of integration

- 19 semi-structured interviews with refugees and asylum seekers who had been living in Wales for between 1 month and 12 years.
- Interviews conducted in English with 11 male and 8 female participants.
- Participants from 12 different countries of origin (Iran, Sudan, Syria, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Eritrea, Kenya, Egypt, Ethiopia, Chechnya and Uganda).
- Interviews based on Ager and Strang's (2004) Indicators of Integration Framework



# Refugees and asylum seekers in Wales: experiences of integration

- “I don't know but I just feel that I love Wales and I don't actually want to- I don't really want to move to London because like it's a nicer area or like bigger city it's just because I told you it's my university” (Aysha, Refugee, 4 years in Wales).
- *“yeah really community is really a good place [...] you enjoy, you will come you enjoy, you will meet different place- different people from different area you listen to different life stories and plus they offer us food so it's good to to come here. When you came here you will develop good friendship with others so you will get information and if you get in- information you can have access to do something”* (Emanuel, refused asylum seeker, 6 months in Wales).
- *“yeah they are very kind actually they make me feel that I'm a part from the family and really I'm very surprised they- they've they made me very comfortable (.) and before that I feel that I'm not welcome here. Then I change my mind err I see the people they are very kind here.”* (Munir, Asylum Seeker, 2 months in Wales).

# Refugees and asylum seekers in Wales: experiences of integration

- Many spoke of feeling unable to do many day-to-day activities because of restrictions they faced as a result of UK asylum policy and receiving only £35.39 per week:
- *“it's just it's just for food [...]if you if you are a smoker you have to stop smoke you can't do anything with thirty five pound a week you know [...] I think I can't move from here to anywhere I want you know? you can't buy new clothes if you don't have someone to support you some money so yeah if you are not working you don't know anything just with this money you are yeah it's not enough”* (Mustafa, refused asylum seeker, 12 months in Wales)
- *“yeah amount of money because it's like people can't survive on benefits they need to do job for their survival and if you survive on £36 I don't know how can a person survive on £36 a normal British person. It's really worse because you need money for everything and even for going to saloon or going to buy a new dress or anything you need money or even for travel you need money or food”* (Bhaija, refused asylum seeker, 12 months in Wales)

# Refugees and asylum seekers in Wales: experiences of integration

- **Others spoke of a more total restriction:**
- *“nothing gonna get changed unless you have got your visa you are- erm to be honest I am like a moving dead (.) I can't do nothing I can't do study I can't work I can't do anything(.) nothing and it's quite suffering and just it's getting my nerves and it's nerve wracking and it's (.) very bad”. (Ghirmay, refused asylum seeker, 3 and a half years in Wales)*
- *“yeah because the asylum system stops you you are restricted. They might say you are not restricted but in so many ways I know I am restricted in all ways. Because if I want to go house now I can't do without the children because I haven't got the money to pay for crèche or to take them to nursery and say oh I'm going for an interview or a programme I'll be back in two hours I can't pay that money [..] so it's only the status that can change so many things aside that being an asylum seekers to me all other things is frozen and restricted cos I believe to have a life but I'm not having the life ” (Layla, refused asylum seeker, 4 years in Wales)*

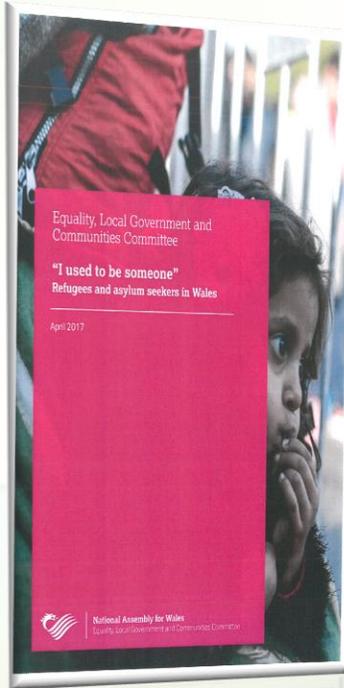
# Refugees and asylum seekers in Wales: experiences of integration

- **But, some restrictions related to areas that are the responsibility of the Welsh Government:**
- *“I registered before entering college two months. When I went to the reception and asked her- them to register they told me there very- there lots of people before you waiting two er two years. I can't and I tried and tried lots of times and finally I ask I asked to speak with the manager I explained my needs. I need I need to learn English and I asked in seriously so they put me in the college” (Samir, Refugee, 9 months in Wales).*
- *“I tried in story classes but the problem is the children I can go anywhere they have crèche for the children but not always is available the crèche” (Hayat, Refugee, 6 months in Wales)*

# Where are we now?

## Wales: Nation of Sanctuary?

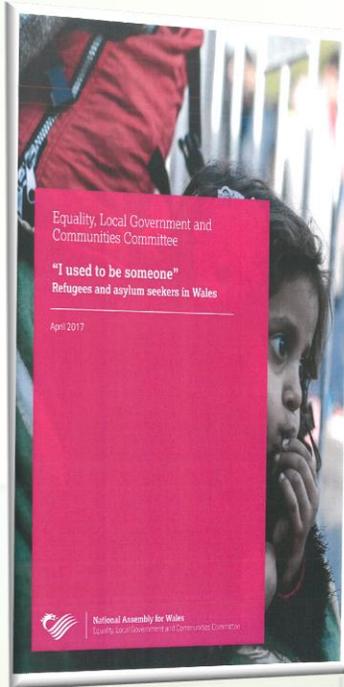
- No UK-wide refugee integration strategy and services such as the Refugee Integration and Employment Service (RIES) scrapped in 2011 as part of austerity savings.
- Focus on integration of Syrian refugees resettled via the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme (SVPRP).
- *“It is clear to the Committee from the evidence received that there is a two-tier system for asylum, which results in unequal treatment of people arriving in Wales and can lead to tensions within communities. This disparity has its origins in the UK Government Home Office’s prioritisation of support for Syrian refugees, including the fast-tracking of their paperwork through the Department for Work and Pensions”.* (National Assembly for Wales, 2017.p.26)



# Where are we now?

## Wales: Nation of Sanctuary?

- Nation of Sanctuary – Refugee and Asylum Seeker Plan (Consultation document -2018)
- *“This draft plan will be built upon during the consultation period to ensure it supports us to work collaboratively with other public authorities, communities and refugees and asylum seekers themselves to make Wales a genuine Nation of Sanctuary”.*
- **But:** *“The Welsh Government believes that improvements need to be made to the standard of accommodation for asylum seekers, the financial support asylum seekers receive and the funding support provided to Welsh public services to support integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Wales, regardless of their route to the UK. Although we will continue to work with the UK Government on these matters as far as possible, we have to accept that we cannot control their decisions. The proposed actions in this plan cannot contravene UK Government legislative rules relating to refugees and asylum seekers”.*



# Conclusions

- UK government has created a “hostile environment” aimed at deterring asylum seekers from coming to the UK and which encourages refused asylum seekers to leave the UK – taken precedence over integration.
- Although Welsh Government have a more welcoming and inclusive approach their aspirations are restricted by reserved asylum and immigration policy.
- Participants talked positively about Wales but also of restrictions they faced that were generally as a result of UK government asylum policy.
- Welsh Government should continue to use its devolved powers wherever possible to ensure inequalities for refugees and asylum seekers are reduced and access to opportunities increased.

# Thank you

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