

Local benefits to be gained from migration.

Introduction

This is a short note to set out some of the potential benefits to be gained by welcoming asylum seekers, migrants, and refugees to local areas, highlighting the experience of dispersal areas and including some examples from people with lived experience of settling in Wales.

Fostering a welcoming culture towards asylum seekers

While immigration and asylum are non-devolved, Local authorities have very considerable capacity to foster a 'welcoming culture' towards asylum-seekers and, particularly, to facilitate the building of relationships between those whose claims are successful, acquiring refugee status, and members of the host community.

The [mayors of Paris, London and New York](#) have jointly written: 'Investing in the integration of refugees and immigrants is not only the right thing to do, it is also the smart thing to do. Asylum seekers, refugees and other foreign-born residents bring needed skills and enhance the vitality and growth of local economies, and their presence has long benefited our three cities.'

Cllr Mark Child, mayor of Swansea has [commented](#):

"We must continue to offer sanctuary and we must continue to welcome people from elsewhere to Swansea. Many of them will contribute hugely to our city and all deserve our protection from violence and oppression." (July 2020)ⁱ

There is a body of research, including [research from the EU](#), which cites the benefits of local authorities welcoming refugees:

- Refugees can increase consumer markets for domestic commodities, create new markets, bring new skills, provide employment, and fill vacant positions.
- The experience of many countries in Europe and beyond (Australia, United States among others) has also been that refugees can have a big role in the revitalisation of small and rural centres.
- Levels of inward migration can contribute to sustained population growth which can bring economic growth, increased [entrepreneurship](#), and a richer and more diverse culture
- Migrants arrive with skills and contribute to human capital development of receiving countries.

While Wales based [research](#) found no substantial evidence that community tensions are an inevitable consequence of new immigration, positive outcomes depend on the presence of strong leadership, such as that shown in responding to the humanitarian crisis in Syria; making the humanitarian case for supporting people arriving in Wales

via other UK Government schemes, and for the advantages of asylum dispersal, will go some way to minimising the 'two-tier' support system which has emerged as a result of the prioritisation of effort and funding towards formal Resettlement Programmes (for example, the Syrian programme)¹. Welsh local authorities have an opportunity to provide support for asylum seekers who cannot access resettlement programmes and help to ensure that all asylum seekers and refugees in Wales are offered similar levels of support.

Experience from Welsh dispersal areas

A number of UK cities, including [Swansea](#) are members of the Intercultural Cities network and contribute their expertise to the Network, as well as learning from it, and developing policy and practice which supports the positive integration of newly arrived asylum seekers.

Swansea's approach has been [recognised](#) for combining community cohesion principles intertwined with a human rights approach. Through Swansea's commitment to the UNESCO Rights Respecting School network, its role as a Sanctuary city, and its willingness to adopt a Human Rights City approach, the city has committed to the *diversity advantage*, as a vision which results from equal opportunities' policies and human rights learning.

The city has a team of five persons with leading responsibility for intercultural integration. This mainly sits in the Poverty and Prevention Service, although other Services take responsibility too. The *Access to Services Team* deals with the legal responsibility on equalities/protected characteristics. The budget covering the integration and equality's teams, the Migration Asylum seeker and refugee coordinator (also the resettlement worker), and monitoring mechanisms are provided largely from the Council with some limited support from the Welsh Government and the Home Office (UK Government).

Swansea's approach to diversity has been translated into policies, projects, and strong communication with migrants. It was the second city in the UK to become a City of Sanctuary, a network of cities that welcomes those fleeing from war and persecution.

Cardiff

Cardiff has provided a strong lead on asylum dispersal for a number of years, has a history rich in movement and resettlement and is clearly influenced by the changes that migration has brought, with a vibrant and proactive third sector and civil society contingent in support of diversity and migration.

Oasis Cardiff

Oasis are a charity which helps refugees and asylum seekers integrate with their local community. The various events and activities they have organised to facilitate community integration have had a noticeable benefit on the socio-cultural well-being

¹ [gen-ld11074-e.pdf \(senedd.wales\)](#)

of the local area and these successes and [stories of integration](#) are amplified and shared across social media.

In 2020, despite the various challenges and restrictions OASIS have faced as a result of the covid-19 pandemic, they have established a [podcast](#) that details the refugee experience and continued a community Home Supper Club, where refugees and asylum seekers work in the Oasis kitchen to cook meals which are then picked up by local residents.

Third sector and civil society support

The success of the current dispersal area Local Authorities in welcoming asylum seekers is, to a large extent, dependent on specialist advice and advocacy support that is funded by Welsh Government² and also by Migrant Help, who have a national contract with the Home Office to provide advice and support. With additional funding, it is possible that this support could be accessible to other local authority areas. More broadly, this work is supplemented by various third sector and civil society groups in a variety of different ways across Wales, including active support from The British Red Cross, Displaced People in Action and Eyst.

The success of [Community Sponsorship](#) scheme in small towns and cities across Wales has demonstrated the enormous goodwill and support by civil society towards supporting refugees, engendered by the humanitarian response to the Syrian crisis. Going forward, there are opportunities to broaden community support and goodwill in support of asylum seekers.

Case Studies – Lived experience

Almas is a British Red Cross Refugee Voices Ambassador living in South Wales. Almas volunteers for her local foodbank, organising for food to be delivered to people who are self-isolating or unable to leave their homes. Having struggled with loneliness in the past, Almas has made the most of the challenging circumstances during coronavirus and is proactively calling people and offering them help and a friendly ear; "I am happy to help my community. When you have the passion to help, no matter the crisis, you can always find a way to help people: putting a smile on someone's face when they are going through a hard time, giving them a call, chatting with them, being optimistic." (story provided by British Red Cross).

Angie, aged 57, [forced to leave Zimbabwe twenty years ago](#), has become an important figure in the lives of many people in **Newport**, children and adults alike. Proud of her Zimbabwean-Welsh identity, she is a well-known face within the community, having provided a safe space for vulnerable women, taught countless

² This currently includes the Asylum Rights Programme, the ReStart: Refugee Integration Project, the 'Move On' project, and the Wales Asylum Seeker and Refugee Doctors Scheme, as well as bespoke anti-destitution, legal advice, and anti-hate crime projects.

children and adults to swim, and provided endless support for individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds over the years.

Chawan Ali had to flee Iraq in 2015 with her parents and three younger brothers to find safety after years of fighting. With limited English and sporadic schooling in her own country, the then 16-year-old had to fight for refugee status, while trying to settle into a new life in **Wrexham**. Alongside her own studies, Chawan is also championing policy change on the right to work, family reunion and detention for others like her. Through her involvement with the [British Red Cross VOICES network](#), an independent group of asylum seekers and refugees who self-advocate to raise awareness and effect positive change, Chawan has spoken at the Senedd and the Houses of Parliament.

Joseff Gnagbo lives in **Cardiff** and is an [asylum seeker who is now a fluent Welsh speaker](#). It is his passion about social injustice that prompted him to take up Welsh when he arrived in Wales in February 2018 as an asylum seeker. "I thought maybe I'm going to stay in Wales," he says. "I was going through the application process for asylum and I didn't know what was going to happen. But if I stay, I should learn the language, I thought. If I live in a country, it's normal for me to speak the language out of respect for the country and the people hosting me too." Joseff now works as a carer, a translator and a teacher, and volunteers for *Cymdeithas yr Iaith*, the Welsh Language Society. He also gives half-hour Welsh language taster sessions at the Welsh Refugee Council.

Joseph and Chawan both won [Learning and Work Institute Inspire Adult Awards](#) last year.

For further information, contact anne.hubbard@wlga.gov.uk

References

¹[Flowers help celebrate 10 years of Swansea's special status \(wales247.co.uk\)](#)

[Refugee Policies for the Intercultural City 16806ee571 \(coe.int\)](#)

[Swansea Intercultural Profile 1680790d25 \(coe.int\)](#)

Official website of the ICC-UK network: <http://interculturalcities.org.uk/2290-wales-migration-cohesion.pdf>

[cr-ld11012-e.pdf \(senedd.wales\)](#)

[Cardiff Migration Stories 210x210 20pp v3.pdf \(makinghistories.org.uk\)](#)

[From moving to Wrexham without speaking a word of English to representing asylum seekers at the Senedd | The Leader \(leaderlive.co.uk\)](#)

[The rapper turned asylum seeker who's now a fluent Welsh speaker - Wales Online](#)

Further links

[Home | Swansea City of Sanctuary](#)

Community Sponsorship – 'a little bit of perfection'-featuring case studies from Wales.

['It's a little kernel of perfection' - UNHCR Spotlight](#)

Video celebrating Community Sponsorship in Wales, led by Croesco Teifi.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PaCBJYx1YB>