

Focus Groups with Refugees: Report to the Welsh Refugee Council

Recommendations

During 2005 researchers from the Cardiff University School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies ran a series of focus groups with refugees. This document lists the researchers' recommendations based on what they found during the focus groups.



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

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Section 1: Language, Communication and Information

No	Recommendations	Division/ Lead
1.1	Assembly Government to work in partnership with RCOs and other agencies (e.g., housing provides, WLACRAS) to produce accurate statistics on refugee numbers and locations for policy purposes. These should be gender sensitive.	Stats/ research; Info
1.2	Refugees require better information on a range of issues crucial to their integration and inclusion. Better statistics on who and where they are is a first step in knowing how to provide this. The development of further strategies should be carried out in partnership with RCOS, WRC and other relevant agencies.	Stats/ research; RCOs & other vol orgs; Info
1.3	Capitalise on the rich linguistic resources available in refugee communities by capacity building of RCOs to provide language support for new arrivals in their own mother tongue, and providing professional interpreting training for refugees to ensure adequate, sensitive and accurate translation.	RCO; Language
1.4	Review current interpretation and translation practices and ensure that public services at least actually make use of what is available and know that they should do this.	Language
1.5	Review the provision of ESOL in partnership with RCOS and others, to ensure that provision takes account of differences in ability and where possible uses support workers who speak community languages to support beginners who struggle with classes entirely in English.	Education; ESOL; RCOs
1.6	Find ways of supporting refugees to pay travel and childcare costs to enable them to attend English classes.	ESOL
1.7	Provide training and information for frontline service workers on	All public

	refugee issues (history, geography and policy changes) and on their responsibilities towards refugee clients.	service providers
1.8	Work in partnership with RCOs and others to facilitate encounters between refugees and 'host' populations which encourage mutual understanding, provide information in both directions and work to counter racism and prejudice.	Community relations (consortium)

Section 2: Building Strong Communities

No	Recommendation	Division/ Lead
2.1	If an inclusion policy for refugees is to be more than rhetoric and have real effects the terms <i>integration</i> , <i>inclusion</i> and <i>community</i> must be much better defined so that it is clear <i>who is to integrate or be included into what and how</i> .	Intro/ Steering Group
2.2	Given the amount of prejudice, racism and discrimination that is evidenced in the focus groups, the Assembly Government needs to take the lead in ensuring that current equal opportunities and race relations legislation is not only complied with in legal terms, but implemented and monitored at all levels across Wales.	EPU/ Racism
2.3	Combating institutional racism in the police, in welfare provision and in the media remain central to the project of inclusion. Training is required in all these areas.	Racism – CRE/EPU; All services; Community safety; Media
2.4	Certain institutions – work, education, libraries, churches in this sample – but also arts and sports - have a particularly important role in promoting integration and	Communities; Employment; Education;

	inclusion, in combating racism and in constructing community. More focus needs to be placed on interventions in these areas.	Vol sector; Arts and culture
2.5	This requires first addressing the poverty and linguistic and training needs which currently stop people reaching these significant points of intervention. It is not insignificant that very few of those we spoke to were involved in sport or the arts. Many were unemployed. Some could not afford the fare to travel to places of worship.	ESOL; Arts and sports; Poverty
2.6	It must be made clear that interventions which focus on local forms of racism or prejudice in deprived or working-class areas continually fail to address elite and much more powerful forms of racism such as those expressed in the political language of immigration itself and in the media. These elite forms of racism must also be addressed.	Racism/EPU; Positive images/ CROESO
2.7	Forms of, and/or fora for, forms of engagement which combine knowledge and communication, are strongly led, bring groups together and are honest and open about confronting racism are urgently needed.	Communities; CROESO
2.8	White 'host' communities need to be informed about incomers to their areas, about who they are and what support they are receiving, about integration/inclusion agendas, and about ways in which they as 'hosts' can contribute to these.	Info for receiving communities
2.9	Refugees need accurate information about the political process in Wales and the UK. Using the new Citizenship booklet may be a place to start.	Info for refugees

2.10	Anomalies with respect to franchise, particularly in relation to long term residents and children of longterm residents educated in the UK, require attention.	UK issues
2.11	Voluntary work is a crucial way of dealing with imposed periods of unemployment as asylum seekers. Ways need to be found of involving mainstream employers in providing volunteering opportunities and of making a culture where this happens a normal part of doing business in Wales.	Volunteering/ community dev; Employment and training
2.12	Involving refugees and RCOs in all of these processes as partners and experts is a crucial part of the way forward.	RCO capacity building
2.13	They must have stable and sustainable funding to do the work that is needed.	RCOs

Section 2: Recommendations of the Refugee Community Organisations

(Refugee Voice Wales, the Cymru Refugee Academic Council, Voice of the Congo and the Somali Integration Society)

No	Recommendations	Division/ Lead
2.14	'This is the idea: the empowerment of the refugee communities to be representative within the areas of the political decision regarding the issues and concerns of the refugees here, regarding health, housing, education. They know the needs of their communities, so they should involved in policy'	RCOs
2.15	'Empowering refugee community organisations...means changing from being service users to service providers'	RCOs
2.16	'Lets try to communicate with [the Welsh Assembly	Information;

	Government], to inform them, to give them firsthand information, then it will become very easy for them to inform people in their constituencies'	RCOs
2.17	'This is in the hands of the Assembly government to facilitate integration, to find work placements based on the need of individuals and the need of the market. And when those people are on the scheme, give them access, lets give them the opportunity to learn about the system, to know more about the area'	Employment and training; Volunteering/ community development
2.18	'[The refugees doctors group, WARD] is helping people with that professional background...it is good, but not enough, extend it, give the same approach to the other people with the other professional backgrounds'	RCOs/ Community dev; Employment and training
2.19	'We [RCOs] can help people by GP access, and supporting these RCOs and helping the GP services by giving interpretation or information. Even your approach to your GP differs completely from my approach, it depends on our cultural background. So here it means the communities are going to give the access to its members to understand the existing culture here'	RCOs; Information; Better Understanding; Health; All services
2.20	'RCOs should participate in the housing association management committee...by doing that they bring the issues and concerns of refugee needs to that place'	Housing
2.21	'Bring this service to those communities who have many teachers, professional teachers, who might teach basic English, ESOL, for their community'	RCO; ESOL
2.22	'When you are asking for empowerment that means you are also asking for funds'	RCO

2.23	'Refugee Voice Wales feels confident to be able to take forward general issues affecting all refugees and many of these are policy issues which as individual organisations people might not be able to tackle because of a variety of reasons that include capacity in terms of financial resources, human resources, and sometimes appropriate knowledge of issues. By coming together as RCOs people have more networks and are likely to receive more assistance from those willing to help refugees and asylum seekers.'	RCO
2.24	'As there is a more wide varied membership to Refugee Voice Wales, people can share resources which are lacking as individuals. As most of the work is voluntary it also means people can share their time and be active in a variety of activities affecting the community'.	RCO

Section 3. Fulfilling Potential

Employment

No	Recommendation	Division/Lead
3.1	Continue to make recommendations against the enforced unemployment of asylum seekers by UK Policy. This contravenes Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and clearly works against both integration and inclusion.	UK
3.2	Deal with unemployment among refugee communities.	UK; Employment/ training
3.3	Ensure that employers are not only legally compliant with, but implementing current Equal Opportunities and Diversity	EPU

	Legislation, including the Race Relations Act, and that this is monitored.	
3.4	Provide training for employers and frontline staff: e.g., in JobCentre Plus and other agencies.	Employment & training; All services
3.5	Capacity-build RCOs to provide information and training to their members on UK employers' expectations.	RCOs; Employment & tr.
3.6	Capacity-build RCOs to develop links leading to work experience placements for their members.	RCOs and Emp & tr
3.7	Deal with the issue of under-employment among refugee communities. Extend the WARD scheme in duration and expand it across other professional areas: e.g., re-training for refugee journalists, academics, accountants and others.	Empl & tr
3.8	Learn from the WARD scheme. Negotiate towards the inclusion of refugee doctors in the British rather than the overseas jobs competition and use this as a precedent for categorisation of other professionals once re-trained. Ensure as far as possible, in setting up such schemes, that some employment will follow re-training.	Empl & tr
3.9	Adopt a gender aware approach to all of the above issues. A large proportion of refugee and asylum seeking households in Wales are headed by female single parents. Many of these women are working currently in unregulated unskilled areas such as cleaning. They are subject to exploitation and discrimination when they do work and they require flexible childcare support in order to do it. Both areas require attention and review.	RCOs; Empl & tr

Education

No	Recommendation	Division/ Lead
3.10	Provide more support and for post-16 education and training in order to help asylum seeker and refugee young people to achieve their full potential.	Elwa
3.11	Provide support for young people who have completed their education in Wales but are unable to work, to engage in further training or to attend university because the Home Office has failed to make a decision in respect of their parents' leave to remain.	Elwa
3.12	All schools must have a zero-tolerance policy on racist/anti-refugee bullying and harassment. Teachers must be trained and supported to implement this and it must be monitored. Examples of good practice should be documented and used to develop good practice in all schools.	Education /EMAS; Esyn; TTA
3.13	Training for all teachers as well as inspectors and LEAs will also be necessary.	Education: TTA; Estyn; LEAs
3.14	Provide a dedicated asylum-seeker/refugee team at Children's Services	Children's division
3.15	Guidance for schools to ensure that asylum seekers are able to access the benefits to which they are entitled, with standard practice across Wales (e.g., school meals and poverty related benefits).	Education
3.16	Information for refugee families about local schools and admissions procedures.	Info; Education
3.17	Encouragement for children to undertake extra-curricular	Education ;

	activities, and where possible the provision of support to overcome the barriers that poverty imposes on participation.	Arts, sports, culture
3.18	Develop better lines of communication between police and communities about white youths and anti-social or racist behaviour outside school and ways of dealing with it.	Community Safety

Welfare

No	Recommendation	Division/ Lead
3.19	From other sections of this report it is clear that many of the causes of school failure or under-achievement are related to poverty: poor housing, health problems related to this, depressed and distracted parents without the English ability and skills to support education in English and so on. Underlying all the recommendations above then is the need to introduce measures to alleviate poverty and provide better quality of life for the asylum family.	Communities Directorate (poverty)

Section Four. Accessing Core Services

Housing

No	Recommendation	Division/ Lead
4.1	The majority of negative experiences with NASS housing noted in this report occurred before asylum seekers reached Wales. Nonetheless these experiences impact on later integration in the Welsh context. They demonstrate gender, cultural and religious insensitivity and almost certainly fail to comply with UK Human Rights, Equal Opportunities and Diversity and Race Relations	UK

	Legislation. These needs to be pointed out at every opportunity in an effort to effect change.	
4.2	Work to have the concept of “local connection” disappplied to refugees, because it works against integration.	UK
4.3	There is an urgent need to improve the quality of current council and private housing stock in Wales, to enforce regulations to control private landlord’s behaviours (whether racist and discriminatory, ignoring complaints from tenants, or withholding bonds for specious reasons), and to review and prevent discriminatory practice by councils.	Housing
4.4	Stronger partnerships between housing organisations and RCOs could lead to more culturally sensitive services, related more closely to people’s needs.	Housing; RCOs
4.5	Reinstate and extend a service like the Homefinder service to manage the difficulties presented by the policy context: i.e., the short period allowed for people to find housing once refugee status is granted. There are other examples of good innovative practice that could be explored here (Perry 2005). However, it is important that local authorities and government departments look to ‘mainstream’ services and funding to ensure wide availability and sustainability.	Housing; SUNRISE/ UK

Health

No	Recommendation	Division/ Lead
4.6	Manage expectations with accurate information about the length of waiting lists and cultural assumptions by NHS practitioners. Capacity-build Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) to provide this information.	Info; RCOs; Health

4.7	Provide accurate information to GPs on their responsibilities with respect to asylum seekers and refugees and how to fulfil them. Medico-legal reports demand responsibility to the courts and require time-consuming research by the health professional. This needs to be understood and training provided if necessary to enable doctors to (a) recognise and treat traumatised patients and (b) provide the evidence required by the Home Office in making decisions.	Health
4.8	The Welsh Assembly Government to ensure NASS recognise that its acceptance of Scott's (2004) proposals to improve asylum-seekers' healthcare access must also extend to the companies it employs.	Health; UK/ NASS
4.9	Capacity-build RCOs to provide healthcare support workers, drawing on the considerable healthcare expertise available from refugee doctors and nurses living in Wales (see section on Employment for further discussion of this group)	RCO; Health; Empl

The following mental health recommendations are contributed by Steve Maddern, of Cardiff Health Access Team, and the All-Wales Asylum Seeker nurses forum (Maddern 2005: 143).

No	Recommendation	Division/ Lead
4.10	The Department of Health and The Wales Assembly Government should have a strategic vision on the provision of mental health services provided to asylum seekers and refugees.	Health
4.11	Specific posts should be identified within regions to identify and co-ordinate existing mental health services for refugees, and to develop these where there is the greatest need.	Health
4.12	Funding for organisations such as the Medical Foundation for the	Health

	Care of Victims of Torture should be considered as mainstream to enable local services to be provided on a basis equivalent to those in London, Manchester and Glasgow	
4.13	Consideration should be given by health services and local authorities, health and social services commissioners, Wales Assembly Government, Scottish Parliament etc. as to the nature and structure and function of mental health services for refugees and asylum seekers. Options such as full integration with existing, generic services or specific, dedicated mental health services for refugees, or a mix of the different models could be considered.	Health
4.14	As part of the above review of service delivery, health and social commissioners should consider the skills and experiences of service providers in caring for and treating refugees and asylum seekers.	Health

Section Five: The Vulnerable

No	Recommendation	Division/ Lead
5.1	Various areas of UK Government Policy on asylum have negative impacts on the entire process of integration/inclusion and social cohesion in devolved contexts and require constant monitoring and response by the Welsh Assembly Government. These include: the policy which makes failed asylum seekers destitute (Bucolli 2005); the practices of deportation, which like the former, drive asylum seekers underground; the process of multiple dispersals by NASS; the issue of Section Four vouchers and the vulnerability of babies; the position of children of longterm asylum seekers	UK

	who complete school and have nowhere to go.	
5.2	This section of the report raises again the need for training of teachers in handling vulnerable children: e.g., knowing how to advise, and support the ambitions of, those whose parents do not have status.	Education; Children
5.3	Education, along with sports and cultural activities, are key areas for personal integration and social inclusion. They are often not available to refugee children or such children are unable to 'develop their full potential' in these areas because of poverty (or the complex economics of transnational family arrangements). There is a need to ensure that refugee children are eligible for sports grants (as well as school books etc) and that a much greater focus is placed on refugee children's involvement in sporting and cultural activities.	Education; Arts, Sports & Culture
5.4	Post-16 education is again an issue for both asylum seeker and refugee children. Discussions need to take place with UCAS and universities in order to provide better access for both to these forms of further education. This seems particularly urgent in relation to children of longterm asylum seekers who have effectively grown up in Wales, in whose education Wales has invested over periods of five years or more, and who then find themselves unable to work or study further. This whole area requires review and policy focus.	Post 16 Education; UK