



Refugees and asylum seekers focus

16/12/2022

Regional partnership board children's sub group toolkit

Population needs assessment summary

"An asylum seeker is a person fleeing persecution in his or her homeland, has arrived in another country, made themselves known to the authorities and has exercised their legal right to apply for asylum. These individuals will be awaiting the outcome of their asylum claim.

Under the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, a refugee is a person who "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country."

- Welsh Government, [Nation of Sanctuary Refugee and Asylum-seeker Plan](#)

Key information from the Population Needs Assessment:

- Refugees and asylum seekers represent around 0.5% of the population in Wales.
- From 2017 to 2021, 241 asylum seekers (including adults and children) have been resettled across the North Wales local authorities.
- Wrexham and Conwy are asylum dispersal areas.
- Due to the small numbers, the published statistics for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children is limited for North Wales (see below for the latest statistics). Services will be needed to support their needs. They often arrive with little known about their health and wellbeing needs.
- Asylum seekers in dispersed accommodation are directly supported by services.
- A key issue flagged for asylum seekers and refugees is the need for improved mental health support.



Demographics and statistics

Though the number of unaccompanied young asylum seekers in North Wales is relatively low, it looks as though numbers have risen since we last reported in the Population Needs Assessment, which used September 2021 data. (Data was not available for all areas for the PNA report.)

County	Looked after children 2022	Care leavers 2022	Looked after children 2021
Anglesey	5	5	<5
Gwynedd	10	<5	0
Conwy	<5	<5	0
Denbighshire	10	0	
Flintshire	10	<5	0
Wrexham	<5	5	
North Wales	40	10	<5

Source: Local authority data collection

Figures for care leavers only counts those unaccompanied young asylum seekers who, after reaching the age of 18, choose to stay in contact with the local authority.

Data is rounded to the nearest 5 to avoid disclosure. The North Wales totals are rounded separately, so they will not equal the sum of individual area figures.

The North Wales totals are for those areas for which we have data.

Where we have this data (it is not available for all local authorities) we can see that unaccompanied young asylum seekers who are looked after by the local authority:

- are mostly aged 15-17
- usually started using our services within the last two years
- may be in a foster care setting, in supported lodgings, or living semi-independently
- may be placed out-of-county.

Unaccompanied young asylum seekers who are care leavers:

- range in age from 18 to 25
- may have been using our services for more than five years
- are likely to be living in accommodation under their own tenancy.

The countries of origin for unaccompanied children seeking asylum include:

- Afghanistan
- Albania
- Egypt
- Eritrea
- Ethiopian
- Iran
- Iraq
- Morocco
- Pakistan
- Sudan
- Syria
- Ukraine
- Vietnam

We do not have this data for all local authorities.

Consideration also needs to be given to young refugees who arrive as part of a family. Though they may not need the same level of social care as unaccompanied young asylum seekers they will still have contact with welfare services provided in the area, including health, education, and housing services. As well as established programmes such as the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Scheme and the Afghan Relocation and Assistance Programme, 2022 also saw the introduction of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.

Data at a North Wales level is incomplete but national figures suggest 25% to 40% of people settled through these schemes are aged under 18.

From the data we have from Wrexham and Gwynedd we know there are:

- about 130 children aged under 18 settled under the Homes for Ukraine scheme who are known to local authorities
- about 60 children aged under 18 within other schemes (including children born after settlement).

Survey results

On the 29th of November 2022 the RIC Hub engagement team was invited to a session with refugee and asylum-seeker children and their families at The Salvation Army centre in Rhyl with British Red Cross and the Community Cohesion team. We asked the children and young people about their magic/tragic moments and asked them if they had any ideas on how to improve services. These are some of the responses:

“There are very nice people in hospitals, but when you’re waiting there, there is not a lot to do. If there are activities, there when you’re bored so you could be more patient. My mum and dad do not understand English, so I have to talk to the doctors but sometimes they do not talk to me. A translator would be good for my mum and dad if me or my brother or sisters are ill.”

“There should be a book in hospital in Albanian for me to read”

“In school I learn lots of work. I listen to the teacher because she has been kind to me and listens to me. When I first came to this place, and I went to school I didn’t get ignored and made lots of friends. I was made to feel very welcome and when I was scared after talking to my teacher, I was not scared any more. When I went to hospital, I was lucky my parents stayed with me. They could not understand the nurse there as my mum does not speak English and my dad was in work.”

“People should be nice; they should learn we are good; they should stop bullying. They should be kind; they should be friendly, and everyone should play kind and should not be mean. Bullying is bad, be kind.”

Youth Cymru staff had informal conversations with their refugee and asylum-seeking children and collated the responses to create these themes:

Education:

- Bullying and racial abuse not taken seriously – this then added to the lack of trust, confidence, and apathy regarding services.
- Students failing in subjects due to not having specific vocabulary and staff not having time to deal with these language issues and it is not dealt with in English as it doesn’t come under their remit either.
- General conversation classes do not cover speaking on the phone using formal English.

Not understanding or knowing how to fill out forms for school, housing, hospital, and so on.

Not knowing who to turn to for help in specific areas of life – passed from pillar to post as their initial enquiry is not understood which also leads to lack of trust, confidence, and apathy regarding services.

Asylum seeker and refugee support services

Organisations providing support to asylum seekers in North Wales include:

- Local authorities
- Welsh Refugee Council
- British Red Cross

Once an asylum seeker arrives in an area, they/their families are offered support to access:

- Housing
- Healthcare
- Education (registering with a school, help with university/college applications)
- Financial/legal support

The local authority also provides additional services for unaccompanied asylum seekers including:

- Fostering services
- Safeguarding support
- Housing options
- Tenancy support
- Advice and assistance with Home Office requirements.

Whilst support is available across North Wales and partners work collaboratively, a greater concentration of support is available in the Wrexham.

Wrexham – City of Sanctuary

Wrexham is one of the Home Office dispersal towns in Wales, accommodating asylum seekers arriving in the UK. There is a focussed network of support services in place for families and young people aged 18-25:

- Welsh Refugee Council - Advice and Support Worker (Refugee Well Housing Project & Asylum Rights Programme).
- BCUHB Health Visitor – GP, dentists, nurseries and schools registrations, assesses health needs and makes referrals.
- Housing Officer (Ready Homes) manages Home Office procured properties in Wrexham.

They also run support groups and activities to improve social networks and learn new skills and a weekly surgery.

The Wales Sanctuary service partner with agencies to help with legal advice, provide access to service for women, children and young people services and promote client led advocacy:

- Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team (EYST) Wales offer advice and support for young asylum seekers, including access to a Wrexham based Youth Club.
- Displaced People in Action (DPIA)
- Tros Gynnal Plant (TGP Cymru)
- Black Association of Women Step Out (BAWSO)
- Asylum Justice

British Red Cross and Welsh Refugee Council also offer support to Ukrainian Refugees.



Policy background

The definition of an asylum seeker is 'someone who has applied for refugee status [...] and is still waiting for a decision on that application' and refugee is defined as someone 'who has already received a positive decision from the authorities on his or her asylum claim' [1].

The Welsh Government Refugee and Asylum Seeker Plan [2] contains the following points directly relevant to children include; health needs/barriers, healthy start, mental health, sport/physical activity, education, family support, advice/support, and supporting local authorities to look after child asylum seekers.

The briefing 'Supporting unaccompanied asylum-seeking children' [3] sets out rights/entitlements including; preventative services, well-being, assessment for those in need of care and support, meeting needs, support for care leavers, and support for return to country of origin if appropriate.

Asylum-seeking children are covered by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child [4], meaning they have the right to be safe, educated, healthy and happy. This includes; not to be discriminated against, best interests protected, having things needed to survive/develop, and involvement in decisions affecting them.

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act [5] is the wider legal framework that is inclusive of children seeking asylum and stipulates the need to; assess needs, meet needs, support with disabilities, and provide care if needed.

The Migrants' Entitlements to Educational Services in Wales [6] clarifies the rights of asylum-seeking children to education and additional support if eligible including; free school meals, flying start, counselling, and special educational needs support.

A Public Health Wales report [7] sets out recommendations to improve health services for asylum seekers, recommendations relating to children included; access to mental health resources for self-help, prompt access Mental Health Services if needed, and concerns around using children for translation.

Welsh Government has also recently updated their guidance for supporting children seeking asylum for both foster carers [8] and social workers [9].

Literature search

Please ask to see a fully referenced version.

What issues are experienced by child asylum seekers/refugees?

Increased risk of mental health problems:

- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Depression
- Self-harm
- Behaviour problems
- Anxiety

Pre-migration issues:

- Trauma; war, violence, torture, sexual assault
- Separation from/loss of loved ones
- Lack of food/water/shelter/education
- Health issues
- Forced labour
- Lack of schooling

Post-migration issues:

- Social isolation/loss of community
- Loss of loved ones
- Acculturation
- Finances including housing
- Language barriers
- Hostility/violence/discrimination/stigma/racism
- Challenges accessing health and social care
- Asylum procedures and an uncertain future
- Increased vulnerability to exploitation
- Education:
 - Additional Learning Needs access
 - Bullying
 - Social
 - Lack awareness in teachers
 - Delayed by age assessments
 - Poverty (resources, trips, travel, housing)



Literature search continued...

What issues are experienced by unaccompanied asylum seekers/refugees?

- Increased vulnerability to exploitation
- Increased risk of going missing - 13% of unaccompanied children went missing from care in 2020
- Trauma of separation from family
- More likely to have experienced additional trauma
- Increased risk of severe mental health issues:
 - Anxiety
 - Distraught
 - Sleep disorders
 - Depression
 - Psychosis
 - Bipolar disorder
 - Toxic stress

What do child asylum seekers/refugees need?

- Increased awareness of trauma and treatment for trauma
- Mental health support, counselling, psychological needs met
- To be safe, sufficient capacity for appropriate homes
- Make friends, trusted relationships, belonging, community
- Life skills
- Family reunion including legal advice
- Education:
 - School awareness of provisions available to support asylum seekers
 - Support with school applications
 - Interim provision of education
 - Advanced planning for Additional Learning Needs
 - Designated staff in school
 - Improved provision of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
 - Resources/good practice/training to support Additional Learning Needs and English as an Additional Language (EAL)
 - Mental health support
 - Peer support
 - Collaboration to provide clinical/therapeutic interventions
- Improved immigration procedures
- Equality and inclusion
- To be asked what they need/think/feel, listened to and kept informed

Literature search continued...

What can we do? Good practice examples and recommendations:

Education:

- Innovative use of Pupil Premium Plus, instead of individual tuition used it to provide their own service which was more cost effective, covered more subjects and the children got interaction.
- A welcoming and personalised approach helped develop trusted relationships.
- Young Roots weekly lunch group where students drop in to; play music, board games, cards, socialise. Also provide drop-in casework service, offering advice about immigration, housing, solicitors, registering with GPs, accessing benefits and other services.
- Paiwand partner with schools/colleges to run weekly groups, sporting activities, life-skills, leadership training and social activities. Volunteers provide additional educational support in school.
- Refugee Support Network partners with schools and colleges to provide specialist education support service to help young people overcome issues preventing them accessing, remaining, or progressing in education, and run drop in and appointment-based support sessions.

Manchester city council needed to identify children requiring support.

- Department for Education did not ask local authorities to record nationality of looked after children, so develop own system.
- Dedicated teams in schools to provide support to children and families and refer to other services if needed have been beneficial to families.
- School-based somatic soothing intervention showed significant improvement in psychological symptoms, and teachers reported improvements in, confidence, academically and socially.
- ESOL programme helped; develop language and connect with others with lived experience.

Fostering/Placements:

- Research into placements is limited, however, it does suggest foster placements are mostly beneficial to unaccompanied asylum seekers, although foster placements do not suit all children. It also suggests cultural similarity and language benefit these young people further. Although research suggests that this is less important among former unaccompanied children.
- The research suggests where cultural similarity is not possible, cultural understanding is essential, but that many foster carers report concerns over not being able to meet cultural needs and many are unaware of support available.
- One study claimed transition to adulthood for unaccompanied asylum seekers could be improved if after care services treat them as young people rather than asylum seekers.

Literature search continued...

Social Work/Services:

- South London Refugee Association early intervention project provided casework for children/young people and advice to social workers and personal advisers. Helping to upskill workers, embed knowledge, and create a strong referral pathway for the most complex immigration issues.
- West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership created a suite of training delivered by experts, open to local authority staff and others working with them to safeguard children. The training is multidisciplinary, targets, healthcare, education, wider local authority, and voluntary sector.
- Citizenship and Integration Initiative and Greater London Authority's children in care programme, delivering a programme of training, guidance, and capacity-building to local authorities on rights of children in care/care leavers with immigration/nationality needs. Focusing on early identification and resolution of immigration issues and aims to provide skills needed to resolve issues quickly.
- A specialist team to support all the needs of unaccompanied asylum seekers was set up in the Royal Borough of Kingston, recent research claimed social work should focus on their human development rather than integrating into the social order.

Mentoring/Peer Support:

- Mentoring/befriending schemes help young refugees feel part of new communities. If they like football, they find a game. If they like dancing, they find a class. Also, help with learning English.
- Group sessions where refugees can meet peers, learn from each other and build confidence. One group started a campaign so unaccompanied children get a legal guardian to look out for them and female-only groups provide safe spaces to; have fun, pursue interests, fitness, well-being, education and language.
- Housing peers with similar cultural backgrounds together and developing peer relationships supported a range of aspects including; connectedness, mental health and development.
- YoungMILE a mentorship project for young refugees embraced flexibility, mutual learning, curiosity, goals, skills from past experiences, connecting people of refugee background and host community for meaningful integration.

Social/Friendships:

- Social relationships/friendships offer protective factors that benefit the well-being of refugee children, same and cross ethnic friendships were found to benefit refugee adolescents.

Parent/Family Support:

- The Selfcare programme was adapted for cultural relevance and was found to potentially benefit refugee children in their resettlement, although further research is needed.
- A caregiver intervention showed significantly increased parental warmth/responsiveness, decreased harsh parenting, lower stress/distress, improved well-being, and improved stress management. Parents reported increased child well-being.

Literature search continued...

Sexual Health:

- Relationship and sex education programme developed with the young people using interactive, experiential learning. It also now includes building self-esteem and resilience.

Age Determination:

- Age determination processes can be inaccurate, a psychosocial approach including assessing; strengths, needs and vulnerabilities may be more appropriate.

Independent guardians:

- [The Children's Society](#) are supporting a group of young activists on their Distress Signals Campaign – calling for all young asylum seekers entering the country to have an independent guardian.

Other Support:

- Group interventions for young asylum seekers appear to help reduce PTSD and depression.
- HOPE in Greater Manchester empowers unaccompanied children to develop life skills including:
 - CV support
 - Interview practice
 - Housing
 - Finding a solicitor
 - How to buy groceries.
- Connecting Opportunities assists young refugees into jobs and education. Online sessions support young people in isolated areas with connecting, social skills and confidence.
- Children's Society HEARTS offers long-term, personalised help, lead workers speak five languages, improving children's lives allowing them to connect and build trust.
- The Tree of Life strength-based narrative to share stories about their lives, allowed young people to speak about their difficulties without re-traumatising but making them stronger.
- A storybook was shared about the child's refugee experience it was reported increases in; empathy and helping intentions, and attitudes predicted helping intentions to refugees.

References from policy background

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2. Welsh Government (2019) 'Refugee and Asylum Seeker Plan (nation of sanctuary)'. Available at: <https://gov.wales/refugee-and-asylum-seeker-plan-nation-sanctuary> Accessed: 23/9/22
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