

Making Open Data Real: A Public Consultation 2011

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Our Organisation:

The Welsh Refugee Council has over twenty-one years experience of working with refugees, asylum seekers and refused asylum seekers. It provides confidential and independent advice services across Wales, advocates for the rights of refugees and asylum seekers, supports capacity building for refugee community organisations, and promotes good community relations. Its vision is to ensure that refugees and asylum seekers are safe, and that they get the support they need to rebuild their lives in Wales.

The Welsh Refugee Council's work is guided by the core principle that the right to seek asylum is a fundamental right. This year marks the 60th anniversary of the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, an international standard that has provided the essential protection to save hundreds and thousands of lives since it was established.

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The Welsh Refugee Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to HM Government Public Consultation on 'Making Open Data Real'. While this consultation does not specifically mention refugees and asylum seekers, we would like to only focus on issues that directly relate to our refugee and asylum-seeking clients in Wales.

The Welsh Refugee Council recognizes the importance of publishing regular and accurate statistics relating to asylum and values the quarterly reports giving UK asylum statistics that are published by the Home Office. The Welsh Refugee Council believes that these reports are a vital resource for organisations that are involved in developing policies, planning services and dispelling misinformation.

The Welsh Refugee Council regrets that, although the Home Office has dispersed thousands of asylum seekers to Wales since the dispersal policy was introduced over ten years ago, no regular, authoritative reports are published giving asylum statistics for Wales.

The Welsh Refugee Council believes publicly available statistics for asylum in Wales are needed and recommends that the Home Office takes steps to make such reports available for the following reasons.

Although asylum policy is not a devolved matter, the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Government have responsibility for a range of policy areas affecting Welsh Communities and affecting asylum seekers and refugees living in Wales, for example health, employment and children. They also have responsibility for promoting equality and community cohesion in Wales and in responding to concerns raised about changes in Welsh communities. Welsh Assembly Government has developed a 'Refugee Inclusion Strategy and Refugee Inclusion Strategy Action Plan' and is committed to enabling asylum seekers and refugees to make use of their skills and contribute to Welsh communities. The National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Government need reliable and detailed statistical information about asylum seekers and refugees in Wales to ensure evidence-based policy-making.

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Welsh local authorities, which work in partnership with the Welsh Government and the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), are responsible for planning and delivering local services such as housing and schools throughout Wales. Reliable statistical data about the composition and needs of local communities is essential to cost-effective planning and delivery of services, for example in deciding where to locate services, what is the likely demand, and how to make them accessible.

Welsh voluntary organisations and community organisations provide services and offer informal support, befriending and social activities. They also require statistical information on asylum seekers and refugees in Wales in order to assess the level of need. For the Welsh Refugee Council, as the leading organization working with asylum seekers and refugees in Wales, detailed asylum statistics for Wales would enable the organisation to prepare better for changing trends, for example, changes in the number of arrivals from different countries or changes in the numbers granted different forms of leave to remain. Asylum statistics for Wales would also allow the Welsh Refugee Council, as a respected commentator on asylum policy in Wales, to assess more effectively the implications of changes in Home Office policies and practices and to provide advice on these changes.

Wales prides itself on its tradition of offering welcome, but public opinion in local communities in Wales can be negatively affected by misinformation and rumours about the numbers of asylum seekers and refugees in Wales. In the absence of credible evidence, myths are perpetuated, and this has a direct impact on the welcome given to asylum seekers and refugees. Publication of official statistics can go some way to counteracting misinformation. The Welsh Refugee Council believes that while statistics for the UKBA administrative region of Wales and the South West would be valuable, they are not sufficient. Given Wales' distinct political, economic, geographic and cultural identity, it is vital that separate statistical reports are available for the nation of Wales irrespective of UKBA's administrative borders.

The Welsh Refugee Council is grateful for the efforts made by the UKBA Wales and South West regional office to share some management information for the region with key stakeholders but these figures contain limited detail and are not for wider circulation. As such they are insufficient for planning services and cannot be used to allay public concerns.

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The Welsh Refugee Council understands that the data required to provide appropriate statistical reports on asylum in Wales is already held by the UK Border Agency, and so the cost of producing such reports should not be prohibitive. Welsh Refugee Council believes that the cost could be offset by efficiency savings, since better information will lead to better-planned services in Wales.

Proposed content of asylum reports for Wales

The Welsh Refugee Council believes that quarterly reports for Wales should be published which include equivalent detail to those available for the UK as a whole, and should include:

- Numbers of asylum applications (both those who applied and were then dispersed to Wales, or those already living in Wales who later claimed asylum).
- Number of initial decisions made on asylum applications, and the outcome of those decisions (refusals, grants of Refugee Status, Humanitarian Protection or Discretionary Leave).
- Number of appeals and the outcome of appeals.
- Number of fresh claims submitted and the outcome of fresh claims.
- Number of refugees arriving on resettlement schemes (these are not currently operating in Wales but may do in future).
- Number of grants of indefinite leave to remain to those who had claimed asylum.
- Number of grants of family reunion to those who had claimed asylum.
- Number of grants of citizenship to those who had claimed asylum.
- Number of voluntary returns through assisted voluntary returns programmes, by those who had claimed asylum.

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- Number of other voluntary returns by those who had claimed asylum.
- Number of removals for those who had claimed asylum.
- Number that received asylum support 'subsistence only'.
- Number that received asylum support in the Initial Accommodation centre.
- Number that received asylum support in dispersed accommodation (for each dispersal area)
- Number that received Section 4 support (for each dispersal area).
- Number of unaccompanied children supported by local authorities (for each dispersal area).
- Number taken into detention (solely for immigration and not for criminal reasons) who had claimed asylum and been resident in Wales. Average and maximum length of time spent in detention.
- Number of children (unaccompanied or in families) taken into detention (solely for immigration and not for criminal reasons) who had claimed asylum and been resident in Wales. Average and maximum length of time spent in detention.
- Number of age-disputed individuals taken into detention (solely for immigration and not for criminal reasons) who had claimed asylum and been resident in Wales. Average and maximum length of time spent in detention.

For all of the categories listed above, figures should be given for the number of asylum applicants, and the number of applicants and dependents.

For all of the categories listed above, figures should be given showing country of origin.

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References

Refugee Inclusion Strategy (2008), the Welsh Assembly Government

Refugee Inclusion Strategy Action Plan (2011), the Welsh Government

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