



# Home from Home? Seeking Sanctuary in Swansea

## Swansea City of Sanctuary Newsletter Special Edition



Mabinty Carew, our Chair

**FREE!** Please take a copy to keep or pass on to others

What if the place you call home became somewhere where you were always afraid, but to leave could mean losing your home, losing most of your possessions and losing contact with loved ones, for a totally uncertain future? What if the place you came to for safety was somewhere where people didn't understand?

### The City of Sanctuary vision – a welcoming city

We can all work for Swansea to be:

- A place of welcome and safety for people seeking refuge from war and persecution.
- A place where we celebrate the contribution of those who have come here for safety and spread a culture of hospitality and support.



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# About this special edition

Welcome to the special “Home from Home” newsletter edition.

It explains, with stories, pictures and examples, why City of Sanctuary is needed, how it works, and how individuals and organisations all over Swansea can be part of it.

You may want to use it to:

- See beyond the headlines to find out more about the reality of being an asylum seeker and refugee
- Raise awareness about people seeking sanctuary
- Find ways for you, your workplace, faith group or organisation to welcome, support or involve asylum seekers and refugees in Swansea.
- Become part of the growing City of Sanctuary Movement.

The newsletter is largely based on “Home from Home,” an excellent exhibition first presented at Swansea Museum between June and August 2012. The exhibition was the focus of a number of events and workshops. We were particularly pleased with the response from the many young people who attended workshops.

We hope that the exhibition, together with this special edition of our newsletter, will be a stimulus for awareness raising and practical action for years to come. If you would like to discuss displaying the exhibition, or running workshops based on the material generated, do get in touch. You can e-mail [richard.lewis@swansea.ac.uk](mailto:richard.lewis@swansea.ac.uk) or [swansea@cityofsanctuary.org](mailto:swansea@cityofsanctuary.org) or go to [facebook.com/cityofsanctuaryswansea](https://facebook.com/cityofsanctuaryswansea).

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We would like to thank Swansea Museum and all the people who worked really hard on the exhibition. Special thanks are due to the asylum seekers and refugees who contributed their stories, comments and planning and organisational skills, or who facilitated events and workshops.

# What is City of Sanctuary?

Swansea was proud to be recognised as the second “City of Sanctuary” in the UK in May 2010. The idea started in Sheffield and we are now part of a growing movement with over 25 City of Sanctuary groups across the UK.



St Helen's School Feb 2009 – launch of campaign to make Swansea a City of Sanctuary

We want to put the City of Sanctuary vision into practice so that:

**Wherever people seeking sanctuary go in the city – schools, faith and community groups, public services, businesses - they will find people who welcome them, understand why they are here, and, most important of all, actively support and include them.**

**City of Sanctuary is what all our supporters do - pledges of support.**

We encourage organisations all over the city to sign a simple pledge committing them to support people seeking sanctuary in whatever way they can. 150 organisations have now pledged and we are seeking more.

**Asylum seekers and refugees at the heart of the movement.** We work to include people seeking sanctuary at every level in the City of Sanctuary process - for example as volunteers and board members. We encourage our supporting organisations to do the same. We are guided by priorities defined by people seeking sanctuary – e.g. by the Swansea Refugee and Asylum Seekers Advocacy Forum.

**Bringing people together, raising awareness and celebrating the positive**

When people meet each other, fears and myths dissolve and supportive relationships develop. There are regular drop-ins where locals and people seeking sanctuary meet, Groups can invite members of our speakers team to give them first hand accounts of life as a person seeking sanctuary, or run social evenings and shared meals. We hold events where professionals, our supporters and people seeking sanctuary meet to talk creatively on topics like health, education, etc. And we aim to include stories in the local media which celebrate the achievements of people seeking sanctuary.

**City of Sanctuary – of benefit to all**

Although the focus of City of Sanctuary is on welcoming those fleeing war and persecution, a culture of welcome has benefits for all of us.

## Unsafe at Home?

Who is seeking sanctuary in Swansea, why, and where have they come from?

We all need a home – somewhere to live in safety; to be with our family; to be part of the community; to feel we belong.

How would you feel if this safety was suddenly shattered? What if the place you call home became somewhere where you were always afraid? What if every day you were frightened that you or someone you love might not come home or could be beaten up, threatened, arrested, tortured, or even killed? But to leave could mean losing your home, losing most of your possessions and losing contact with loved ones, for a totally uncertain future.

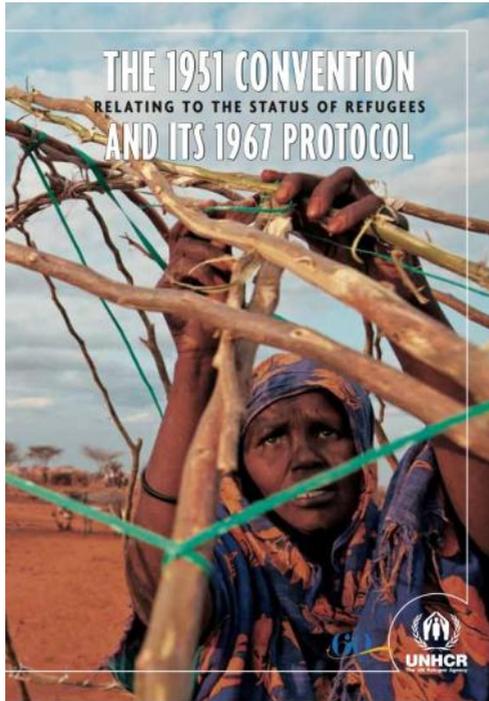


Artwork by Romisa Amadi

This is what happens every year to hundreds of thousands of people. In the world today there are over 10 million refugees who have had to leave their homes to escape violence and in fear of persecution. Most of them flee to neighbouring countries – there are over 1.7 million refugees from Afghanistan in Pakistan, and another million in Iran. Some find their way to the UK and some of those to Swansea.

## Something to be proud of

Anyone, anywhere, who is forced to flee persecution in their own country, should receive protection if they need it.



One of humanity's best moments came in response to the horrors of the Holocaust. World War II had created millions of refugees in Europe. Fleeing Jewish refugees had been denied entry by many countries.

In 1951, the newly formed United Nations agreed the UN Refugee Convention. This defines a **refugee** as a person who leaves their home country and seeks the protection of another country because of a

*"well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion".*

Up to now, 134 countries have signed this convention, agreeing that anyone who claims refugee status should have a fair hearing and that they will give them protection if they need it. No country has ever withdrawn.

# Who is who? Asylum Seekers and Refugees



When someone has fled persecution, arrived in the UK, and formally asked for protection, that is called applying for **asylum**. The UK Border Agency (a part of the Home Office) then decides on their application, based on whether they have proved that they cannot go home because of a 'well-founded fear of being persecuted' for one of the reasons listed on page 5. While they are waiting for a decision, that person is known as an **asylum seeker**.

*Everyone has the right to ask for asylum* - and to stay here until the authorities assess their claim. As such, there is no such thing as an "illegal" or "bogus" asylum seeker.

A **refugee** is a person whose asylum application has been accepted. They are granted 'leave to remain' for 3 years, 5 years, or indefinitely. The UK is then committed to protect them.





## Where are people fleeing from?

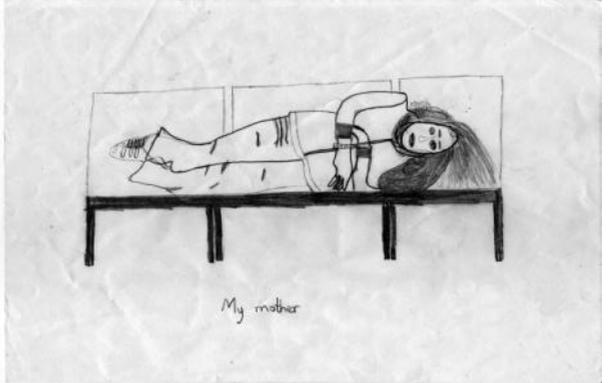
On our TV screens we see terrible things happening in countries around the world: bombings, peaceful demonstrators being attacked, other forms of violence. These are often countries where people are being persecuted and which people are trying to escape from as refugees.

Other countries remain peaceful although particular religious or ethnic groups or political dissidents are persecuted. In some countries, women escaping from abuse cannot get protection and they may become refugees.

In 2010, the top five origin countries of asylum applicants to UK were Iran, Afghanistan, Zimbabwe, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. In Swansea, considerable numbers also come from China, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Sudan and Iraq.

## Nadia's Story

In Pakistan, Nadia – now in her thirties with three children – endured gang rape and domestic violence, mostly witnessed by her children. Her eldest child was kidnapped and never seen again.



Nadia sought asylum in Britain on political grounds and was sent to Swansea. The children started school and she began to learn English and join in community activity. After a few years their claim was refused. Immigration officers twice came to the house early in the morning and took them to a detention centre.

The first time they were released after two months and returned to Swansea, resuming as normal a life as possible. Nadia needed treatment as her mental health deteriorated. The second time their removal from the UK was only forestalled by Asylum Justice volunteers, but they stayed in detention for four months before being released on 'bail' provided by volunteers. Conditions were very poor. They witnessed other inmates screaming at night and attempting suicide. The children were 7, 9, and 12 years old.

The effect was profound. The children lost weight and would only speak in whispers. Nadia's condition worsened, to include self harm. Finally – despite new evidence from a torture specialist and hopes for a fresh asylum claim – immigration officers *again* came early one morning and took them away.

This time they were deported, to a city in Pakistan far from their own. The children resorted to street begging for money to get back to their former home city, and there the family remains, in hiding.



Now the children's friends are missing them and those in Swansea who tried to help are also emotionally scarred. The family themselves have been ripped from a community in Swansea that accepted them and plunged back into danger.

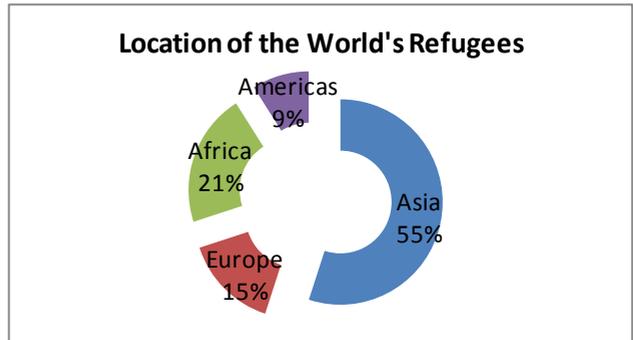
## Where do they flee to?

Mostly, people who have to leave their homes do not get very far. Some are still living in another part of their own country. These people are called ***internally displaced persons (IDPs)***. Many others end up in a neighbouring country living either in refugee camps or urban areas.

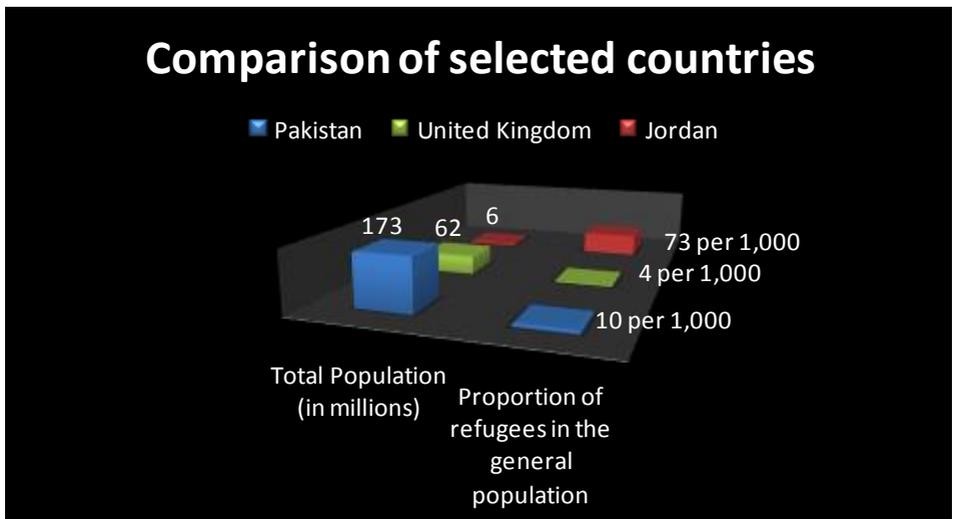
For example, Iraq has a population of about 30 million, of whom 5 million have been displaced since 2003. Most of them have gone to other areas of Iraq or to neighbouring countries, mainly Syria and Jordan. Only 200,000 have fled the Middle East.

At the beginning of 2011, over 75% of the world's 10.5 million refugees were sheltered in Asia or Africa.

Altogether, Europe hosts only 16% of the world's refugees, and **only 3%** are in the United Kingdom.



Some of the world's poorer countries carry a disproportionate burden. Pakistan hosts 10 refugees per 1000 of its own population, and Jordan 71 per 1000, while the equivalent figure for UK is only 4 per 1000, i.e., less than half of 1%.



## Why do they come *here*?

Most asylum seekers have little choice about where they go. They do not come here for economic reasons.

Home Office research has found that refugees are driven first and foremost by the need to escape and reach a place of safety. They know little about our benefits system before they arrive. Only a few of them were able to *choose* the UK as their destination in their search for safety. In that case, they did so because they have family here, they speak English or come from a country formerly colonised by Great Britain, or because they believe the UK to be a country which respects human rights.

Once in the UK, asylum seekers do not *choose* to come to Swansea – they are sent here or to Cardiff, Newport, Wrexham, or one of a number of English and Scottish cities, as part of the government’s ‘dispersal’ policy.

People seeking asylum are often separated from their loved ones and may find their families spread all over the world, with very little chance of reunification.

### Whereabouts of one Iraqi woman’s family: after the 2003 invasion

*Aliya is in Swansea seeking sanctuary. But her family is scattered across the world.*



## How many people seek sanctuary here?

In 2011 there were 25,455 new applications for asylum (including dependants). This compares with 334,815 admitted to UK as students or student visitors, and 166,660 work permit holders and dependants.

There are approximately 1,300 people seeking asylum in Wales – less than 0.1% of the total population – and an estimated 10,000 refugees. About a quarter of these are in Swansea. Most of the others live in Cardiff, Newport and Wrexham.



*If all the refugees and asylum seekers in Wales sat in the Millennium Stadium, Cardiff, they would only fill the first 16 rows.*

### Sa'id's Story

Sa'id grew up in Baghdad. When Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, he refused to participate and deserted the army. In 1991, after the first Gulf War, he joined an uprising against Saddam's government, which was brutally crushed. After three years in hiding, Sa'id was smuggled out to the UK, where his brothers lived in Glasgow. He moved to Swansea in the late 90s, after achieving refugee status:

"I love the sea."

"Even though I speak good English, know Western culture and traveled the UK as a child, I also had to rediscover myself and shape a way for me. Most Iraqi people are Muslim. Arriving here, will they continue in Islam or maybe rediscover Islam itself?" The most difficult part was worrying about his family back home. "Once they joined me here, everything was much easier, except that I had to work very hard ... I didn't have money to start my own business, so I started working in Kebab shops until finally I opened my own in Brecon. It was a long way to travel every day, but it was

mine." Sa'id was very active in the community, especially with Iraqi refugees. In 2003 he became a manager for a Red Cross programme supporting asylum seekers.

Sa'id has a B.A. in Petroleum Mining and Engineering. He did well on a computer networking course at Swansea College, but could not find a job in the field. "Is it because of my name? Is it because of my color? I wouldn't be able to tell... And this dilemma also happens to everybody: You must have experience to get the job, yet you have to get the job to be experienced. So I said I will work for free for 2-3 months just for the experience – and I couldn't even get that." Eventually, Sa'id got a technician position in a cable company.

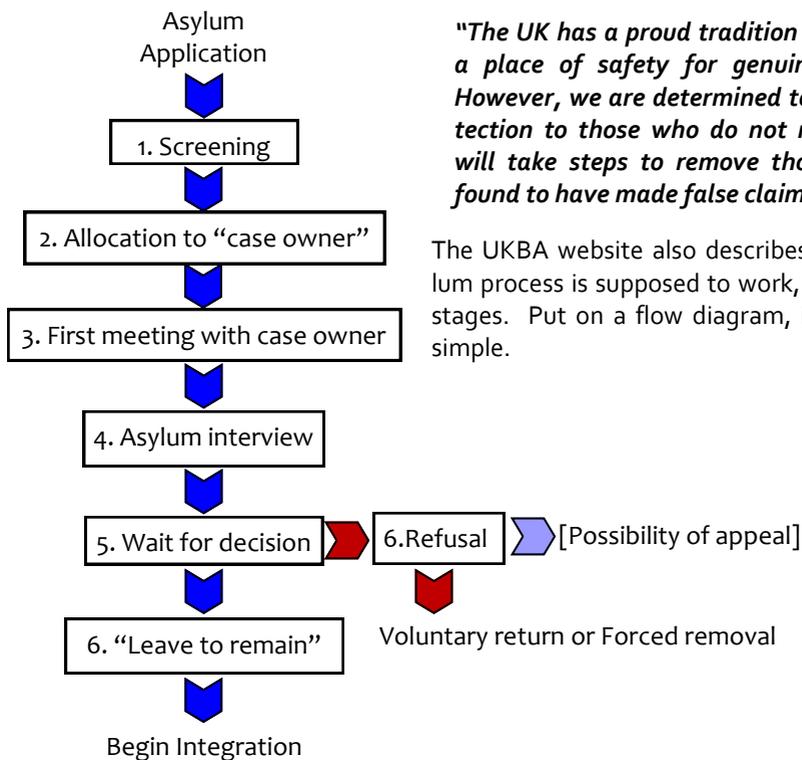
Sa'id now owns a café and a launderette in Swansea and employs the equivalent of four full time staff. He wonders if he would have done better in London, but:

"My children are Welsh; they are settled in school here. I have a home here. And Welsh people are brilliant."

# Desperately Seeking Protection

## The UK Asylum System and How it is Experienced

### It looks simple ...



The UKBA states on its website:

*"The UK has a proud tradition of providing a place of safety for genuine refugees. However, we are determined to refuse protection to those who do not need it, and will take steps to remove those who are found to have made false claims."*

The UKBA website also describes how the asylum process is supposed to work, in terms of six stages. Put on a flow diagram, it looks (fairly) simple.

### ... but what's the reality?

The system works for some. 33% of initial decisions on asylum claims in 2011 resulted in a grant of some form of protection. But the remaining 67% who were refused have not necessarily made 'false claims'. Many appeal successfully against the decision. Even after losing an appeal, refused asylum applicants often compile new evidence and go on to make a 'fresh claim' which brings refugee status. And only a minority is 'removed'. Many cannot be sent 'home' because although their individual case was refused, the UK courts have found that it is not safe for them to return them or there are practical difficulties making it impossible to arrange their 'return'.

In reality even going through the six stages is not straightforward (see 'Jamila's Story'), and the process is much more complex than indicated by the six stages. As well as facing the threat of removal, those seeking sanctuary often suffer from delay, detention and/or destitution.



## Jamila's Story

I had to set off to at 3am in the morning with two small children to get to Croydon at 8am for my [screening] interview. I had no money and only made it there thanks to a good Samaritan.

I waited two hours before it was my turn to be interviewed. I was asked lots of questions but when I answered I was constantly interrupted to fill in more forms. When I couldn't provide some documents it became very tense. An 'expert' was called to get 'further information' from me. I had to feed my children, who were now very tired, at the same time as answering these complicated questions. It was the longest day of my life.

After this questioning was over we had to wait again to give our finger prints and have our photos taken. I was told to leave my children in another waiting room and go in for 'further interrogation'. At first this lady was friendly but she suddenly turned hostile and accused me of lying to the UK government to obtain a visa. I was very scared and tried to explain I was innocent. I felt horrible, like I was a dangerous criminal.

After another two hours wait I received a 'decision' letter with several pages explaining why I had been refused asylum [*at that time*]. I was told to go to the Cardiff office for a 'proper interview' later in the month. My [asylum] interview in Cardiff lasted 4 hours. I talked as slow as I could so they could write down every word.

Life in the hostel was hard. The children couldn't go to school. I was constantly worried about being removed. Finally, we were moved to Swansea. The move was difficult. I didn't know anybody in the area, I felt very lonely and isolated.

It has been two years since I was moved to Swansea but the journey hasn't ended. I am appealing the decision and we are still in short term accommodation. I am not allowed to work. I am a determined, able person - given the chance I could be independent. I volunteer as much as I can to remain sane.



## Delay

There used to be very long delays – often several years. Things have improved. UKBA now says it aims to make initial decisions within six months, but does not always do so.

### While waiting, what support do asylum seekers get?

Asylum seekers are not generally allowed to work, which leaves most no choice but to be dependent on state support. Many do voluntary work.

The UK Border Agency arranges temporary housing for asylum seekers while they are waiting for a decision, in one of twenty or thirty 'dispersal areas' throughout the UK. From this year all the contracts for housing asylum seekers are with large private firms.

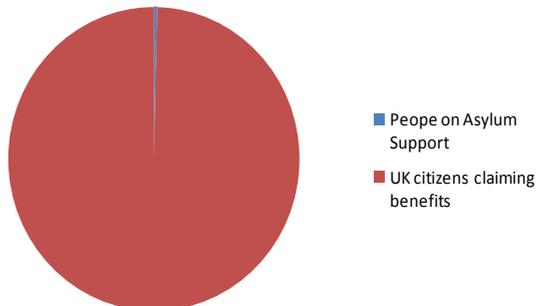
**The UKBA also provides very basic financial assistance to asylum seekers, which for a single adult over 25 amounts to £36.62 per week.** Although, housing and basic utilities are provided to them, they cannot access any other form of support.

By comparison, **a single adult aged over 25 on Job Seekers Allowance receives £71.00 per week.** They can also access tax credits, housing benefit, income support and means-tested subsidies.

Asylum support stops 21 days after a final refusal unless children under 18 live with the family.

Refused asylum seekers get nothing unless they can claim 'Section 4' or 'hard case' support. To get this they must undertake to return home but show they are prevented from doing so, e.g. too sick to travel, no viable return route, judicial review pending. They then get just over £35.00 per week, not in cash but via a plastic payment card to be spent only in certain shops, so people cannot use markets or cheaper or culturally appropriate shops, and have no cash for phone calls or bus fares.

In December 2010, there were 20,894 asylum seekers receiving asylum support, compared to 5.7 million working age UK citizens claiming benefits in November 2010. Thus, asylum support accounts for less than 0.5% of state benefits paid out.





## Detention

Everyone in the UK enjoys a fundamental right to liberty, whether British citizens or not. There are strict limits on how long criminal suspects may be detained without charges or trial, and increasing the time for which people can be locked up without being charged has been controversial. However, asylum seekers can be detained at any point during the asylum process with **no date set for their release**.

According to the UNHCR, the UK detains more people for longer periods and with less judicial supervision than any comparable country in Europe. In 2010, the UK Border Agency detained 12,575 asylum applicants, including 300 children. There have been at least 12 suicides in immigration detention centres.

Immigration officers have the power to detain people without reference to a court - on arrival in the UK, when they seek asylum, if they are considered likely to abscond, or when they have been refused and are about to be returned 'home'. In this last case, their lawyer may be able to stop them being put on their flight by obtaining a judicial review, and they may then be allowed out 'on bail'. This can happen to people several times and to people who later win their case for refugee status.

Another category of asylum seekers who are often detained are those who passed through another 'safe' country on their way to the UK. This could be Greece for those who came overland from Asia, or Italy for those travelling by boat from North Africa. People fleeing persecution are supposed to apply for asylum in the first 'safe' country they arrive in, so they can be detained and then sent back to Greece, Italy or wherever.

In 2011 the government ended the practice of detaining children in immigration removal centres, though they may still be held for short periods in "pre-departure accommodation" when their families are subjected to forcible removal. In theory it is also Government policy not to detain survivors of torture or those with serious medical conditions or mental health problems, but in practice such people are often found in detention. Being locked up can *cause* severe mental health problems, adding to the trauma already suffered in one's home country.

## Destitution

Destitution occurs at many points within the asylum process:

- **at the beginning** -

Many people are unaware that they can claim asylum at the point of entry, e.g., at the airport, so they may have no means of support. To submit a claim for asylum they would have to go to the asylum screening unit in Croydon, and may lack money to travel there.

- **during** the process -

Before asylum support is set up or when an initial decision is made, administrative errors and procedural delays may occur.

- **at the end** of the process -

When a person's application is refused and their appeal rights have been exhausted, they are no longer entitled to support. They are told that they must not work, and that they are expected to leave the country within 21 days.

Many refused asylum seekers do not leave the UK. At this point – unless they are willing to claim 'Section 4' support (see page 14), and succeed in doing so - they become destitute. Some end up living on the streets, but most survive through a combination of support from social contacts, particularly from members of their own national community, and very low-paid illegal work. They can be heavily exploited.



## Why don't refused asylum seekers go home?

Each case is different, but here are five of the main reasons:

### 1 Their countries are unsafe

Large numbers of asylum seekers – 80,000 over five years by one estimate - are refused and made destitute although they are from countries which the Foreign Office has flagged as dangerous and unstable. In many cases the UKBA refuses people protection and then cannot return them to their countries of origin because it is not safe to do so.

### 2 They can't be removed

In practice it is extremely difficult to forcibly remove people to countries where there may be serious safety issues, uncooperative governments, difficulties or unreliable travel routes. For example, for Iranians it may be virtually impossible to obtain travel documents if they do not already have them, because the Embassy is closed.

### 3 They are afraid to go back

Many refused asylum seekers are fearful to return to countries torn apart by conflict or where human rights abuses are rife. While their countries remain volatile, they consider living destitute in Britain to be the lesser of two evils.

### 4 They believe they have a case

Even if a person is refused asylum, their story may not be "bogus" and they may have genuine fears for their safety:

- The burden of proof is on the asylum applicant and some people can't obtain evidence from the country they fled.
- Fleeing danger is not enough. People may have fled violently unstable countries and experienced serious injury, torture, rape, or loss of family members, but still not meet the strict criteria of the 1951 Refugee Convention. Even if the government accepts that you have been persecuted, you may be refused asylum unless you can prove there is a significant risk it will happen again.

### 5 The Government sometimes gets it wrong

While most asylum applications are initially refused, many win on appeal. In 2011 over a quarter of cases that went to appeal were successful. For some nationalities this figure is much higher. In 2010, 50% of appealing Somalis and 36% of appealing Zimbabweans and Sri Lankans saw initial refusals overturned. Legal aid for appeals is strictly limited and it is likely that many unfair initial refusals go unchallenged for lack of adequate legal representation.

## Removal

Large men in riot gear breaking down doors at dawn and taking people away is something that happens only in other countries? No, it happens here as well! The removal process can be very distressing and often leaves asylum seekers feeling scared and intimidated:

“They were not nice people, and they were really big people. When we went to the toilet, they wouldn’t let us shut the door”

In 2010, over 7000 asylum seekers and dependents were forcibly ‘removed’ from the UK, compared to 3000 who left voluntarily. Private security contractors escort them onto the plane, or to their country of origin. Over the years there have been at least 300 cases of reported physical and verbal racial abuse.



Worryingly, more rejected asylum seekers are being deported to countries where they will not be safe. They may be returned directly into the hands of state agents and face retaliation simply for having claimed asylum abroad. In 2009, people began to be sent back to the Democratic Republic of Congo after a two-year ban, just after a major rebel offensive pushed the total of displaced people to 1.25 million, and with several areas controlled by militias who use repeated sexual violence and rape as instruments of intimidation. In 2011, the Home Office resumed forced removals to Baghdad and Central and Southern Iraq despite UNHCR warnings that it is unsafe.

## Maria's Story

Maria's family fled a country that was part of the former Soviet Union when she was six and her brother four. They faced persecution and discrimination because her mother converted from Islam to Christianity. "Life back home wasn't really life. People were against us; me and my brother weren't allowed to go to school". Maria felt safe in the UK.



Maria's family was placed in Yorkshire and "living a normal life" until immigration officials took the family to Yarlswood Immigration Detention centre in 2005. "It was a horrible place ...[with] no real education." Eventually, Maria and her family were removed back to her country of origin. On arrival, they were held by authorities and separated from their father. Upon release the family were forced to flee from village to village, staying in a different house every night. Her mother eventually managed to pay an agent to take them back to the UK, where they once again applied for asylum, still separated from their father. The family was sent to Swansea and awaited the outcome of their new asylum application.

In 2007, immigration officials detained the family again. First, they were held in a caged van outside Cockett Police station for three hours and released. Sixty days later, the family was taken back to Yarlswood. "They treated us like we were terrorists and said they are taking us home again. But I kept saying, 'Home is here.' Maria was 12.

At the detention centre Maria met another young girl whose mother's arms and face were bruised by guards dragging her up airplane steps. Maria was shocked. "How could that happen in a democracy?". Despite feeling hopeless and scared, and being taken to the airport three times, Maria wrote letters to Government officials, managing to cancel the removal. "I was just so amazed that a young child could have that influence."

In 2009, the family received leave to remain in the UK. They were eventually reunited with their father who received asylum in another EU country. Now Maria is finishing her A-levels and looking forward to studying at University. Her brother is an avid footballer.

# A New Home? Swansea City of Sanctuary

## How people in Swansea can be part of the welcome

One of most important parts of the City of Sanctuary process is signing up organisations of all sorts as supporters. So far over 150 have signed our pledge (see back page).

These include community and faith groups, environmental and arts organisations, schools, clinics, other service providers, private firms, the local paper and the council, as well as those set up to work alongside refugees and asylum seekers. Thus City of Sanctuary brings together groups already supporting people seeking sanctuary with those new to the idea.

## Pledging in Practice

Of our first 100 supporting organizations, over 60 were already doing something practical to support or involve people seeking sanctuary.

For example, in 2009 the trade union **UNISON** put on a Refugee Pre-Employment Project in collaboration with the **City and County of Swansea**. Max Kpakio (right), from Liberia, was one of those who took part.



Another example is the **Oxfam Books and Music Shop** in Castle St. It has volunteers from all over the world, including many asylum seekers. Before he gained refugee status, Ameen Melkyan (below left) was one of four Iranian asylum seekers volunteering there.



A third is the **African Community Centre**. As well as welcoming asylum seekers and refugees in allits activities, it runs the Amani project which supports asylum seeking women suffering trauma and stress.



Swansea can only become a 'City of Sanctuary' if more and more groups and organizations pledge support and then find ways of putting their support into practice and making a difference.

## City of Sanctuary is what all our supporters do!

*Here are some ideas for your group once you have signed our pledge.*

### Invite the Refugee Speakers Team

The first step for many supporting groups is simply to find out more. Many people know nothing about asylum seekers and refugees, and there are lots of myths about them in the papers. The best thing is to hear from them directly and if possible talk face-to-face.

Displaced People in Action (DPIA) has a refugee speakers' team – they give talks in schools, faith groups and anywhere they are invited.

### Organise a social event or shared meal

If yours is a group with a regular social programme, you could consider inviting a group of asylum seekers and refugees for a joint get-together. It could be a shared meal organised through SHARE Tawe (see next page) or an evening of poetry and song. The picture shows one of the refugee poets who took part in such an event in Ammanford.



*Alhaji Kamara*

### Involve asylum seekers and refugees in your ordinary activities

People seeking sanctuary have as broad a range of interests as anyone. Whether it is sport, music, rambling, crafts, community activism or volunteering, there are probably people who would love to take part if only they knew where to come and were made welcome. There can be practical difficulties (especially for those with no money) - e.g. language, transport, childcare - but it can be well worthwhile to find ways round these.

### Fund-raising for local refugee charities

Think about adopting SHARE Tawe, SBASSG, Asylum Justice, DPIA or WRC as your charity of the year, or putting on a special fund-raising event.

### Special Actions for different kinds of organizations

Depending on what you do, your particular group may have a special role to play. Do get in touch to discuss ideas and possibilities.

For example, faith groups with asylum seekers in the congregation may be able to support them very directly - one pastor stood surety when a member was detained.

At school, refugee and local children are in class together, so it's crucial to begin raising awareness early. Pentrehafod has become Swansea's first 'School of Sanctuary'.

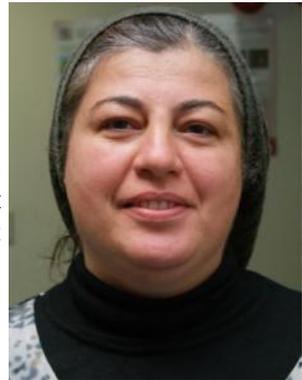
## Refugees are part of us - we celebrate their contribution

People who have fled for their lives and lost homes and families now contribute to Swansea in many ways. They have brought new skills, music, food and hard work to our city, and have played a big part of the City of Sanctuary movement.

There are plenty of opportunities, and different people contribute in different ways – in community groups, the arts, and so on. Here are just a few examples.



Hafan Books publishes poetry and writing by people seeking sanctuary and others in Wales. Farzaneh Dadkakh is shown reading her contribution to 'Fragments in the Dark'.



Tan Dance runs community dance projects which often involve people new to Swansea, including a special piece developed for the launch of the 'Home from Homer' exhibition. In 2011 Aliya Khalil, from Iraq, took part in an intergenerational community dance project run by TAN Dance. "It was an unforgettable experience for me". She is now a TAN Dance 'ambassador', and shares her experience of dance with asylum seeker and refugee communities.



Positive Action was a group set up in 2011 by asylum seekers to engage in community projects. In March 2011, they organised a beach litter pick with support from Discovery and Keep Wales Tidy.

Ali Juma, one of the organisers, speaks passionately about the reasons behind the group's formation.

"It's about people being together, it doesn't matter about their race, colour or religion. We want to show everyone that we can unite and do something good for the community. We aren't here just to sit around, we want to give something back."

## Bringing people together

The best way to understand someone from another culture is to meet them and do things together. People do this through the drop-ins, social events and so on run by some of our supporting organizations. But we also do it on a bigger scale.

### Working groups, 'thematic workshops' and networking events

We have working groups on some of the major issues faced by those seeking sanctuary here, notably mental health and destitution. We also take part in forums organised by others on relevant topics such as combating far-right extremism and work with young people. We organise 'thematic workshops' and networking events where professionals, members of our supporting organizations and people seeking sanctuary get together to learn and think creatively about particular issues. We always make sure that people seeking sanctuary have a big role in chairing, presenting or facilitating.

Networking event for local employers on issues around employing refugees



### City-Wide Social and Cultural Events

We are involved every year in Welsh Refugee Week events. And there are lots of other social and cultural events where people seeking sanctuary and other Swansea people can get to know each other, such as World Party Day. It's important to make sure



asylum seekers and refugees can take part in events which are meant for everyone, not just special refugee events.

Performers at the African Community Centre's annual 'Swansea's Got Talent'

## Getting involved

We are very keen for both people seeking sanctuary and local people to play a part. Here are some examples of what you can do

### Volunteer or fundraise for a refugee charity

**Swansea Bay Asylum Seekers Support Group (SBASSG)** runs regular Friday and Saturday drop-ins where asylum seekers, refugees and local Swansea people can meet socially. Childcare is provided. Help is needed with informal English conversation, running outings and events, and general organization.

**Asylum Justice** provides free legal advice to help asylum seekers with their claims. Volunteers help with pre-interviewing, research and administration.

**DPIA's speakers' team** needs local people to speak alongside refugees and asylum seekers at schools, faith groups, etc.

**Welsh Refugee Council** and **Cyrenians Cymru** also need funds as well as volunteers.

### Join the Swansea City of Sanctuary Volunteer Scheme

City of Sanctuary is encouraging asylum seekers and refugees and members of the local community to volunteer together to make Swansea a real place of welcome.

We are flexible and can develop an opportunity with you to suit your skills or find support, guidance and training to develop more skills if necessary.

All expenses incurred while volunteering are reimbursed



If you are interested in volunteering with City of Sanctuary and you would like to discuss what we can do together, e-mail: [richard.lewis@swansea.ac.uk](mailto:richard.lewis@swansea.ac.uk).

We need help with:

- Event management;
- office administration;
- communications and marketing;
- grant applications;
- facilitating and chairing meetings;
- bookkeeping;
- befriending and mentoring;
- fundraising;
- childcare;
- gardening and horticulture;
- teaching English;
- first aid and catering.

## Support the 'SHARE Tawe' hosting scheme

Provide accommodation in your home for a destitute asylum seeker for a night, a few days or longer. Or invite someone to dinner or support us financially.

Join the City of Sanctuary committee or one of our working groups

We really need people to help keep the whole process moving!

## An interview with a volunteer for Asylum Justice

### *How long have you been living in Swansea?*

A I have lived in Swansea and around the Swansea Valleys for 38 years, born to a Welsh-speaking father and an English mother. I have always wanted to know more about people of the world and other cultures.

### *When was your first contact with asylum seekers & refugees?*

Since my childhood, I've always wanted to know more about the peoples of the world and other cultures but it wasn't until 2004 that I officially started committing myself to reaching out to asylum seekers & refugees through Asylum Justice.

### *Why did you choose to give your time to work with asylum seekers & refugees?*

As I grew up, I became more aware of the problems of the world its people. I felt angry that my country was becoming inward turning, less tolerant and less concerned with justice and I didn't want it to be like that. My involvement is as much about my political concerns for a just society as about Asylum itself. Asylum Seekers are the worst victims of an unjust system that I want to change.

### *Would you say that asylum seekers & refugees have positively changed your life?*

Oh yes, since I started working and hosting some asylum seekers & refugees in my house (2003 to date), I've realized that I've learnt a lot from their various cultures & lifestyle. All this has made me a different person as I think that I've the whole world within Swansea without having to travel abroad. I have had people from many countries living in my house and I have more trouble with British lodgers than Asylum seekers & refugees

### *What would you suggest should be done to make your other British people discover the same things that you have through your personal interaction with asylum seekers & refugees?*

I think the media, especially our newspapers, have to get involved to bring out the positive & bright side of asylum seekers & refugees to help others understand why some fellow human beings become asylum seekers & refugees. They should also take politicians to task who use the race card and target asylum seekers as scapegoats of their own incompetence.

# City of Sanctuary – of benefit to all

*A reflection by Dewi Hughes, retired minister, Capel y Nant, Clydach*

Caring for each other is the beginning of what it means to be human. We have a duty to welcome strangers who have had to flee from persecution and to leave behind almost everything that is valuable to them.

However, having asylum seekers and refugees among us is not a one-way process of them receiving and us giving.

They bring skills. Many are highly educated, and given the opportunity, can fill important gaps - in education and medical care, for example.

They bring culture: some are artists, poets, or musicians, who turn their own painful experiences into beautiful poignant works of art.

When asylum seekers visited a church group in Ammanford recently, African drummers invited the children and young people present to join them. In a few minutes the whole gathering were dancing around the hall.

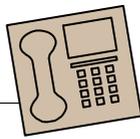
Asylum seekers and refugees know all about tears of sadness and despair. They also bring with them tears of joy.



Photo by Robat Powell

**“Proud to be a place of safety!”**

# Useful Contacts



## POLICE

NON EMERGENCY 101 or 1792 456999  
EMERGENCY 999 (*violence or fear of violence*)  
HATE CRIME (*help and advice*) – **Andrea Griffiths**  
- 101 or 01792456999 EX 52700 or 07584770944  
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT – **Julie Upcott**  
- 01639 889198 or 07779517935.

## HOSPITALS

Singleton 01792 205666  
Morrison 01792 702222

**African Community Centre** - Cultural and youth activities, women's and men's groups, Amani project for asylum seeking women suffering trauma and stress.  
2 Humphrey Street, SA1 6BG 01792 470298

**Asylum Justice** - free legal advice to asylum seekers without legal representation. Drop-ins at the Cyrenians Cymru Office, 123 Walter Road, SA1 5RF Wednesdays from 3.00-5.00 pm and Saturdays from 10.00-11.30 am.

**BAWSO** - for BME women and children made homeless due to domestic violence. 1st Floor, 63 Mansel Street, SA1 5TN 01792 642003 www.bawso.org.uk swansea@bawso.org.uk

**Citizens Advice Swansea** – free welfare rights, other advice and assistance. Llys Glas, Pleasant St. 0844 477 20 20 www.swanseaacab.org.uk enquiries@swanseaacab.org.uk

**Community Legal Services** Information on local legal and advice services 0845 3454345 www.clsdirect.org.uk

**Cyrenians Cymru** Drop-in supper, English classes, internet, Tues/Thurs 5.00-7.00, St Matthews, High St. Office 123 Walter Road. 01792 467926 www.cyrenians.co.uk cyrenians@cyrenians.co.uk

**DPIA** (Displaced People in Action) Refugee speakers team, support for Swansea Refugee and Asylum Seekers Advocacy Forum, employment advice. 029 2048 2478

**EYST** - supports ethnic minority young people aged 11-25, 11 St. Helen's Rd. 01792 466980 - www.eyst.org

**Gower College Swansea** Kingsway 01792 470611 Tycoch 01792 284000

**Info-Nation** - Information, support and advice for young people aged 11-25. 47 The Kingsway. 01792 484010 info-nation@swansea-edunet.gov.uk

**MEWN** - Minority Ethnic Women's Network. 24 Mansel Street. 01792 467222 www.mewnswansea.org.uk mewn@mewnswansea.org.uk

**Samaritans** - Confidential, emotional support. 17 St Johns Road. 01792 655999 (National helpline) 08457 909090 www.samaritans.org.uk Jo@samaritans.org

**SBASSG drop-in** - Fridays - 5pm - 7pm: *Brunswick Methodist Church Hall* (St Helen's Road, next to Exotica) SA1 4BE; Saturdays - 2pm - 5pm: *St Phillips Community Centre* (opposite Tesco) SA1 3RY. www.swanseaabassgroup.org

**SHARE Tawe** - hospitality for destitute asylum seekers. www.sharetawe.org.uk info@sharetawe.org.uk

**Swansea Refugee and Asylum Seekers Advocacy Forum** - for refugees and asylum seekers to consider issues faced in common. Brian Marijena 07861 772516

**Swansea City and County Council** Main switchboard 01792 636 000 Library (central) 01792 516750

**Swansea Bay Regional Equality Council** Grove House, Grove Place. 01792 457035 www.sbrec.org.uk sb.rec@virgin.net

**SCVS** Swansea Council for Voluntary Services 7 Walter Road. 01792 544000 www.scvs.org.uk

**Victim Support** Local support for victims of crime 81 Mansel Street. 01792 543653

**Welsh Refugee Council** 3rd Floor, Grove House, Grove Place, SA1 5DF. 01792 630180 info@welshrefugeecouncil.org

**Women's Aid Swansea** For women who are experiencing domestic violence and abuse 01792 644683 www.welshwomensaid.org web@womensaid.org.uk

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## City of Sanctuary People and Places Project

The People and Places Project operates from the 3rd floor on Grove House (next to WRC and SBREC) on Mondays to Wednesdays from 10am-2pm and from the Discovery Offices, Fulton House at Swansea University from 3-6pm on Mondays to Wednesdays and 10am-6pm on Thursdays and Fridays.

# Our Supporters

*Has your organization signed the City of Sanctuary pledge?*

"We support the vision of Swansea as a 'City of Sanctuary', welcoming those fleeing violence and persecution in their own countries. We recognise the contribution of refugees and people seeking sanctuary to the City of Swansea. We are committed to taking practical steps to welcome and include them in our activities and are actively seeking ways of supporting them wherever we can."

African Community Centre, African Friendship Association, Amnesty International (Swansea), Asylum Justice, Swansea Women's Asylum Support Group, Swansea Green Party, British Red Cross, Cardiff Asian Christian Outreach, CEMVO Wales, Centre for Migration Policy Research, The Union of Congolese People, Circus Eruption, City Temple, Communities First Bonymaen, Communities First Morriston, Communities First Port Tennant, City Counselling Services, Community Regeneration Unit, Congo Support Project in Wales, Cornerstone Church, City and County of Swansea, Cyrenians Cymru, Department of Continuing and Adult Education, Dharmavajra Kadampa Buddhist Centre, Discovery Student Volunteering Services, Displaced People in Action, Dragon Arts, Ethnic Minority Congregations Wales, Ethnic Youth Support Team, Global Xchange, Gwalia, Hafod Youth Action Group, South Wales Police (Community Engagement Team), International Organization for Migration, Kurdi Cymru, Welsh Café, SOVA (Mentoring Service), Cytún Area, Minority Ethnic Women's Network, National Waterfront Museum, Oxfam Union St Shop, Peace Mala, Pentrehafod Wales, Swansea Bay Asylum Seekers Bay Racial Equality Council, Sandfields Shelter Cymru, Green Art Studio, Snap Social Services, Sudanese Welfare Advice Bureau, Swansea County Labour Museum, Swansea Quakers, Swansea Women's Centre, Swansea YMCA, Sylfa-Undercurrents, Sketty Parish Parochialny, Waterfront Church, Wise Up Home Partnership, OnePeople Productions, ASART, Parklands Church, Swansea Digital Storytelling, Unison, Caer Las, Palestinian Society of Wales, South Wales Evening Post, Workers Educational Association, Humbrella Community Singing Group, Bikeability Wales, Exemplary Training, Older Feminist Network, Swansea Council of Voluntary Service, GSP Community Regeneration Partnership, Transition Swansea, Jimmy Juggle, Small World Theatre, Forest School, Theatr Fforum Cymru, Swansea Metropolitan University, Swansea Mosque & Islamic Community Centre, Communication Workers Union Welsh Valleys, UNITE Swansea Branch, The Environment Centre, Oyster Education, The Josef Herman Art Foundation Cymru, Swansea Mind, Local Aid, Swansea Central Library, Doves Youth Group, Capel y Nant Welsh Congregational Church Clydach, Plaid Cymru, Seventh Day Adventist Church, Communities First Penlan, Asia Market, Athena Trauma Support, Clydach Methodist Church, Communities First Clase & Caemawr, DESI Foods, Exotica, Jasmin, Oxfam Cymru, St Helens Primary School, Swansea Community Farm, Swansea Drugs Project, Baha'I of Swansea, BP, Buondi Café, Cancer Research UK, College of Medicine Swansea University, Cytun - Churches Together in Sketty, Gower College Swansea, Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement, Lush Swansea, Sketty Methodist Church, Student Services, Swansea Feminist Network, Swansea UAF, Swansea University Mosque, SWP Swansea Campaign Against Cuts, Taliesin Arts Centre, The Bike Hub, Vetch Veg Patch Project, Wales Africa Community Links, Fair Trade Wales, Cheriton Medical Centre, Mid & West Wales Fire and Rescue Service, Ethical Chef, Waxhands, New Pathways Liberate Project.



**ARIENNIR GAN Y LOTERI  
LOTTERY FUNDED**

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