

WELSH

REFUGEE COALITION



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2024-25 MANIFESTO

FIVE STEPS TO SANCTUARY

This manifesto follows our [‘2016 Seven Steps to Sanctuary’](#) guide that led to the Welsh Government adopting a Nation of Sanctuary Plan, and our 2021 mission [‘Nation of Sanctuary – making that vision a reality’](#).

To improve our asylum system, integration, and contribution to the economy, the Welsh Refugee Coalition is setting out five key asks to all political parties ahead of the General Election:

1. Commit to the right to seek asylum in the UK
2. Build an effective asylum system that treats people with dignity and compassion
3. Review the impact of policies on No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) for those facing homelessness
4. Stand up for migrant justice
5. Commit to the Nation of Sanctuary vision of welcome

BUILD A COMPASSIONATE REFUGEE PROTECTION SYSTEM



We have witnessed the harmful impact on people seeking sanctuary, since the passage of legislation including:

- **The Nationality and Borders Act (2022);**
- **The Illegal Migration Act (2023);**
- **The Asylum and Immigration Act 2024.**

Over 500 charities, faith groups, local authorities, businesses, and unions, along with dozens of cross-party MPs and Peers, have signed a national pledge to fight these anti-refugee laws. After years of hostility towards people seeking safety, and the broken asylum system, with your help we have an opportunity to build a system that protects and supports people seeking safety.

Wales' commitment to becoming a Nation of Sanctuary is a bold stand for refugees' rights and inclusion. It aims to create a welcome for those fleeing war or persecution, allowing people to rebuild their lives and contribute to Welsh communities.

BUILD A COMPASSIONATE REFUGEE PROTECTION SYSTEM

Our vision aims to mitigate negative portrayals of immigration, and hostile legislation. Negative rhetoric and inaccurate media reporting are instilling fear in those seeking sanctuary, with misinformation causing tensions within communities, exacerbated by the far-right.

Communities are increasingly becoming polarised, leading to isolation, and marginalisation of people seeking sanctuary. In the run up to the general election you can help to bring communities together by rejecting harmful rhetoric and lead by example by promoting positive messages about people seeking sanctuary.

We are recommending five tangible steps that you can take as a new Government to fix our broken asylum system. We urge all candidates to commit to repealing harmful anti-refugee laws and to building a refugee protection system based on humane principles.



COMMIT TO THE RIGHT TO SEEK ASYLUM IN THE UK

As a global leader, our asylum system must uphold our international responsibilities and recommit to the right to seek asylum in the UK. We must invest in building an asylum system that makes just decisions in a timely way and ensures everyone has access to good quality legal advice. Crucially, we must dismantle unworkable anti-refugee laws that fundamentally undermine the right to seek asylum, including:

- **Restore the right to seek asylum in the UK** in line with international law, by repealing the Illegal Migration Act and the Nationality and Borders Act;
- **Expand safe routes for people seeking asylum to reach the UK** so that people are not forced to risk their lives in the Channel, including providing visa routes, enabling families to reunite safely, and rebuilding refugee resettlement. Expand the UK's resettlement schemes, setting an ambitious target for those resettled under a single scheme which is in addition to a single community sponsorship scheme.
- **No offshore processing** - The Rwanda-UK agreement must be revoked, and the principle of 'offshore processing' should be abandoned, you must ensure that people are able to have their cases processed in the UK in a fair and timely way.
- **Fair Hearings for Refugees and Asylum Seekers** - Ensure a fair hearing for all, regardless of their arrival method and ensure that provision to legal advice is accessible.
- **Expanding Family Reunion** - Broaden the family reunion rules to keep families together.



COMMIT TO THE RIGHT TO SEEK ASYLUM IN THE UK

To defend the rights of people seeking sanctuary, it is imperative to address the current legal aid crisis, improve the quality of initial decision-making, and reduce financial burdens on asylum seekers. By increasing funding for legal aid, streamlining the appeal process, and supporting non-profits providing legal assistance, the government can ensure fairer legal proceedings and uphold the true notion of sanctuary.

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- **Increase Funding for Legal Advice:** The Refugee Council's latest figures up to March 2023 show that 43% of asylum appeals were successful, nearly identical to the previous year. This rise from 29% in 2010 indicates deteriorating quality in initial decision-making, with almost half of Home Office decisions being overturned. The recent collapse of the legal aid sector, particularly in Wales, has left many asylum seekers unrepresented. Increasing government funding for legal aid is essential to address this crisis, improve successful appeal chances, and ensure fair hearings.
- **Streamline the Appeal Process:** The growing number of successful appeals highlights the inefficiencies in the current system. Streamlining the appeal process can reduce delays and associated costs, making the system more efficient and less stressful for sanctuary seekers. This includes revising procedures to ensure timely and just decisions, addressing the fact that many initial claims now lack legal representation.
- **Support Non-Profits:** With the legal aid sector's collapse, non-profit organisations have become crucial in providing legal assistance. In Wales, for instance, only two firms now provide legal aid for initial claims, down from twelve a few years ago. Asylum Justice (AJ) faces a high demand, receiving 2.5 times the referrals compared to last year. Supporting non-profits financially can reduce barriers, ensuring fairer legal proceedings and upholding the rights of asylum seekers.
- **Ensure Fair Hearings for Refugees and Asylum Seekers:** Given the adversarial nature of the UK asylum system, particularly at appeal stages, it is virtually impossible for unrepresented clients to succeed. Guaranteeing fair hearings and accessible legal advice, regardless of arrival method, is essential for maintaining the system's integrity and fairness.

BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE ASYLUM SYSTEM THAT TREATS ALL PEOPLE WITH DIGNITY AND COMPASSION



We must create an asylum system that supports, rather than hinders, people seeking safety and the opportunity to rebuild their lives.

This includes:

- **Restoring the Right to Work** - Research has identified sanctuary seekers can not only rebuild their lives in dignity and provide for themselves, moreover, can contribute 1.2 billion to the UK economy. They must be allowed to work after a waiting period of six months, without the shortage Occupation List's restrictions, the benefits are immense including integration, reduced cost to the taxpayer, and fill employment vacancies in the UK.



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- **House people in Community-Based Accommodation** - close all institutional accommodation including barracks, barges, hotels and hostels which are not only expensive but cause lasting harm for sanctuary seekers. Expand the already successful pilots funded by the Home Office evidencing that tailored support in the community consisting of access to healthcare and legal assistance, helps individuals understand and engage with the immigration process more effectively. With global evidence confirming this approach's success, it is imperative to commit to expanding these pilots across the UK.
- **Eradicating Enforced Poverty** - The UK Government must increase asylum support rates, to at least 70% of the Universal Credit rate for people over 25, to enable individuals and families to meet their essential living needs and prevent mental health decline.
- **Providing consistent and timely interpretation services** to asylum seekers and refugees, to address their health and wellbeing concerns.



REVIEWING THE IMPACT OF POLICIES ON NO RECOURSE TO PUBLIC FUNDS (NRPF) FOR THOSE FACING HOMELESSNESS



We advocate for a comprehensive review of policies affecting individuals with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) who are at increased risk of homelessness. These vulnerable individuals, often excluded from essential services due to their immigration status, require targeted support. To address this, the new UK government should consider the following actions:

- **Vulnerability Assessment:** Recognise the heightened vulnerability of NRPF individuals and acknowledge the need for assistance beyond public funds.
- **Policy Re-evaluation:** Legal constraints on access to public funds exacerbate their risk of homelessness. The new UK Government must explore options to better support NRPF individuals. A humanitarian, people-centred approach, highlighting health and well-being, should guide policy changes. Collaboration between government agencies, charities, local authorities, and people with lived experience is essential to provide holistic solutions.
- **Legal Protections:** Strengthen legal safeguards for NRPF individuals. Fair treatment, human rights, and advocacy efforts are crucial. Ensuring access to emergency accommodation is a fundamental humanitarian obligation.

STAND UP FOR MIGRANT JUSTICE

Stand up for migrant justice by endorsing the following Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants' (JCWI) principles:

- **Rights:** Everyone should be able to thrive, no matter where we're from
- **Safety:** We must welcome people who seek sanctuary on our shores
- **Dignity:** We all deserve to live with dignity and feel safe in our homes and workplaces
- **Justice:** We should all be able to defend our rights and hold the government accountable
- **Community:** We all deserve to find care and belonging

With your help we can co-create a compassionate refugee protection system. We call upon you as a parliamentary candidate to stand against anti-refugee laws, defend the right to seek safety, and commit to building a system that treats everyone seeking sanctuary with dignity and compassion. Please make the simple pledge to use positive language, combat misinformation, and promote positive narratives about those seeking safety.



STAND UP FOR MIGRANT JUSTICE

As a parliamentary candidate you can demonstrate your support by:



Committing to meeting with constituents with direct experience of seeking asylum and local organisations to understand the reality of the system: Find Your Local Project | Refugee Resource Centre



[Pledging to defend the right to seek safety in the UK](#)

[Pledging to Fair Begins Here at Fair Begins: A new campaign calling for a fair new plan for refugees that works for everyone](#)



[Pledging to migrant justice by endorsing the JCWI manifesto We Move: A Manifesto for Migrant Justice](#)



[Commit to the vision of making Wales a Nation of Sanctuary, and to working with the Welsh Government and in Westminster to make this vision a reality](#)

COMMIT TO THE NATION OF SANCTUARY VISION OF WELCOME

With anti-migrant hate up by over 20% in 2022, which was itself a bumper twelve months for this corner of the movement. Far-right, anti-migrant activism took place on at least 278 days out of 365 in 2023. Direct links have been found between political announcements, mainstream media coverage and far right online activity. We urge all candidates to use positive language when speaking about individuals seeking sanctuary.

- We demand that you **express your disapproval of discriminatory or prejudiced language, or false information about individuals seeking safety in the UK.**
- **All elected officials should take an active role** in disseminating accurate and truthful information and sharing positive messages

