

**WELCOME OR OVER-REACTION?  
REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS IN THE WELSH MEDIA**

**Tammy Speers**

**WALES MEDIA FORUM  
FFORWM CYFRYNGAU CYMRU**

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Asylum Seekers and Refugees Media Working Group

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## SECTION I

### WELCOME

The National Assembly for Wales has taken a keen interest in matters relating to asylum seekers and refugees and are committed to ensuring that their experience of living in Wales is a positive one. I fully endorse the key messages provided in this Report. The media need to look at the real stories behind asylum seekers, understanding what difficulties and experiences have brought them here so that they can report the human side of this global problem. The issue of asylum seekers is an international one and as Wales becomes more involved in debates at an international level, Wales need to have an international outlook. Wales has a tradition of being a welcoming nation. Asylum seekers and refugees are in the main people who have suffered injustice and hardship and we have a moral duty to make them welcome and help their resettlement into the local community. It is heartening to see that the Welsh media have, for the most part, avoided the hysterical coverage and reporting found in other parts of the UK but we could, and should, do more to ensure a balanced reporting of all matters relating to asylum seekers and refugees. With the dispersal of asylum seekers to Wales due to begin this year, I welcome this timely report and support the recommendations that have been put forward to ensure that the reporting of such matters is fair, honest and responsible.

Edwina Hart, AM

**MINISTER FOR FINANCE, LOCAL GOVERNMENT & COMMUNITIES  
WELSH ASSEMBLY**

## 1.1 FOREWORD

In the 1990s the issue of refugees and asylum seekers has become highly politicised in the UK. Locally, regionally and nationally some politicians have used the issue of refugees claiming asylum in the United Kingdom to gain support for their own political parties. The national media focussed their reporting on the issues in London and the South East (where most asylum seekers and refugees lived) so that for a time it was only the local media in the South East which had a vested interest in reporting on these issues. However the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act introduced the 'dispersal process', effectively making this a truly national issue, with local media across the UK now increasingly interested in and reporting on refugees and asylum seekers. This research examines how the Welsh local media have covered issues concerning refugees and asylum seekers, even though at the time of this report being published in March 2001, the dispersal process has still not started in Wales.

The report results from the work of the 'Asylum Seekers and Refugee Media Working Group' which first met in April, 2000 in the Oxfam offices in Cardiff. It has met monthly since with representatives from Oxfam Cymru, British Red Cross, Save the Children Fund, Barnardo's, Welsh Refugee Council, Presswise (Refugees and Asylum Seekers Media Project), Cardiff Council and Newport County Council's Press Relations Unit and The Tom Hopkinson Centre for Media Research, affiliated with the Wales Media Forum, located in the School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies, Cardiff University.

The group aimed from the outset to facilitate and co-ordinate both reactive and proactive responses by the voluntary sector agencies represented within it to media coverage of asylum seekers in Wales, to share and exchange information, and to strengthen the capacity of the Welsh Refugee Council to be the lead agency responding to the media regarding refugee and asylum seekers. In order to accomplish these ends, Oxfam set up a media monitoring programme of the Welsh media. The sample collected consists of all newspaper articles concerning refugees and asylum seekers in the Welsh local media as well as a number of radio and television pieces that appeared between August and December 2000. A comprehensive list of these monitored stories was circulated to all participants in the group since April on a weekly basis. This allowed a co-ordinated reaction to any negative stories and provided the data for the writing of this report.

The proactive part of this project has also been greatly indebted to Oxfam, who provided the School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies with a grant to support the employment of Tammy Speers as a part time media officer to work with the group and support the Welsh Refugee Council. Tammy has made a considerable contribution in networking with the Welsh Media, challenging negative images and generating positive stories and images about asylum seekers and refugees, exploring the reasons why such stories can be difficult sources for journalists to access, and, in some cases, having a verifiable impact on the reporting practices of journalists, as well as researching and authoring this important report on the media monitoring project.

Why then does all this matter? The Labour Party's *Democracy and Citizenship* Report sets out a number of conditions for assessing asylum policy. These include evidence of support systems which will build confidence and maintain dignity after oppression and persecution, adequate standards of living and income, and integration into communities. None of these is achievable while local communities believe all the pernicious and damaging stories and myths that they often seem to believe they know about asylum seekers and refugees. Academic research has shown over and over again that there are links between media stories and public opinion formation. It has also shown that these links are extraordinarily complex and often difficult and time-consuming to trace and to make explicit. Common sense is very slippery stuff to tie down, often profoundly embedded in local and community cultures and ways of being, and usually even more difficult to change. This report attempts to tease out what part the local Welsh media has played in these complex processes.

Political, policy, media and academic 'common sense' can be every bit as difficult to shift as the everyday kind. In this context, it seems to me, some politicians, policy-makers and academics are sometimes too quick to call community common sense 'racism', or to brand the media with 'racist' reporting. Racism there certainly is and it must be challenged, but the resort to 'race' for explanations, just like the laying of *all forms* of community common-sense at the feet of the media, is far too simple, and even evasive, a tactic. It is too easy to simply blame the media when the Home Office itself communicates its messages so ineffectively, when it takes six to eight months to establish that, after all, only twenty people are officially 'dispersed' to Wales by April 2001, when, in the meantime, media stories, gossip and rumour may have produced an atmosphere of suspicion and fear which must damage the effects of stated asylum policy as outlined above. Such a context then contributes further to the complexities and difficulties of media coverage, inhibiting access to the voices and stories of those most affected, refugees and asylum seekers themselves. People who feel threatened quite simply do not talk to the media. It is also far too easy to call communities racist when there is neither information nor economic support or infrastructure to allay their fears. This report is a beginning in showing how complex these issues are in a local context and in pin-pointing just what other issues may be regularly evaded by a number of current common sense versions of the way things are.

Thanks are due to Oxfam for their support and particularly to Helen Buhaenko and Tammy Speers for their vision, for knowing what the issues are, and for caring enough to make the group and this report happen.

Special thanks is also due to Oxfam volunteer Uzma Bozai, who assisted in the original research.

Professor Terry Threadgold,  
Professor of Communication and Cultural Studies  
Director, The Tom Hopkinson Centre for Media Research,  
School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies,  
Cardiff University.

## 1.2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Press Complaints Commission cautioned newspaper editors in 1999 that when writing about asylum seekers and refugees there is 'the danger that inaccurate and misleading reporting may generate an atmosphere of fear and hostility which is not borne out by the facts'.

This research examines how the Welsh local media have covered issues concerning refugees and asylum seekers from April 2000 to the end of that year. The sample analysed consists of relevant newspaper articles in the English-language press in Wales as well as some radio and television pieces that appeared between August and December.

### Key Findings

- The Welsh press covers the issue of asylum seekers without the hostility or hyperbole that can be seen in the UK-wide national media.<sup>1</sup> However, the debate around asylum seekers and refugees is primarily framed as an 'official' issue. Most coverage examines how government representatives are 'managing' asylum seekers and refugees and how the police are preparing for their arrival, instead of reporting on conditions in countries asylum seekers are fleeing or the experiences they have had.
- 195 articles appeared between April and December. With approximately 200 asylum seekers either dispersed or already living in Wales in the period covered (although more had been expected), this translates into 1 article per asylum seeker. The majority of the articles discuss asylum seekers in terms of 'costs' and 'numbers' and there is little, if any, attention paid to their experiences in their home countries and the contribution they can make to society in the UK. This is particularly true for newspapers based outside of Cardiff and Newport.
- Asylum seekers and refugees are given little opportunity to voice their own views or tell their histories as seen in the scant use of refugees and asylum seekers as sources. Similarly they are absent from images in newspapers. Instead, the media use quotes and photographs of already powerful groups, primarily government officials.
- An active Local Authority Public Relations Department improves coverage. It is evident that in areas where Local Council Public Relations departments have taken the initiative coverage of asylum seeker issues, on the whole, is more accurate and thoughtful.
- Communication processes need to be improved to provide residents, journalists, local government officials and Welsh Assembly Members with correct information concerning the dispersal of asylum seekers to Wales.

## **MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS (see page 35 for a full list)**

### **Media**

- Tell readers why refugees and asylum seekers are coming to Britain, and to Wales.
- Use a variety of sources. Don't over-depend on official sources, seek out the voice of refugees, refugee community groups and non-governmental organisations that work with refugees.
- Be sensitive to the fears of asylum seekers and refugees about the possible impact on their case of talking openly, and make it easy for them to tell their stories confidentially.
- Use realistic images of refugees and asylum seekers.
- Continue to set a local agenda but remember that refugees are a global issue, make connections outside of your area, see the wider picture of refugees around the world.

### **The Home Office**

- Discuss issues concerning asylum seekers and refugees in a more neutral manner. Remember the All-Party Agreement which states: "To ensure that in any dealings with the public no words or actions are used which may stir up racial or religious hatred, or lead to prejudice on grounds of race, nationality or religion."

### **Welsh Assembly Members, Local Government Members, Police and Officials**

- Use supportive language to demonstrate that using responsible language is a powerful tool when discussing asylum seekers and refugees.
- Use your local newspaper to answer citizens questions about the dispersal process about asylum seekers and refugees.

### **Community Groups and Non-governmental organisations**

- Work proactively with your local media, arrange to meet local journalists and explain your work. Send press releases about all events or issues you address.

### 1.3 CRYNODEB GWEITHREDOL

Rhoddodd y Comisiwn Cwynion am y Wasg rybudd i olygyddion papurau newydd ym 1999 fod "perygl i adroddiadau anghywir a charmarweiniol greu awyrgylch o ofn a gelyniaeth ddi-sail" pan fydd pobl yn ysgrifennu am geiswyr nodedd a ffoaduriaid.

Mae'r gwaith ymchwil hwn yn archwilio sut mae'r cyfryngau lleol yng Nghymru wedi ymdrin â materion sy'n ymwneud â ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr nodedd rhwng mis Ebrill 2000 tan ddiwedd y flwyddyn honno. Mae'r sampl a ddadansoddwyd yn cynnwys erthyglau perthnasol o bapurau newydd yn y wasg Saesneg ei hiaith yng Nghymru, yn ogystal â rhai darnau ar y radio a'r teledu rhwng mis Awst a mis Rhagfyr.

#### Canfyddiadau Allweddol

- Mae'r wasg yng Nghymru'n ymdrin â mater ceiswyr nodedd heb yr elfen o elyniaeth neu or-ddweud a welir yn y cyfryngau cenedlaethol ar lefel DU gyfan. Fodd bynnag, mae'r ddadl ynghylch ceiswyr nodedd a ffoaduriaid yn cael ei gweld yn bennaf fel pwnc 'swyddogol'. Mae'r rhan fwyaf o'r drafodaeth yn archwilio sut mae cynrychiolwyr y llywodraeth yn rheoli ceiswyr lloches a ffoaduriaid a sut y mae'r heddlu'n paratoi ar eu cyfer, yn hytrach nag adrodd ar yr amgylchiadau yn y gwledydd y mae'r ceiswyr nodedd yn ffoi rhagddynt neu'r profiadau a gawsant.
- Ymddangosodd 195 o erthyglau rhwng mis Ebrill a mis Rhagfyr. Gyda dim ond 20 o geiswyr nodedd wedi'u lleoli yng Nghymru yn ystod y cyfnod dan sylw (er bod disgwyl y byddai mwy), mae hyn yn golygu fod 20 o erthyglau wedi'u hysgrifennu ar gyfer pob un ceisiwr nodedd.
- Trafodir ceiswyr nodedd yn nhermau 'costau' a 'niferoedd' a rhoddir prin ddim sylw, os o gwbl, i'w profiadau yn eu gwledydd eu hunain a'r cyfraniad y gallant ei wneud i'r gymdeithas yn y DU. Mae hyn yn arbennig o wir am bapurau newydd sydd â'u canolfannau y tu allan i Gaerdydd a Chasnewydd.
- Ychydig o gyfle a roddir i geiswyr nodedd a ffoaduriaid i fynegi eu barn hwy eu hunain neu i adrodd eu hanes ac fe adlewyrchir hyn yn y defnydd prin a wneir o ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr nodedd fel ffynonellau. Yn yr un modd, ni chânt eu cynnwys mewn delweddau papur newydd. Yn hytrach, mae'r cyfryngau'n defnyddio dyfyniadau a ffotograffau o grwpiau sydd eisoes yn rymus, swyddogion y llywodraeth yn bennaf.
- Gan amlaf, mae'r ymdriniaeth yn well os yw Adran Cysylltiadau Cyhoeddus yr Awdurdod Lleol yn weithgar. Mae'n amlwg mewn ardaloedd lle bo adrannau Cysylltiadau Cyhoeddus y Cyngor Lleol wedi cymryd yr awenau ym maes materion sy'n ymwneud â cheiswyr nodedd, bod yr ymdriniaeth ar y cyfan yn fwy cywir ac yn fwy ystyriol.
- Mae angen i'r cyfathrebu ddigwydd ar lefel genedlaethol, nid dim ond ar lefel y cyngor. Nid oes prosesau ar gael i roi gwybodaeth gywir ynghylch lleoli ceiswyr

nodded yng Nghymru i drigolion, newyddiadurwyr a hyd yn oed i swyddogion llywodraeth leol ac Aelodau'r Cynulliad Cenedlaethol.

## **PRIF ARGYMHELLION (gweler tudalen 35 am restr gyflawn)**

### **Cyfryngau**

- Dywedwch wrth ddarllenwyr pam fod ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr nodded yn dod i Brydain, ac i Gymru.
- Defnyddiwch amrywiaeth o ffynonellau. Peidiwch â gorddibynnu ar ffynonellau swyddogol, ceisiwch glywed llais ffoaduriaid, grwpiau ffoaduriaid yn y gymuned a mudiadau anllywodraethol sy'n gweithio gyda ffoaduriaid.
- Byddwch yn sensitif i ofnau ceiswyr nodded a ffoaduriaid ynghylch effaith bosibl siarad yn agored am eu hachos, a'i gwneud hi'n hawdd iddynt ddweud eu hanes yn gyfrinachol.
- Defnyddiwch ddelweddau realistig o ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr nodded.
- Ceisiwch ddal i osod agenda leol, ond cofiwch fod ffoaduriaid yn fater byd-eang, felly gwnewch gysylltiadau y tu allan i'ch ardal, a gweld darlun ehangach ffoaduriaid o gwmpas y byd.

### **Y Swyddfa Gartref**

- Trafodwch faterion sy'n ymwneud â cheiswyr nodded a ffoaduriaid mewn dull mwy niwtral. Cofiwch y Cytundeb Pob Plaid sy'n dweud: "Sicrhau nad oes neb wrth ymwneud â'r cyhoedd yn defnyddio geiriau nac yn cymryd camau a allai ysgogi casineb hiliol neu grefyddol, neu arwain at ragfarn ar sail hil, cenedligrwydd neu grefydd."

### **Aelodau'r Cynulliad Cenedlaethol, Aelodau Llywodraeth Leol, yr Heddlu a Swyddogion**

- Defnyddiwch iaith gefnogol i ddangos bod defnyddio iaith gyfrifol yn offeryn grymus wrth drafod ceiswyr nodded a ffoaduriaid.
- Defnyddiwch eich papur newydd lleol i ateb cwestiynau dinasyddion ynghylch y broses o leoli ceiswyr nodded a ffoaduriaid.

### **Grwpiau Cymuned a Chyrff Anllywodraethol**

- Achubwch y blaen gyda'ch cyfryngau lleol, trefnwch i gyfarfod â newyddiadurwyr lleol ac esboniwch eich gwaith. Anfonwch ddatganiadau i'r wasg am bob achlysur neu bwnc y byddwch yn ymdrin â hwy.

### 1.3 INTRODUCTION

Since the creation of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights in 1951, which created the modern definition of 'refugee'<sup>2</sup>, Wales has provided a safe haven for thousands of people. In 1956 refugees from Hungary's revolution were housed throughout Wales, similarly Ugandans, Somalis and Vietnamese refugees were housed throughout Wales in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>3</sup> Wales' ethnic minority communities have a long history; both the Somali and Chinese community have lived in Wales for over 100 years.

The dispersal process was set to begin in Wales in April 2000 and the report's analysis begins then. Since April 2000 the Home Office has indicated that the dispersal of asylum seekers to Wales was imminent, hence the reason for choosing this period. However, even without the dispersal process in effect, there is still a notable community of asylum seekers and refugees in Wales. Independent research<sup>4</sup> found that in 1997 approximately 3, 600 asylum seekers and refugees have made their home in Wales.<sup>5</sup> The Welsh Refugee Council service users consist of over 49 nationalities.<sup>6</sup>

The dispersal of asylum seekers to Wales has been delayed for two reasons: complex negotiations between the Home Office and Local Councils across Wales and the unexpectedly high numbers of asylum seekers and refugees electing to remain in London accommodated by family and friends.

The research reported here covers eight months, from April 2000 to the end of the year. At the time when the analysis begins in April 2000 coverage of asylum seekers and refugees was at a height of often incomprehensible and fanatical reporting across the UK and in Europe.<sup>7</sup> In April the United Nations Commissioner for Refugees criticised the Conservative Party of breaching an All-Party Agreement not to exploit prejudice on the grounds of race, nationality or religion in order to gain political advantage in their treatment of the asylum issue.

The sample analysed consists of each newspaper article concerning refugees and asylum seekers in the Welsh press<sup>8</sup> (32 newspapers) as well as the inclusion of some radio and television pieces that appeared from August to December. The Welsh-language media have shown little interest in stories concerning asylum seekers and refugees. *Golwg*, a Welsh-language magazine with the largest circulation in Wales, wrote a feature in October 2000 on asylum seekers in Wales, using sources found by the Media Working Group. The Media Group's press releases are sent out in English, most including a footnote explaining that a Welsh-language speaker is available for comment.

The local media can play a significant role in the dispersal process, as the National Audit Commission point out, when Kosovar asylum seekers were sheltered around the country in 1999 'positive, well-organised media briefings help(ed) to generate public support, particularly when reinforced by positive messages at a national level.'

Wales' newspapers are read widely, with 80 percent of the Welsh population reading local and regional papers.<sup>9</sup> Most people get their news from London-based newspapers, however these papers rarely cover communities' reactions to the

dispersal of asylum seekers and thus when people get information about asylum seekers coming to their local communities, they must read local newspapers.

## **1.4 METHODOLOGY**

From April 2000 to December 2000 all articles concerning refugees and asylum seekers were collated from English-language Welsh newspapers. A total of 195 articles from 32 newspapers are included (see Appendix 1 for full list).

Each article was analysed to quantify key trends in reporting on issues concerning asylum seekers and refugees, using the following categories:

### **a) Type of Article**

Each article was classified under one of the following types:

News    Feature            Editorial            Letter to the Editor

An analysis of the type of article leads to an understanding as to what form the newspapers use to report refugees and asylum seekers.

### **b) Local or National Issue**

Each article was identified as either addressing a local or national story, this analysis helps to understand if local papers set their own agenda or follow the lead of the national media.

### **c) Sources in Articles**

The main source of each article was identified under one of the following categories:

- Individual Refugee
- Ethnic Group of Refugees
- Refugee Organisation
- NGO/ Voluntary Sector
- Local Government Official
- Central Govt. Official
- Assembly Member
- Resident
- Support Group
- Judge/Lawyer/Police
- Doctor
- University Professor/Lecturer
- Other

By identifying the sources in each article we can identify who the press use as the main sources when discussing refugees and asylum seekers, whose views appear most frequently and determine how often refugees are used as sources.<sup>10</sup> From this analysis it is possible to understand if refugees and asylum seekers are permitted to speak for themselves or whether they are spoken about by other sources. Whether the source is

speaking directly or indirectly is also examined in order to understand which sources journalists allow to speak for themselves.

#### **d) Labels**

The labels used for refugees and asylum seekers were examined under the following categories:

- Asylum Seeker/s
- Refugee/s
- Name
- by Ethnic Group
- Other

It was also recorded which source used each of the above labels, in order to see whether journalists, government/ official sources, refugees and community and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) are using the correct labels. This analysis will also provide information as to whether refugees and asylum seekers are written about as a group or as individuals.

#### **e) Immigration**

Each use of the term immigration/immigrant was recorded to examine whether refugees and asylum seekers are incorrectly labelled as such. This helps us to understand if the media are framing the asylum seeker/refugee debate within an immigration framework as opposed to a human rights/persecution context.

#### **f) Numbers**

Each article was monitored for references to the numbers of refugees and asylum seekers in Britain and Wales and whether the number was made with reference to a source. Also examined was the accuracy of the numbers and whether journalists exaggerate or use misleading numbers of asylum seekers, as is often seen in the national media.<sup>11</sup>

This analysis can help us to understand whether the local media are as fixated on the numbers of refugees and asylum seekers as the national media have been for the past decade.

#### **g) Photographs**

Photographs were recorded to examine the images used in local media.

Categories used:

- Government Officials
- Other Officials
- NGO/Vol. Sector Officials
- Residents
- Refugees

- Patrick Jones <sup>12</sup>
- Other

## **h) Headlines**

Media research finds that readers often only read the headlines of articles, and often headlines are the only text readers remember.<sup>13</sup> Headlines were analysed to determine key words used that set the agenda. Articles will be analysed to determine whether they agree with the tone of the article.

Terms searched for:

- asylum seekers/asylum
- refugees/refuge
- fear/ threat
- number
- welcome
- costs/funding
- help/support/aid

## **i) Language**

Each article was subject to a textual analysis, main themes looked at:

- Descriptions of Refugees and where they come from
- Asylum seekers and refugees as something to “worry about”/ “fear”
- Asylum seekers and refugees as a “burden”, as a financial “burden”
- Communities welcoming refugees and asylum seekers
- “Real” and “Fake” refugees and asylum seekers

Analysing the language in articles reveals the use of so-called ‘asylum myths’. These myths, many the same as those circulated in the media in other Western nations (Australia, Canada, Germany, etc.), have become a focus for some sections of the national British media and it was examined to see if the language used in the Welsh press reinforces these myths. These ‘myths’ are not simply a result of the numbers of asylum seekers and refugees increasing over the past decade but there is growing evidence that these feelings of ‘protectionism’, ‘national defence of borders/culture’, ‘defence of national economies/capitalism’ are profoundly embedded in notions of democracy and racism.

## **j) Themes**

Resulting from the textual analysis is a series of recurring themes. The final analysis of the 195 articles concerns these main themes and examines how the debate about refugees and asylum seekers is framed in Welsh newspapers.

The following themes will be examined for their presence in the articles analysed:

- Cost of dispersing asylum seekers to Wales

- Lack of explanation of dispersal process
- Asylum Seekers and Refugees are Problems
- 'Good' vs. 'Bad' Asylum Seekers
- A Welsh Welcome
- Need to assimilate

## SECTION II FINDINGS

### 2.1 TYPE OF ARTICLE

Of the 195 articles in the study, 165 are news articles, with only 2 editorials, 12 feature articles and 16 letters to the editor. This proliferation of news articles is not accompanied by a similar number of feature articles which would help to contextualise the debate. The lack of feature articles provides few opportunities to develop a more in-depth understanding of the issues concerning asylum seekers and refugees. For instance, additional information which would improve the public's understanding as to why people come to Britain to seek refuge appears only twice, in two features about individual refugees, both found in the *South Wales Echo*.

The majority of articles in each area of Wales (South East, South West, Mid and North) appeared from April to June, when dispersal was expected to begin. The death of 58 Chinese people on their way to Britain is also a reason why the number of articles is high in June. In October the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) announced the dispersal process would be delayed in all areas but Cardiff until, at the earliest, April 2001 and this most likely accounts for the decline in articles across Wales. From August to December a total of 69 articles appeared in the Welsh press of which 29 (42 percent) appeared due to press releases sent out by the author.

195 articles appeared in the period covered and with only 20 asylum seekers dispersed to Wales, this, combined with approximately 180 asylum seekers already resident in Wales, means that this translates into one article per asylum seeker. Local newspapers must question whether this issue warrants this much attention.

#### Letters

Of the 16 letters to the editor, 10 are against asylum seekers being dispersed to Wales, 3 of these letters are from Conservative Party members in the Newport area. The remaining 6 letters support dispersal and plead for a more humane attitude towards asylum seekers, that Wales should be welcoming them, not hindering their arrival. Two of these letters are from members of the Communist Party and the Socialist Workers Party. Political parties thus can be seen to use the letters page to continue to politicise asylum seekers and refugees.

#### Features

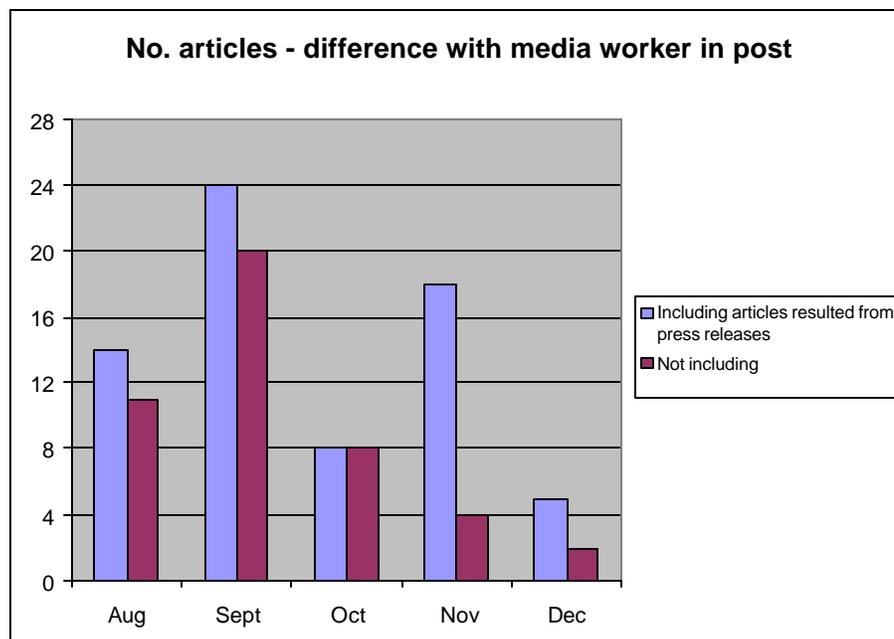
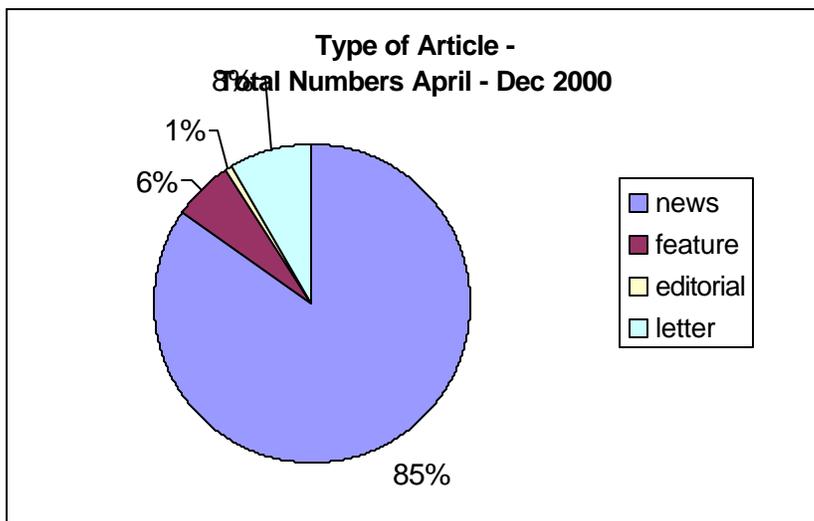
Of the 12 features 9 are found in the Cardiff and Newport papers. The remaining three features were printed in North Wales, one feature appearing twice in different papers and the third feature concerned Denbighshire citizen's views of the dispersal of asylum seekers to their area (see *Denbighshire Free Press* August 10).

As recommended by the Audit Commission's report on implementing the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act, local councils should 'develop a public relations strategy for asylum seekers and joint procedures for communicating with the media'.<sup>14</sup> Two local councils have taken up this challenge. In South Wales, Tom Begg, Chair of the Welsh Consortium and Director of Social Services for Newport, answered questions concerning the dispersal process in the *South Wales Argus* (May

15) and this article was repeated in a shortened version in the *Free Press* (May 19). In North Wales, Denbighshire's Director of Social Services, Meirion Hughes, also answered a series of questions (*The Visitor* July 27, *Vale Advertiser* July 28). In all four feature articles the questions primarily concerned costs associated with asylum seekers coming to the local authority.

Conversely the features in the Cardiff papers explained more about the background of individual asylum seekers (*South Wales Echo* May 15, November 13) or events which hoped to provide opportunities for the public to understand why asylum seekers were coming to the area (*South Wales Echo* November 13, *Western Mail* July 24 and December 23).

No articles appeared which tried to explain what life was like in Wales for the average asylum seeker.



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**CASE STUDY:  
TELEVISION & RADIO FEATURES**

There has been relatively little coverage of refugees and asylum seekers on Welsh television and radio. This absence is made even more evident when compared to the steady stream of stories in the Welsh press. But why this significant reduction in stories? One reason could be the lack of sources. As television is dependent on images, they need refugees and asylum seekers to appear on camera, however, according to groups working with refugees and asylum seekers, few are willing to speak to the media, and in particular, appear on television. If the coverage of refugees and asylum seekers is to make an impact on television and radio in Wales, groups that support refugees need to find sources and case studies and the media must be sensitive to asylum seekers' need for anonymity. Refugees and asylum seekers have sound reasons for being wary of the appearing in the media. Many fear that it might prejudice their case as well as raise their profile in the public domain (a potentially dangerous position for asylum seekers in today's climate of hostility, especially given that Cardiff and the Valleys have recently been found to be the second most likely place in Britain for an ethnic minority person to be attacked).<sup>15</sup> Lastly, they may be justifiably suspicious of the media from previous experiences in their own country.

**Television**

Over the 8 months period studied, BBC Wales and HTV Wales both produced half hour documentaries. The Welsh Refugee Council worked alongside HTV Wales in their production of the half hour long documentary. News coverage has also been minimal: in November HTV news ran a piece concerning young refugees, (unaccompanied minors) on their 6 p.m. programme, and worked with the media group to gain access to sources.

**Radio**

Radio in Wales is dominated by BBC services. 'Eye on Wales', Radio Wales' weekly documentary show, ran a half hour programme on refugees and asylum in Wales in September. In June, October and November (during Refugee Week) the Sara Dickens Show, a daily phone-in programme on Radio Wales, ran discussions about refugees in Wales and guests included: two Kurdish refugees, the Welsh Refugee Council, the Race Equality Council and Assembly Minister Edwina Hart.

## 2.2 LOCAL/NATIONAL ISSUE

Three-quarters of all articles concerned a local issue, showing that for the most part, the local media set their own agenda and do not follow the lead of national papers. Whilst local papers are setting their own agenda, often they follow the themes set out by the national media, which discusses asylum seekers and refugees primarily within the frames of cost and/or numbers coming to Britain.<sup>16</sup>

Local papers often include information about national issues at the bottom of articles concerned with other, but related, issues to asylum seekers and refugees. Much of this information is short, and as a result appears out of context and it is difficult to understand why the newspaper has chosen to include the information. For instance at the end of a letter to the *Newport Argus* about costs of dispersing asylum seekers to the local authority:

‘Recently in Swindon, gangs of rival Kosovan asylum seekers were attacking each other with Samurai swords and chains in the town centre in broad daylight.’ (May 17)

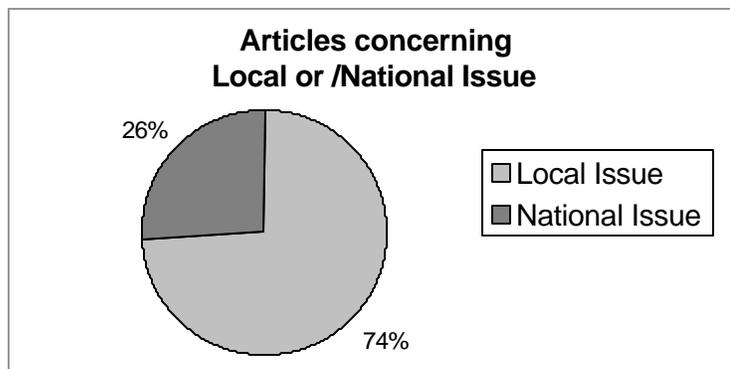
In an article in the *Wrexham Leader* discussing when asylum seekers will arrive in that area, the final paragraph:

‘Meanwhile, the government has threatened to deport any refugees from Kosovo who were evacuated to the UK during last year’s conflict if they try and remain beyond a June 25 cut-off date.’ (May 19)

In the North’s Wales largest newspaper, the *Daily Post*, the final 3 paragraphs of an article concerning William Hague criticising asylum seekers receiving fertility treatment discuss the Central Scotland Police:

‘hunt(ing) for a group of suspected asylum seekers who fled when they were confronted by a police officer’ (July 10)

Each of these articles is presented without context which would allow the reader to understand the issues, and instead encourages the reading public to continue to associate asylum seekers and refugees with either ‘financial’ or ‘criminal’ issues. As the majority of articles discuss asylum seekers in terms of a local agenda, cost and numbers, there is a lack of information for the public to understand who/why these people are coming to their communities, other than to ‘ease pressure on the South East’.



## 2.3 HEADLINES

71 percent of all headlines include the words: asylum seekers/asylum, refugee/refuge, thus enabling the reader to understand the main subject of the article from the headline. The analysis of key terms showed that there was no pattern of words used in the headlines. Asylum seekers/asylum and refugee/refuge were the only consistent key terms in the headlines.

In an analysis of this size there is not enough room to adequately analyse all headlines. A representative sample was chosen in order to provide an analysis of typical headlines found in the Welsh press. The headlines in the *South Wales Evening Post* were analysed. 28 articles appeared in this Swansea-based paper and each of the headlines are categorised below.

- 11 headlines agree with the subject and tone of the article:

‘Asylum seekers centres planned’ (May 10)

‘Appeal for toys by AM’ (May 22)

‘Meeting to back asylum seekers’ (June 7)

‘Asylum seekers’ warm welcome’ (June 9)

‘Refugee numbers are still unknown’ (June 9) (same page)

‘Talks over asylum seekers’ (June 13)

‘Refugees in need of help not suspicion’ (June 28)

‘Meeting pledged refugee support’ (June 28)

‘Refugee funding shortage has potential for disaster’ (July 3) – This article quotes Bridgend Council leader, Jeff Jones who states ‘If there are not proper funds it will be an unmitigated disaster.’ An example of a government official using overly-dramatic language and the media using it for greater effect.

‘Refugees focus of charity’ (July 12)

‘Getting ready for refugees’ (October 17)

‘Donation calls for refugees’ (October 26)

The above headlines clearly describe what the article is about and accurately reflect the information in the article.

- The remaining 17 articles either overtly disagree with the subject or tone or have an ambiguous meaning:

### **Disagree:**

‘Asylum seekers no threat claim’ (April 27) – Refers to an article concerning public meeting

‘Asylum pair jailed for £13000 snatch’ (July 19) – Refers to robbery of Swansea area post office by two asylum seekers.

‘Cash aid call to help out immigrants’ (July 24) – Concerns a demonstration against the use of vouchers organised by the Swansea Bay Asylum Seekers’ Support Group.

‘Benefit call for asylum seekers’ (July 25) This article discusses how asylum seekers might be victims of scapegoating due to the voucher system.

'Refugees opt for Home Counties' (November 14) - Addresses the unexpectedly low numbers of asylum seekers needing accommodation, and that as a result the arrival of asylum seekers to Wales has been delayed.

**Ambiguous:**

'Toys plea for asylum children' (June 2) –Concerns Assembly Members collecting toys for asylum seekers' children.

'Meeting in aid of asylum seekers' (June 5) – Refers to the first meeting of the Swansea Bay Asylum Seekers' Support Group, which aims to support asylum seekers, not 'aid' them.

'Asylum seekers turn to crime' (June 14) – Discusses a warning from Neath and Port Talbot police warning people that asylum seekers might turn to crime.

'Cost fear over refugee influx' (June 16) – Concerns the cost associated with dispersing asylum seekers to the Swansea area and the word 'influx' suggests a larger number of asylum seekers is expected to come to Swansea.

'Asylum seekers 'will get warm welcome' (August 23) – Refers to Swansea Bay Asylum Seekers' Support Group, use of quotation marks attenuates the call by the group to welcome asylum seekers.

'Store demo aims to back refugee cause' (September 5) – Use of the word 'aim' again lessens the impact of the call to 'back refugee cause', omit the word 'aims' and this more accurately reflects the actions of the Swansea Bay Asylum Seekers' Support Group's demonstration.

'More than a roof is vital' (September 27) – Refers to Liberal Democrat politician asking for more information and funding for refugees.

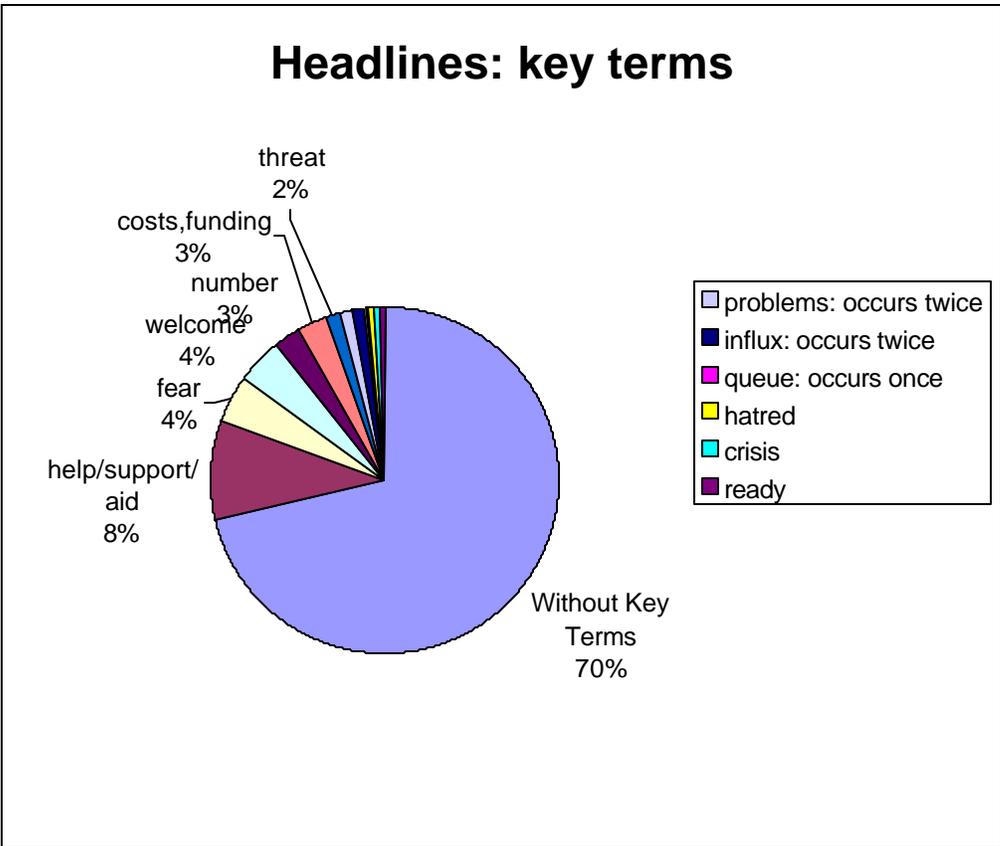
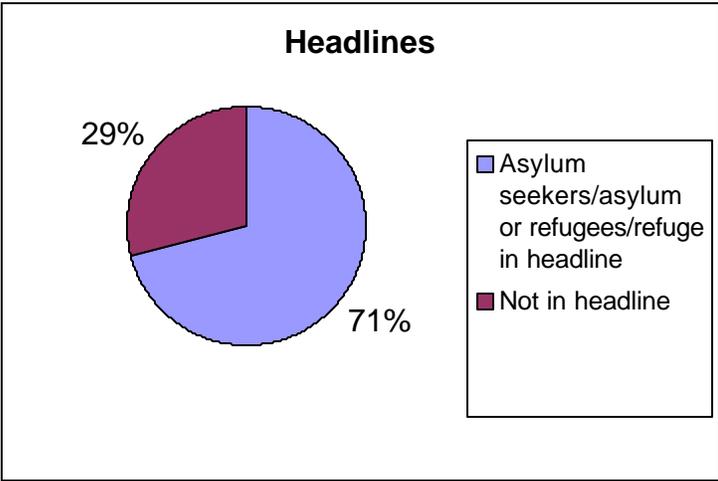
'Refuge in Wales not booming' (October 13) – Refers to the reduced number of expected asylum seekers to Wales

'Bishop's plea on asylum seekers' (November 24) – Refers to call from local bishop's call to welcome asylum seekers to the Swansea area.

'Racism action call to end the suffering of refugees' (December 4) – Refers to a new charity forming to help refugees and asylum seekers in Wales.

With 11 clear and unambiguous headlines, it appears that the *South Wales Evening Post* is choosing to make headlines concerning asylum seekers and refugees misleading, perhaps in their quest to make the story more dramatic than it actually is, as no asylum seekers have yet been housed in the Swansea area.

The headlines in the *South Wales Evening Post* are typical of headlines found in other papers: many simply reflect the article, whilst other headlines, particularly those concerning residents' views and meetings, can be misleading in their quest to be overly dramatic. As journalists and editors realise that asylum seekers will not come to Wales until March/April of 2001, the headlines are less dramatic but often still ambiguous.



## 2.4 SOURCES IN ARTICLES

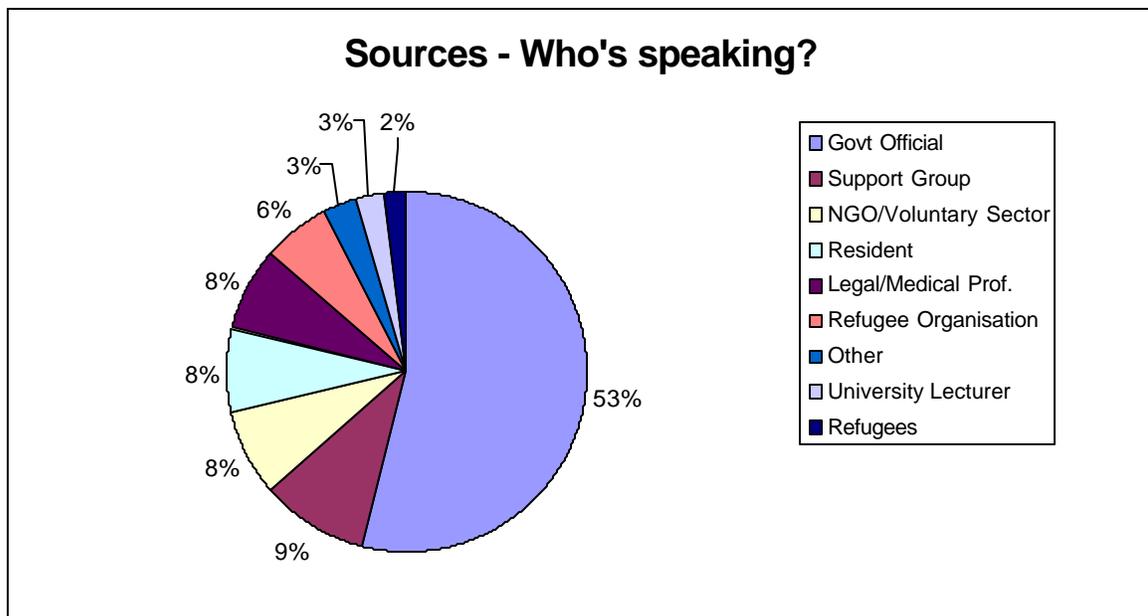
The analysis of sources in articles shows an over-dependence on government officials as speakers, both directly and indirectly, in all 195 articles. When all three levels of government officials are combined, Local Councillors, Assembly Members and Members of Parliament, they account for 51% of speakers directly quoted.

By using 'official' government sources most often in articles concerning refugees and asylum seekers an 'official' discourse is created. They become an 'official' issue to be dealt with by politicians, they become a political issue, not a humanitarian or civil rights issue. Both of the main political parties in Britain appear to have changed the focus of the asylum debate away from the humanitarian aspects and instead they choose to politicise the discussion.

Rarely are refugees given the opportunity to speak in their own voice, to put across their own views, to tell their own stories. Refugees are only directly sourced in 2 percent of articles and all 3 articles with refugees directly quoted are from the *South Wales Echo*. Outside of Cardiff readers have yet to encounter the views or voices of refugees or asylum seekers in their local papers. This problem is not solely due to journalists not attempting to ask asylum seekers and refugees for comments. With the level of debate on this issue at such a vitriolic level many asylum seekers are reluctant to speak to the media for fear of harassment or the negative impact on their case.

The local media do make use of NGOs, Local Refugee Support Groups, Doctors/Lawyers and Residents as sources. (One good example of this is the South-West Wales media's use of the Swansea Bay Asylum Seekers Support Group as a source.) However more use could be made of this sector, in particular the Welsh Refugee Council, which is the lead agency advocating on behalf of asylum seekers and refugees in Wales.

An 'official' discourse of asylum seekers and refugees is created in Welsh newspapers by consistently using government officials in articles concerning asylum seekers and refugees' arrival in Wales. In essence, refugees and asylum seekers are talked about, not talked to.



## 2.5 LABELS

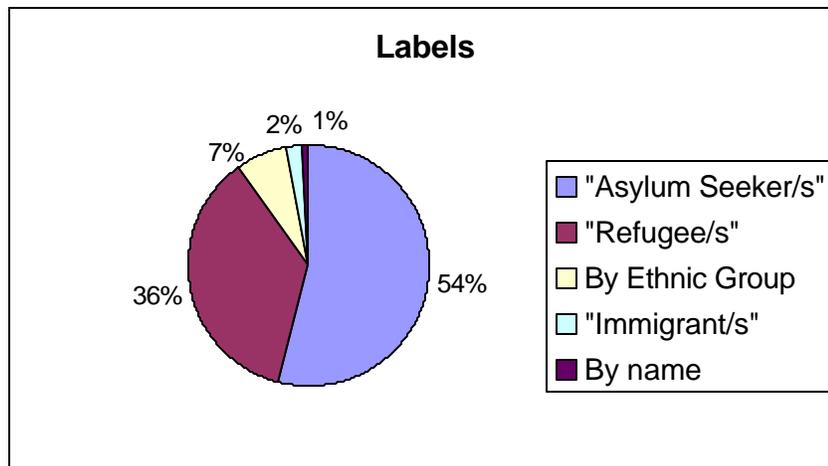
The labels 'asylum seeker/s' are used most often, followed by 'refugee/s'.

In only five of the 195 articles are refugees referred to by their name (or a pseudonym, admittedly many will not want their real names used), two of these are profiles, one concerns a legal case won by a local refugee (all three in the *South Wales Echo*). The remaining two articles refer to a refugee speaking to a public meeting in Swansea (both in the *South Wales Evening Post*), in the remaining 190 articles, asylum seekers/refugees are labelled as a group.

Similar to a lack of asylum seekers and refugees used as sources, they are rarely referred to by their own name or by their ethnic group. Again, an 'official discourse' is created, asylum seekers and refugees are, labelled as a group and not as an individual or from a country.

Both journalists and government officials use the labels asylum seeker/s and refugee/s 89 percent of the time. Government officials are the main group incorrectly using the label 'immigrant/s', in 7 percent of their labels.

Referring to refugees and asylum seekers as a group and not as individuals dehumanises them. It is easier to think of a *group* as something to vilify rather than the faces of a few *individuals*.



## Case Study:

### How the 58 Chinese Deaths were labelled

The Welsh press carried 12 articles concerning the death of 58 Chinese people found in the back of a lorry at Dover on June 19. Journalists and editors were confused as to how to label this group: were they asylum seekers? illegal immigrants? refugees? or Chinese? The following labels were used:

- ‘Bodies’, ‘Illegal immigrants’ 8 times
- ‘Deaths’ 6 times
- ‘Asylum seekers’, ‘men and women’ 5 times
- ‘People’ 4 times
- ‘Victims’, ‘Migrants’, ‘Stowaways’ 3 times
- Would-be refugees, Economic Migrants 2 times
- ‘Chinese immigrants’, ‘the group’, ‘individuals’, ‘human cargo/beings’, ‘travellers’, ‘immigrants’ 1 time
- ‘Refugees’ none

However, at other points the Chinese people are not labelled at all:

‘...who made the discovery’ (*South Wales Echo*, June 19)

‘...made the grim find’ (*South Wales Argus*, June 20)

‘...the 58 found dead at Dover...’ (*Western Mail*, June 20)

‘...the other 58...’ (*South Wales Echo*, June 23)

In a feature on June 20 the *Western Mail* describes how people get to Britain,

‘Illegal immigrants’ favoured methods’ and state reasons why people come to Britain as ‘to break free from the poverty of their home countries...to chase their dreams.’

In the same article Claude Moraes, MEP and formerly of the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants explains why people come to Britain in hazardous ways:

‘...there is an increasing level of desperation on the part of the people who are coming, either fleeing poverty or war.’

Otherwise there is little explanation as to why these people risked their lives in crossing the English Channel in a lorry and thus little explanation as to whether these 58 people were “asylum seekers” or “immigrants”.

This tragic incident was a opportune moment for newspapers to question why people come to Britain, however, few papers took up this challenge and instead simply wrote of the tragedy of their deaths.

## 2.6 NUMBERS

Unlike the national media, Welsh newspapers rarely use terms like ‘flood’, ‘influx’ or ‘wave’ to describe the numbers of asylum seekers coming to Britain or Wales.<sup>17</sup> Of the 195 articles the following terms were used:

Influx:	12 times
Wave:	5 times
Flood/Flock:	3 times
Total:	20 times

The use of these terms reinforce the dehumanising way of referring to asylum seekers:

‘Cardiff is not expected to receive a sizeable batch of asylum-seekers until the new year.’ (*South Wales Echo*, October 4)

‘Council chiefs in the city are gearing up to cope with the influx of refugees... Swansea’s share of 5 000 people destined to come to Wales’ (*South Wales Evening Post*, April 13)

When terms like influx/wave/flood are used their use by ‘official’ sources gives more credence to their use. Neath and Port Talbot detectives inflame the discussion of refugees and asylum seekers when after the arrest of 2 asylum seekers for the burglary of a Post Office in that area they state:

‘They have flooded into Britain...With the influx of such individuals throughout Britain we would ask traders and businesses to be vigilant.’ (*South Wales Evening Post*, June 14)

Other times when the terms are used they are used to exaggerate small numbers:

‘A wave of asylum seekers could be settling in the Bridgend area by November, the Gazette has learned. Ten houses in Windmill...’ (*Glamorgan Gazette*, Sept 21)

In July and August newspapers in North Wales were particularly concerned with the numbers of asylum seekers coming to their area and most articles listed the number of asylum seekers in the first paragraph.

‘...before Denbighshire welcomes 30 to 50 asylum seekers over the next three years...’ (*The Visitor* July 20 and *Vale Advertiser* July 21)

‘The people of Denbighshire are divided about the arrival of up to 50 asylum seekers in the county over the next three years’ (*Free Press*, August 10)

When numbers are used in articles it is to refer to numbers of asylum seekers coming to Wales or to the communities the newspaper covers, less than 5 articles discuss the numbers of people seeking refuge in Britain.

Edwina Hart, the Welsh Assembly Member with responsibility for asylum seekers and refugees, is the most often used source for the number of asylum seekers coming

to Wales, with local councillors the second most likely group to discuss numbers. Bar only 3 or 4 exceptions, the figures referred to in all 195 articles are accurate.

As well as a vigorous defence of asylum seekers heard on the Sara Dickens radio phone-in show on BBC Wales, Ms Hart's comments in the Welsh media have included:

'Wales has a tradition of being a welcoming nation. Asylum seekers are, in the main, people who have suffered injustice.' (*South Wales Argus*, 11.11.00)

Both the Labour Party in Wales and Plaid Cymru (particularly Helen Mary Jones' comments) have been much more positive in their support for those seeking asylum in Britain than their national counterparts.

A disproportionate number 9 (equating to 45 percent) of these terms appear in Swansea/Bridgend papers, this is especially true when one considers these two papers only account for 16 percent of sample.

## 2.7 IMMIGRATION/IMMIGRANTS/ECONOMIC MIGRANTS

The misuse of the terms “Immigration/Immigrants/Economic Migrants” occurs rarely in Welsh newspapers. In only 11 of the 195 articles are the terms immigration/immigrants/economic migrants used incorrectly to describe asylum seekers or refugees. On the whole, journalists and sources are correctly using the terms ‘asylum seeker’ or ‘refugee’ instead of complicating the issue with ‘illegal immigrants’, ‘illegal immigration’ or ‘economic migrants’.

The *South Wales Evening Post* misuses the above terms 3 times and uses the following headline to describe a call from the local refugee support to aid refugees:

‘Cash aid call to help out immigrants’ (July 24)

In only a few articles do journalists themselves use these terms:

‘It is expected 100 immigrants will be brought to North Wales this year...’ (*Weekly News*, May 11)

‘There have already been concerns that the immigrants will put pressure on resources’ (*South Wales Evening Post*, June 9)

When government and official sources use the terms ‘immigrant and immigration’ journalists follow their lead. The *South Wales Evening Post* quotes detectives from Neath and Port Talbot who:

‘...believe the struggling illegal immigrants are behind crimes worth thousands of pounds.’ (June 14)

However, for the most part, by not using the terms ‘immigration’ or ‘immigrants’ Welsh newspapers do not follow the discourse created by many of the national newspapers which, by labelling asylum seekers as ‘illegal immigrants, misrepresent their decision to come to Britain as solely on economic grounds.

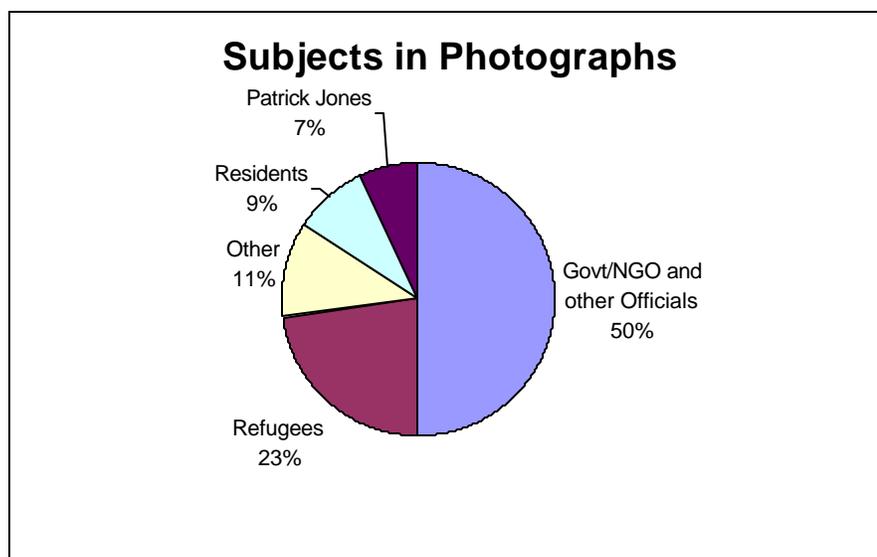
## 2.8 PHOTOGRAPHS

There are only 42 photographs in the 195 articles. Only 10 of these photographs are of refugees, and 6 of these photographs are agency photos (photographs supplied by Photography Agencies) and 2 of these photographs are used twice in separate papers. When these agency photographs are omitted refugees only account for 11 percent of images in photographs.

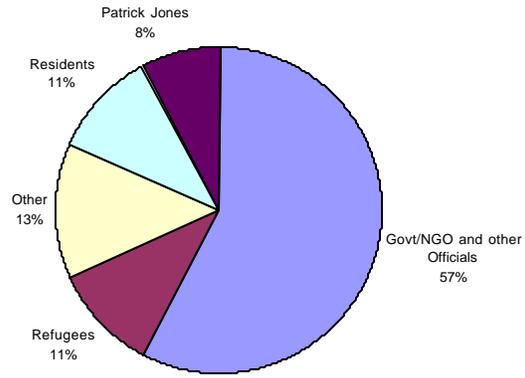
There are very few images of refugees or asylum seekers in newspapers, and when they do appear, they tend to be shown in camps in the countries where they came from. With so few images of refugees and asylum seekers the public have few opportunities to construct an image of who will be coming to their local communities. For instance in North Wales, only four photographs of asylum seekers are used, all of these are agency photographs of refugees standing behind a fence. Instead, newspaper readers in North Wales must depend on the national media and photography agencies for images of refugees and asylum seekers.

All four pictures of asylum seekers in Britain are of men, all pictures of asylum seekers outside of Britain are of women, or have women as the primary focus for the photograph. This acts to reinforce that of the asylum seekers who come to Britain the majority are men.<sup>18</sup>

Similar to those speaking in articles, the majority of images attached to articles concerning refugees and asylum seekers are of government officials or other officials; they appear in 41 percent of all photographs. Again, this reinforces the framework of asylum seekers and refugees in an 'official' discourse.



### Subjects in Photographs - NOT including agency photographs



## 2.9 LANGUAGE

Whilst the sources and labels may show that Welsh newspapers report asylum seekers and refugees as an “official” issue, and are writing fairly balanced articles, a close reading of the 195 articles shows that the language used by journalists creates other frames, other ideas of refugees and asylum seekers. Journalists choose the language they use and the subtle differences can influence the meaning. For instance when the Swansea Bay Asylum Seekers Support Group called their first meeting in June it was reported in the *South Wales Evening Post* on two separate days, in two very different ways:

‘A public meeting has been called to defend asylum seekers’ (June 5)

‘A public meeting is to held in Swansea to rally support for asylum seekers and refugees.’ (June 7)

The second sentence more accurately describes the work of the Support Group, they wish to inform the public and challenge the negative media coverage. The first sentence is more combative in its tone and has a hostile or militant meaning.

### “Real” Asylum Seekers

The discourse of creating ‘real’ versus ‘fake’ asylum seekers, or in the more commonly used terms ‘genuine’ and ‘non-genuine’, is not often used in the Welsh press, however these examples conform to the media’s framing of asylum seekers as either ‘real’ or ‘fake’:

‘...at least three new detention centres are to be set up in a bid to speed up the removal of bogus refugees’ (*Wales on Sunday*, May 14)

‘Non-genuine cases need to be returned to the country from which they departed’ (*South Wales Echo* May 10)

‘Downing Street released a digest of press cutting and other media reports from eastern European countries highlighting Britain’s determination to crack down on bogus asylum seekers’ (*Western Mail*, May 26)

‘No local authority will turn away genuine asylum seekers....’ (*Western Mail*, June 20)

‘asylum seekers may have tried to trick their way into Wales...As word has got round that the groups have been accepted to take part in the Eisteddfod some less than honourable people have attached themselves to them as so-called ‘dancers’. ’ (*Western Mail*, July 5)

‘attempts to clamp down on bogus refugees ...’ (*Western Mail*, November 25)

This difference created between ‘real’ and ‘fake’ asylum seekers is a constant discourse in the national media and particularly in the tabloid press.

## Why Here/ Where From

The explanations as to where asylum seekers come from list the country of origin but rarely discuss the situations people are escaping as local newspapers do not carry international news, unless there is some connection to the local community, readers must find out from other sources as to what the situation is in these source countries:

‘fleeing horrors of Eastern Europe and Africa...Many of the refugees will come from the former Yugoslavia, victims of ethnic cleansing and human rights abuses in Kosovo and elsewhere...asylum seekers were coming from Yugoslavia, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Sri Lanka, China, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Algeria, Somalia, Sierra Leone and elsewhere.’ (*Herald of Wales*, April 13)

‘those fleeing human rights abuses in countries like Somalia, Iraq and Sierra Leone being given asylum’ (*Western Mail*, May 26)

The phrase ‘former Yugoslavia, including Kosovo, Somalia, Sri Lanka, the former Soviet Union and Afghanistan’ to explain where asylum seekers come from is reused in a number of articles:

‘over half of all the asylum seekers ..from...former Yugoslavia, including Kosovo, Somalia, Sri Lanka, the former Soviet Union and Afghanistan. All these are countries in war or turmoil, where persecution and human rights abuses occur’ (*South Wales Argus*, May 15; *Newport Free Press* May 19; *Denbighshire Free Press*, July 20; *Evening Leader*, July 21; *The Visitor*, July 27; *Denbighshire Free Press* July 27; *Vale Advertiser*, July 28; *The Pioneer*, September 6; *Weekly News*, September 7, *The Visitor*, September 7)

As far as reasons why people seek asylum, this is often stated in one sentence and again, includes little detail. Readers must struggle to comprehend what kind of ‘traumas’, ‘atrocities’ or ‘conflicts’ would cause someone to seek asylum. These terms are not explained and thus their meaning is ambiguous:

‘These are people who are traumatised, people who have come from a brutalised regime’ (*South Wales Evening Post*, April 27)

‘Refugees are created by government policies, war and famine’ (*Barry and District Evening News*, May 4)

‘People are not granted refugee status just because they come from a poor country, they are coming from conflict and devastation.’ (*The Visitor*, July 20; *Vale Advertiser*, July 21)

‘but they may well be escaping from extreme conditions and have suffered the consequences of war and other forms of oppression.’ (*Flintshire Leader and Standard*, August 10)

‘many families and individuals arrive in Britain after experiencing trauma, torture, death of loved ones and forms of extreme violence.’ (*South Wales Echo*, November 30)

When broader explanations are given, they still lack background information necessary to educate citizens as to what seeking refuge means and often have ambiguous meanings:

‘Over half of all the asylum seekers entering Britain last year were from countries in war or turmoil, such as Kosovo, Somali, Sri Lanka, the former Soviet Union and Afghanistan, where persecution and human rights abuses occur. Due to this, many are forced to leave their countries illegally, leaving behind all their possessions, paperwork and passports, but Mr Hughes believes however unconventional their methods of arrival, they deserve fair consideration.’ (*The Visitor*, July 27; *Vale Advertiser*, July 28)

‘They have asked for protection and the right not to be returned to a country where they say they would face danger.’ (*Flintshire Leader and Standard*, August 10)

### Fear

The language used to describe the arrival of refugees and asylum seekers in Wales frames the possibility as something to be “feared”:

‘...asylum seekers descending on council estate will not threaten their lives.’ (*South Wales Evening Post*, April 27)

‘And the council has dampened down claims that trouble will break out as was first feared in Dover’ (*Denbighshire Free Press*, July 27)

‘Plans to house asylum seekers in North Cornelly have provoked an angry reaction from a pregnant mother-of-two’ (*Glamorgan Gazette*, September 28)

‘must take asylum-seekers...concerns have been voiced over the reaction of residents to the influx...produced an information leaflet to allay public fears’ (*South Wales Echo*, October 6)

### Preferential Treatment

Communities also express fears that refugees and asylum seekers will be given preferential treatment and politicians are quick to point out this is not the case:

‘no special deal for asylum seekers...not receive any preferential treatment in terms of housing, residents were reassured last night...no preferential treatment will be given to the asylum seekers’ (*South Wales Argus*, June 24)

‘no preferential treatment will be given to asylum seekers...with a serious impact on community balance.’ (*Denbighshire Free Press*, July 20)

‘Many people think asylum seekers will be given preferential treatment...but this will not be the case.’ (*The Visitor* July 20; *Vale Advertiser* July 21)

## Ghettos

Similarly, communities express fear that ‘asylum seekers ghettos’ will be created, and fear that “events” that occurred in Dover, though never explained, will happen in Wales. The so-called “detrimental” effects of housing asylum seekers in the same community are never explained.

‘...pledged that the refugees who finally settle in the town will be spread across the borough...to maintain local control and to prevent concentrations in individual neighbourhoods’ (*South Wales Argus*, May 6)

‘to spread refugees across the country rather than having them concentrated in places like London and Kent’ (*South Wales Evening Post*, June 9)

‘They will be distributed as evenly as possible across the county in small groups so they can support each other, but not large enough to intimidate the local community.’ (*Denbighshire Free Press* July 20; *The Visitor*, July 27)

‘Rumours that a ‘ghetto culture’ will be created, and that refugees will be given preferential treatment over education and employment’ (*The Pioneer*, September 6)

## Crime

Part of the way in which this fear is cultivated is by associating refugees and asylum seekers with criminal issues. Welsh newspapers do associate refugees and crime:

‘Crime and immigration are big issues and they need to be debated’ (*Evening Leader*, May 1)

‘...issued a warning in the press to businesses to be alert following investigations which revealed there had been a number of burglaries carried out by hard-up refugees...made it clear not all refugees should be tarred with the same brush’ (*South Wales Evening Post*, June 28)

The arriving asylum seekers are discussed as if they will turn to crime automatically:

‘Refugees seeking asylum in Llanelli will be taught our culture and customs in a bid to help them fit in...in an attempt to prevent unnecessary accidents and petty crime’ (*Llanelli Star*, October 5)

## As a ‘Burden’ on British Society

Refugees are discussed as a problem to be solved, communities have to ‘cope’ or ‘suffer’ upon the arrival of asylum seekers:

‘cope with the increasing numbers of asylum seekers...large numbers still flocking to the UK’ (*South Wales Echo*, May 10)

‘cope with the increasing numbers of asylum seekers’ (*South Wales Evening Post*, May 10)

‘I don’t believe the council tax payers of Swansea should suffer’ (*South Wales Evening Post*, July 3)

At other times they are labelled as an outright burden or strain to Britain:

‘no longer have to bear the brunt of the refugees – instead they will be distributed throughout Britain...(dispersal) aimed at removing the financial burden laid at the door of the local authority’ (*Weekly News*, May 11)

‘should help shoulder the burden of caring for asylum seekers...’ (*Western Mail*, November 4)

### Reluctant Councils

The language used by officials also frames local councils as ‘reluctant partners’, as not having a choice in accommodating asylum seekers in their communities:

‘Ok, we are all, reluctant partners in this but the alternative is far more unpalatable; all they will do is parachute them in’ (*Western Mail*, August 9; *Newport Free Press*, August 4)

‘Ceredigion will be asked to provide homes for its share of asylum seekers...will have to provide’ (*Cambrian News*, July 13)

‘will have to find them suitable accommodation’ (*Weekly News*, September 7; *The Visitor*, September 7)

‘Swansea Council has to house a certain number...’(*South Wales Evening Post*, October 26)

### Welcome

The Welsh press give ample space to those who wish to welcome asylum seekers to their communities, and in particular to give them a ‘Welsh’ welcome. This welcome is primarily from government officials, quite often Edwina Hart, AM, as well as a number of local councillors.

‘Give a warm Welsh welcome’ (*Herald of Wales*, April 13)

‘to show that refugees are welcome here’ (*South Wales Evening Post*, June 28)

‘desire to promote understanding of the plight of refugees and asylum seekers and to build on Wales’ tradition as a ‘welcoming nation’. (*South Wales Argus*, November 11)

‘the church in Wales has called on the public to welcome asylum seekers and refugees arriving in Wales...as they wait for their application for political asylum to be considered.’(*Ynys Mon Chronicle*, November 16)

Often this is discussed in terms of the specific local community welcoming asylum seekers:

‘Lynda Thorne has asked the city to extend a warm welcome to people who have travelled thousands of miles to flee persecution...people of Cardiff will play their part in providing them with a warm welcome’ (*South Wales Echo*, April 6)

‘Swansea has welcomed the backing they have received from city residents’ (*South Wales Evening Post*, August 23)

‘Flintshire council is seeking help from the public to welcome asylum seekers to the area...’ (*Flintshire Leader and Standard*, August 10)

‘big-hearted Carmarthenshire residents are welcoming asylum seekers into the county.’ (*South Wales Evening Post*, June 9)

‘A helping hand of friendship is to be offered to refugees setting up home in Port Talbot’ (*Neath and Port Talbot Courier*, June 21)

‘There is in Wales a strong tradition of humanitarian action in response to persecution and injustice...I am sure the people of Corwen would welcome them.’ (*Denbighshire Free Press*, July 13; *Evening Leader*, July 14)

### Providing help

The presence of supportive language to describe the dispersal of asylum seekers lends support to the idea that journalists choose their very carefully. The following sentences show that by using verbs with a more positive connotation, the meaning changes:

‘Cardiff is expected to host several hundred...’ (*South Wales Echo*, April 6)

‘houses and flats have already been offered’ (*Western Telegraph*, April 12)

‘Council chiefs are offering 30 houses’ (*South Wales Evening Post*, June 9)

‘Carmarthen...has been chosen to house up to 30 asylum seekers’ (*Carmarthen Journal*, September 27)

‘Cardiff will become the first Welsh host...’ (*South Wales Echo*, November 3)

## 2.10 THEMES

Out of the textual analysis emerged the following themes:

### Cost of Dispersing Asylum Seekers to Wales and Asylum Seekers and Refugees Are Problems

The costs and logistics of accommodating asylum seekers in local Welsh communities dominate the coverage of the issue in Welsh newspapers. Half of all articles at some point discuss the financial cost of dispersing asylum seekers to communities in Wales. Housing, the numbers of asylum seekers coming and the effect on education are also dominant themes, and account for 22 percent of all articles. The cost of supporting asylum seekers is one of the main themes in articles and similarly this emphasis frames the discussion in terms of finances and not human rights. Discussion of the cost of asylum seekers dehumanises asylum seekers and allows the cost of helping those in need to become more important than relieving of human suffering.

The dispersal of asylum seekers to Wales is primarily framed as a problem for Welsh communities, local authorities do not have ‘a choice’, the Home Office will disperse asylum seekers regardless of the decision of local councils, and as seen, journalists frame the story as councils not having a decision. Education and health are only discussed as problematic, that local services will ‘suffer’ due to so-called huge numbers of asylum seekers. This is the case in North Wales, where only 300 asylum seekers will be housed over the next three years. The language used states that citizens need to ‘fear’ or be ‘concerned’ at the arrival of asylum seekers. That these people will be a financial burden is clear, but also there is a fear that they will be a criminal threat.

### A Welsh Welcome

Leading politicians, including Edwina Hart the Assembly Minister with responsibility for asylum seekers and John Griffiths AM for Newport East, have attempted to frame the discussion in terms of giving asylum seekers a ‘Welsh welcome’, something poet Patrick Jones also attempts to do as well as local refugee support groups, primarily the Swansea Bay Asylum Seekers Support Group. Their views are covered widely. This is an example of a leading politician taking a positive stance on asylum seekers and attempting to change the debate.

### ‘Good’ vs. ‘Bad’ Asylum Seekers

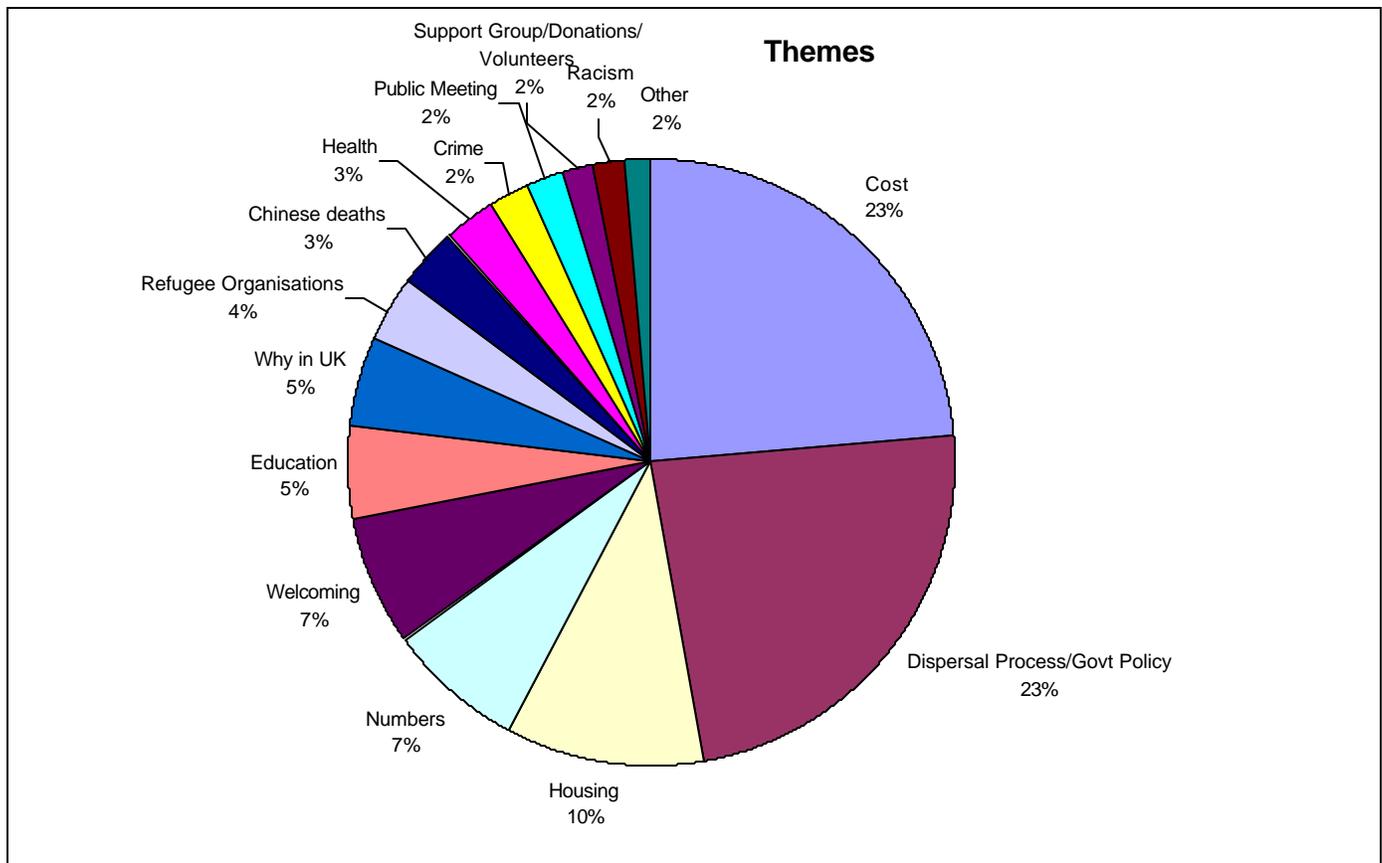
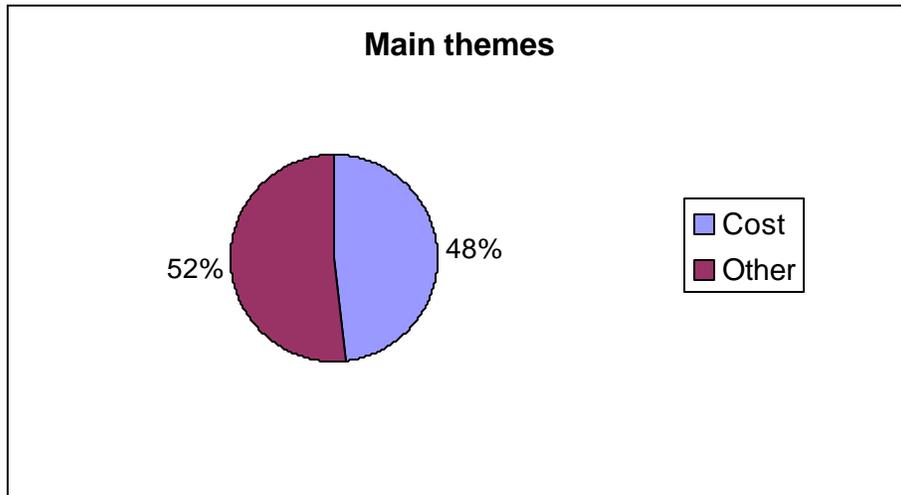
Good and bad asylum seekers are written about, in terms of ‘genuine’ asylum seekers and ‘bogus’ asylum seekers. The death of 58 Chinese people confuses this issue. Certain groups such as the Kosovars who arrived during Nato’s bomb campaign, are viewed as ‘real’ refugees whilst others are seen as opportunist.

### Need to assimilate

The need to assimilate, or conversely ‘hide’, asylum seekers into the wider community is also another prominent theme. Local councillors emphasise that ‘ghettos’ of asylum seekers will not happen, as did in Dover, that councils will work to include these people in their communities, however how this is to be achieved is not discussed. Local councillor’s emphasis on asylum seekers not receiving any preferential treatment also demonstrates that they will be treated just like other citizens in Britain, they will not get large handouts.

### Lack of explanation of dispersal process

The reasons behind the dispersal process are not covered and instead any explanation discusses an 'ease on the South East'. Discussions as to why these people seek asylum are simplistic and are often framed in one sentence, they are escaping 'torture', tyranny, words unfamiliar to a Western reader. Few articles discuss reasons behind the increase in asylum applications to Britain.



## SECTION 3

### 3.1 CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the Welsh press cover the issue of asylum seekers without the hostility or hyperbole that is seen in the national press.<sup>19</sup> However the debate around asylum seekers and refugees is framed as an ‘official’ issue, this is clear from an analysis of the sources journalists primarily use to discuss asylum seekers and refugees (Assembly Members, Local Councillors, MPs) and they tend to ignore groups that support refugees. The over-emphasis on government and other officials in photographs also demonstrates how asylum seekers and refugees are discussed as an ‘official’ issue.

- **Simply a statistic and a line in the budget**

The most far reaching conclusion of this report is the reduction of asylum seekers and refugees to either a financial cost or a statistic used to describe numbers arriving in the UK. The Welsh media rarely discuss why people seek refuge in Britain and instead coverage focuses on the costs of the dispersal process to their local community. In taking the human element out of the discussion about refugees and asylum seekers, it is easier to create a division between ‘us’, the valid citizens of Britain, and ‘them’ the asylum seekers ‘using up’ ‘valuable’ government resources. Welsh newspapers give simplistic, often one word explanations as to why people seek refuge in Britain. The process of seeking refuge in an international context is not understood and therefore it is difficult for readers, even those who might be sympathetic to refugees, to understand why people travel thousands of miles to seek safety.

- **Without a Voice**

Similar to other media research on asylum seekers and ethnic minorities, asylum seekers are marginalised in the Welsh media. They are given little opportunity to voice their own views or tell their histories as seen in the paltry use of refugees and asylum seekers as sources. Similarly they are absent from images in newspapers. Instead, the media privilege already powerful groups, primarily government officials.

- **Negative and ‘Fearful’ Language**

The use of terms like ‘bogus’ and ‘genuine’ creates negative stereotypes of asylum seekers and there is little use of ‘positive’ language about asylum seekers, particularly in areas outside Cardiff and Newport. An analysis of language showed that asylum seekers and refugees are discussed as a group to be ‘feared’ and as a ‘burden’, particularly a ‘financial burden’ to local communities.

- **An Active Local Authority Public Relations Department**

It is evident that in areas where Local Council Public Relations departments have taken the initiative, coverage, on the whole, is more accurate and thoughtful.

The Audit Commission’s ‘Another Country’ recommends that local authorities and regional consortia ‘develop a public relations strategy for asylum seekers and joint procedures for communicating with the media’. In the case of Cardiff and Newport, it

is evident that the Local Authority PR departments are working closely with local media to provide accurate information and we commend the work they have done. Reporting in the *South Wales Echo*, the *Western Mail* and the *South Wales Argus* is for the most part accurate and lacks the hostility found in other papers throughout Wales. These Council PR departments have worked successfully with local councillors and utilise these officials as sources who will speak positively about the dispersal of asylum seekers to Wales.

- **Communication needs to happen at national level, not just council level.**

Following on from the above point it is clear that the necessary processes are not in place which would provide residents, journalists and even local government officials and Welsh Assembly Members with correct information concerning the dispersal of asylum seekers to Wales. The Home Office needs to provide more *and* accurate information on what is happening in Wales. When journalists are fully briefed the reporting reflects the information they are given, the Home Office needs to take account of the difference in reporting when journalists are fully briefed, again this is recommended in the Audit Commission's *Another Country* report.

Local campaigning groups and refugee community organisations can successfully effect the coverage of asylum seekers in the local newspapers. The work of the Swansea Bay Asylum Seekers Support Group is a shining example of a group of citizens who have influenced their local media. They actively send out press releases and write letters to local papers in order to demonstrate, to 'prove' to local journalists that there are citizens who support the plight of asylum seekers and who are angry with the misrepresentation of the debate in their local media.

## 3.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

### a) **The Home Office**

- Discuss issues concerning asylum seekers and refugees in a more neutral manner. Remember the All-Party Agreement which states: “To ensure that in any dealings with the public no words or actions are used which may stir up racial or religious hatred, or lead to prejudice on grounds of race, nationality or religion.”
- Do not report only on numbers and policy, explain the international treaties Britain voluntarily belongs to which support the provision of refuge to those in need.
- Provide timely and relevant information in press releases, share the same information with journalists, politicians at all levels and community groups.
- Provide information or links to information as to why people seek refuge in Britain, and do not concentrate solely on European refugees (for instance on those from the Balkans).
- Be proud of Britain’s history of providing refuge to those in need.

### b) **The Media**

- Tell readers why refugees and asylum seekers are coming to Britain, and to Wales. Seek information from a variety of groups including: numerous non-governmental organisations: e.g. Welsh Refugee Council , Oxfam, British Red Cross, Save the Children Fund, Barnardo’s, Amnesty International, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees.
- Use a variety of sources. Don’t over-depend on official sources, seek out the voice of refugees, refugee community groups and NGOs that work with refugees.
- Be sensitive to the fears of asylum seekers and refugees about the possible impact on their case of talking openly, and make it easy for them to tell their stories confidentially.
- Use realistic images of refugees and asylum seekers. Don’t use agency photos, let communities see what refugees and asylum seekers look like who live in Wales and in the area you cover.
- Continue to set a local agenda but remember that refugees are a global issue, make connections outside of your area, see the wider picture of refugees around the world.
- If necessary in your area, nominate one journalist or a team to cover refugee and asylum seekers. Gareth Phillips at the *South Wales Argus* and Greg Lewis at the *South Wales Echo* are good examples of media outlets using the same journalist to cover this story and as a result their articles are more accurate and relevant to the important issues in the debate.

### c) **Welsh Assembly Members**

- Edwina Hart, John Griffiths and Helen Mary Jones all use supportive language which act as an example to other officials that using responsible language is a powerful tool when discussing asylum seekers and refugees.
- Educate yourself as to why people seek refuge in Wales, see sources listed above.

- Participate in local asylum seeker and refugee support groups.
- d) **Local Government Officials**
- Take the initiative from Newport and Denbighshire County Councils, use the local newspaper to answer citizens' questions about the dispersal process,
  - As suggested in the Audit Commission's *Another Country* report, organise public meetings to answer local residents' questions
  - Use responsible language when discussing asylum seekers and refugees, educate yourself as to why people seek refuge in Wales, see sources listed above.
  - Participate in local asylum seeker and refugee support groups.
  - Widen the forum for stakeholders to include Refugee Community Organisations and Local Community Refugee Support Groups.
  - Liaise with NGOs like the Welsh Refugee Council.
- e) **Police and other officials**
- Similar to recommendations for government representatives: use responsible language when discussing asylum seekers and refugees, educate yourself as to why people seek refuge in Wales, see sources listed above.
  - Participate in local asylum seeker and refugee support groups.
  - Continue working and liaising with NGOs like the Welsh Refugee Council.
- f) **Community Groups and Non-governmental organisations**
- Work proactively with your local media, arrange to meet local journalists and explain your work. Send press releases, about all events or issues you address.
  - Organise a list of people to use as possible sources – to be prepared when journalists call you. If refugees and asylum seekers do not feel comfortable speaking to the media, collate a series of case studies.
  - Similar to recommendations for government representatives: use responsible language when discussing asylum seekers and refugees.
  - Educate yourself as to why people seek refuge in Wales.
  - Network with organisations you think are interested in similar issues. The Welsh Refugee Council offers information, advice, guidance and support.
  - Participate in local asylum seeker and refugee support groups, organise one if there isn't one in your area.
  - Complain to the appropriate authorities when necessary. Whilst the Press Complaints Commission has strict guidelines in which complaints can be taken as valid, they nonetheless reminded editors "of their responsibilities in covering such topics and of the danger that inaccurate or misleading reporting may generate an atmosphere of fear and hostility which is not borne out by the facts". This was in response to a complaint which was upheld against the *Folkestone Herald's* reporting of asylum seekers in June 1999.

## APPENDICIES

### Appendix 1

#### Newspapers Analysed

##### **Cardiff and Area:**

*Western Mail*  
*South Wales Echo*  
*Wales on Sunday*  
*Barry & District News*

##### **Newport:**

*South Wales Argus*  
*South Wales Guardian*  
*Free Press*

##### **Valleys:**

*Rhondda Leader*  
*Merthyr Express*

##### **Swansea:**

*South West Evening Post*  
*Herald of Wales*

##### **West Wales:**

*Cynon Valley Leader*  
*Port Talbot/Neath Courier*  
*Carmarthen Journal*  
*Llanelli Star*  
*Glamorgan Gazette*  
*The Journal*

##### **North Wales:**

*Daily Post*  
*Wrexham Leader/Evening Leader*  
*Denbighshire Free Press*  
*Flintshire Leader and Standard*  
*Ynys Mon Chronicle*  
*Weekly News*  
*The Pioneer*  
*The Visitor*  
*Vale Advertiser*

##### **Mid Wales:**

*Brecon and Radnor Express*  
*Cambrian News*  
*Western Telegraph*  
*The County Times*  
*Herford Times\**  
*Shropshire Star\**

\*whilst these are “English” newspapers, these two papers have a high readership along the Mid-Wales border and were included for this reason.

## **Appendix 2**

### **Asylum Seekers and Refugees Media Working Group in Wales – Members**

Helen Buhaenko - Chair  
Oxfam Cymru  
46-48 Station Road  
Llanishen  
Cardiff  
Tel: 029 20757067

Tammy Speers  
Tom Hopkinson Centre  
School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies  
Cardiff University  
CF10 3EB  
Tel: 029 20875461

Eid Ali Ahmed, Mohamed Yusuf  
Welsh Refugee Council  
Unit 8, Williams Court  
Trade Street  
Cardiff  
CF10 5DQ  
Tel: 029 20666250

Terry Threadgold  
Tom Hopkinson Centre  
School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies  
Cardiff University  
CF10 3EB  
Tel: 029 20874756

Rob Webb  
Cardiff Council – Family and Adult Services  
County Hall  
Cardiff Bay  
Cardiff  
Tel: 029 20873614

Helen Ball/ Lucy Jackson  
Newport County Council Public Relations Department  
Newport Civic Centre  
Newport  
Tel: 01633 244491

Wendy Flynn  
Barnardo's  
11-15 Columbus Walk  
Brigantine Place  
Atlantic Wharf  
Cardiff  
Tel: 029 20493387

Mike Lewis  
Save the Children Fund  
Pheonix House  
8 Cathedral Road  
CF1 9LJ  
Tel: 029 20396838

**Associated Members:**

Phil Hurst  
Media Resource Wales  
c/o WCVA  
Tel: 029 20431700

Leona Evans  
Displaced People in Action  
Tel: 2041 5710/ 07900 191 933

British Red Cross  
Baltic House  
Mount Stuart Square  
Cardiff Bay  
Cardiff  
CF10 5FH  
Tel: 029 2048 0289

Tim Lockhart  
Amnesty International  
Tel: 029 20552 083

Terry Williams  
Presswise  
East Business Centre  
Felix Road  
Bristol  
BS5 0HE  
Tel: 0117 941 5848

## **Appendix 3**

### **Asylum Seekers and Refugee Service Providers**

Bryan Hartley, Regional Manager  
National Asylum Support Service  
HM Immigration Office  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Phase 1, Government Site  
Ty Glas Road, Llanishen  
Cardiff  
CF14 5UN  
Tel: 07879 848859

Dennis Dwyer  
Chief Immigration Officer  
HM Immigration Office  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Phase 1, Government Site  
Ty Glas Road, Llanishen  
Cardiff  
CF14 5UN  
Tel: 029 2076 4474

Carol Kennedy  
Regional Operations Manager  
One Stop Shop Services  
Welsh Refugee Council  
Unit 8, Williams Court, Trade Street  
Cardiff  
CF10 5DQ

Neil Sullivan, Operations Manager  
Asylum Seekers Team  
Cardiff County Council  
3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Marland House  
Central Square  
Cardiff  
CF10 1EP  
Tel: 029 2087 3614

Trish Johns  
Newport Social Work Services  
Royal Chambers  
High Street  
Newport  
NP20 1FZ  
Tel: 01633 244491

## **Appendix 4**

### **Refugee Community Organisations and Support Groups**

Abdikarim Abdi Adan  
Somali Progressive Association  
Somali Advice and Information Centre  
Unit 4, 8 West Bute Street  
Cardiff  
Tel: 029 2025 5526

Miqdad Al-Nuaimi  
Newport and District Refugee Support Group  
Newport Civic Centre  
Newport  
NP20 4UR  
Tel: 01633 233427

Mohamed Ali Field  
Iraqi Community Association of Wales  
Tel: 01443 2082 6932

Abdallah Khairi  
Sudanese Community Association  
139 CSV House  
Williams Way  
Cardiff  
CF10 5DY  
Tel: 029 2041 5710

Charles Assopardi  
Kosovan/Albanian Association  
CSV House  
Williams Way  
Cardiff  
CF10 5DY  
Tel: 029 2041 5715

Salah Hasan  
S.W.I.C.R.A.  
Tel: 0796 8987092

Anh Tang  
South Wales Vietnamese Refugee Community Association  
CSV House  
Williams Way  
Cardiff  
CF10 5DY  
Tel: 029 2041 5713

Amin Barzanji  
Cardiff Kurdish Society  
Tel: 07808 819 888

Swansea Bay Asylum Seekers Support Group  
PO Box 90  
Swansea  
SA1 4ZL

## **Appendix 5**

### **Welsh Refugee Council**

The Welsh Refugee Council is a national Welsh refugee agency that was set up in 1990 as a registered charity. It was founded in partnership between individuals including refugees and representatives of refugee communities, voluntary organisations and statutory bodies. The Welsh Refugee Council's vision is to 'empower refugees to take control of their lives and create a Wales in which refugees are welcome'.

Over the last two years the WRC has grown to become a major organisation and currently operates across Wales at 3 offices in Cardiff, Newport and Swansea and will soon open another office in Wrexham. In the last two years staff numbers have increased from five to twenty-five and the range of services offered include: advice and support, casework, advocacy and representation in areas such as welfare, benefits, housing, health and immigration. The WRC is also involved with community development and capacity building including volunteering and befriending, adult guidance in education and training and employment. The WRC works closely with key partners in strategic alliance and partnership to meet the needs of refugees and asylum seekers in Wales.

#### **OFFICE LOCATIONS**

##### **Cardiff**

Welsh Refugee Council  
Unit 8, Williams Court  
Trade Street  
Cardiff  
CF10 5DQ  
Tel: 029 20666250

##### **Newport**

Suite 5-6, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Clarence House  
Clarence Place  
Newport  
NP9 7AA  
Tel: 01633 252271  
Fax: 01633 252273

##### **Swansea**

1 The Kingsway  
YMCA  
Swansea  
SA1 5JQ  
Tel: 01792 301729  
Fax: 01792 484337

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**Myths and realities**

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**1. *Britain is a soft touch and takes more than its fair share of refugees.***

According to recent United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees figures, the UK received a *total* of 76,040 applications for asylum in 2000; this represents a 7% increase on 1999. However, *relative to population* many other European countries take far more asylum seekers than we do per head - Britain is 7<sup>th</sup> out of 15 EU member states in these terms, with 1.66 applications per 1000 people. Belgium was highest (4.20 per 1000), with Ireland, the Netherlands, Austria, Denmark and Sweden, all receiving more applications relative to the population of their country<sup>1</sup>.

Moreover, it is primarily the poor countries in the South which bear the brunt of refugee movements. For example, there are around 1.8 million refugees in Iran, more than 450 000 in Guinea and over 400,000 in Tanzania<sup>2</sup>.

**2. *The 1951 UN Convention is out of date***

As a party to the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention, ratified by 139 countries, the UK has an obligation to examine applications for asylum. If an asylum-seeker can demonstrate a 'well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion', then they should be given refugee status. There is a duty on the UK to ensure that, through its actions, no-one is forcibly returned to any territory where their life or freedom may be in danger.

The Home Secretary's recent proposal that those seeking asylum should remain in the first country they flee to is fundamentally flawed. This would shift even more responsibility on some of the world's poorest countries who already host an unfair proportion of the world's refugees; the vast majority already remain in the developing world, whilst the EU hosts less than 5%. It would also undermine the individual's absolute right to make a claim for asylum in Europe and to have it properly considered.

**3. *Only a tiny proportion of refugees are genuine and the rest are 'bogus'***

The majority of people coming to the UK to seek asylum in recent years have been from the former Yugoslavia, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Turkey, Iraq and Iran. These are all countries where there has been serious conflict or where grave human rights abuses are common<sup>3</sup>.

Around 47% of asylum seekers were found to be in need of protection and allowed to remain during 1999, and around 22% during 2000. However, this ignores the fact that

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, (2001), Asylum Applications Submitted in Europe 2000.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Committee for Refugees, World Refugee Survey 2000.

<sup>3</sup> [www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs/asy-dec00.pdf](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs/asy-dec00.pdf)

many refusals are overturned at appeal; in 2000, appeal adjudicators upheld 17% of appeals before them<sup>4</sup>.

Furthermore, the past year has seen a dramatic rise in rejections based on technicalities – up from 1,085 in 1999 to 26,635 in 2000. This is because asylum seekers have only been given 10 working days to submit a 19 page ‘Statement of Evidence form’, in which they must outline the basis of their claim. Often without legal help and lacking sufficient English to complete the form properly, their applications are frequently refused on the grounds of ‘non-compliance’. In such cases, the validity of their actual claim is therefore not even considered<sup>5</sup>.

Adjudications for asylum seekers claims have also been a cause for concern. For example, meetings for asylum seekers dispersed to Glasgow have been held in London at extremely short notice – in some cases one day before the date of the meeting and sometimes even after the meeting. Sometimes asylum seekers have not been provided with travel passes for their journey and if they fail to attend for the meeting their case is dismissed until appeal.

Finally, there are also some who appear to be rejected unfairly. For example they may be turned down for entering the UK with false papers, despite the fact that this may have been the only way to escape persecution in the asylum-seeker's country of origin - a reality which is acknowledged under international refugee law (Article 31, 1951 Refugee Convention).

On this basis, there is no justification for routinely attaching the adjective ‘bogus’ to all those seeking asylum, which does tremendous harm to those legitimately seeking asylum.

#### 4. *Most asylums seekers are 'economic migrants'*

There are clear connections between increases in incidence of human rights abuses and persecution in particular countries and rises in the numbers of asylum applicants from those countries (as set out above in response to myth 3). On the basis of the figures above, large numbers of applications have legitimate grounds for claiming asylum.

It is important, however, to acknowledge that migration is increasing. Given that there are virtually no legal routes for migrants to come to the UK to work, some clearly do seek to claim asylum to gain entry to the UK. To reduce this pressure on the asylum system, it is essential that the Government should develop a more open policy towards migration, as recently recommended in a Home Office report<sup>6</sup>.

The evidence is growing that the immigration of workers – not only skilled but also unskilled – does not reduce the welfare of British citizens. On the contrary, it stimulates the economy and thus the growth and incomes of the indigenous

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<sup>4</sup> See note 3

<sup>5</sup> If one removes those refused on grounds of non-compliance from the total number of asylum applications for 2000, 44% of asylum seekers were found to be in need of protection and allowed to remain in 2000 and even more after appeal.

<sup>6</sup> Glover, S, et al, (2001), Migration: an economic and social analysis, Home Office

population. Indeed, given ageing and an increasingly service-orientated economy, the welfare of the population, especially the elderly, depends on increased unskilled immigration. Furthermore, the evidence suggests that the vast majority of migrants do not wish to settle in the UK, but to work here temporarily in order to send money home to their families.

### **5. *Asylum seekers get massive state handouts***

Since April 3 2000, asylum seekers have been provided with vouchers to meet their basic living needs whilst they await a Home Office decision on their asylum claim. The voucher scheme means that asylum-seekers exist on around 70% of basic income support levels (ie a significantly *lower* level than that for UK citizens). Moreover, there is substantial evidence that income support itself (at 100%) is insufficient too – therefore 70%, aside from being discriminatory, is even more grossly inadequate. Asylum-seekers are amongst the poorest and most vulnerable groups in the UK, and are further stigmatised and demeaned by having to use vouchers.

Under the new arrangements, the amounts of voucher support (£10 of which is redeemable for cash per person per week) is:

Person aged 18-24	£28.95
Person aged over 25	£36.54
Couple	£57.37
Lone parent	£36.54
Child under 16	£26.60
Child 16 or 17	£31.75

A joint report by Oxfam, the Refugee Council and the Transport and General Workers Union ('Token Gestures')<sup>7</sup> has provided the first clear-cut evidence of the damaging impact of the scheme on asylum seekers. In a survey conducted for the report, 49 out of 50 organisations (98%) stated that the scheme is creating serious difficulties. These include asylum seekers: going hungry; not being able to buy essential items (eg. nappies, baby milk, hygiene products, clothes, bus ticket, telephone cards); being denied change for unspent portions of vouchers; and being humiliated and harassed in shops and on the streets.

The Government has argued that vouchers would deter unfounded claims, however since the scheme was established, asylum applications have continued to rise. As the United Nations High Commission for Refugees has recently argued, the main reason for lodging an asylum claim in a particular country is not the level of benefit support available, but the presence of established refugee communities (eg. Sri Lankans in the UK).

### **6. *Asylum-seekers are taking our housing***

Asylum-seekers are primarily being housed in 'hard to let' accommodation that people on council waiting lists don't want. Dispersal under the existing interim arrangements is happening far more slowly than originally envisaged by the

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<sup>7</sup> [www.oxfam.org.uk/policy/papers/vouchers/intro.htm](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/policy/papers/vouchers/intro.htm)

Government; this is evidence of the poor state of the housing stock in many areas and the fact that appropriate accommodation is simply not available. A recent report by Shelter ('Far from home')<sup>8</sup> has provided further detail on the very low standard of housing available to asylum seekers in the private rented sector.

### ***7. Asylum seekers don't need to put themselves into the hands of traffickers***

Trafficking has risen in recent years, but the increasingly restrictive approaches of Western Governments, including the UK (eg. the introduction of visa restrictions and carrier sanctions; the application of 'safe third country' and 'safe country of origin' concepts; readmission agreements) are pushing asylum seekers into the hands of traffickers.

Trafficking in human beings cannot be condoned, and the Government should take action to curb it, however it must recognise the impact of its own immigration and asylum policies in compounding the problem. It is essential that any measures are directed at the individuals and groups making profits out of desperate human needs, and not their victims. There is a significant danger that measures to combat trafficking may prevent genuine asylum seekers from gaining access to asylum procedures.

### ***8. Council tax is going up to fund asylum seekers***

The costs of looking after asylum seekers are currently meant to be met by central government rather than through council tax; this basic principle should ensure that the costs do not fall disproportionately on particular authorities.

In practice, the Home Office estimates that it will spend £300 million to meet the cost of supporting asylum seekers in 2000-2001. Despite some recent Government concessions, local authorities say they face a £90 million shortfall in funding to support asylum seekers. In particular they argue that the extra costs of health, education and social care are not fully met by central government.

There are also particular problems (most prominent in Kent) in relation to funding support of unaccompanied (or separated) children, the responsibility of the Department of Health. This is partly because supporting unaccompanied children costs more, owing to their extreme vulnerability. Many have become separated from their parents or carers through conflict, flight and displacement and arrive in the UK alone. Often it is family or friends who – fearing for the child's safety and well-being – go into serious debt to purchase an airline ticket or to arrange travel with traffickers.

A major reason why support for asylum seekers is proving more expensive is because cases are taking so long to process; the average time of 19 months is far in excess of the Government's stated aim (for families) of two months plus four months for any appeal. When the Labour Government came to power in May 1997 there was a backlog of some 50,000 outstanding asylum cases, but in January 2000 the overall backlog had risen to 102,870 before falling back<sup>9</sup> to 66,195 at the end of December 2000<sup>10</sup>. This is largely the fault of the Home Office (eg. the failure of recently

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<sup>8</sup> Garvie, D, (2001), far from home, Shelter

<sup>9</sup> [www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs/asy-jan00.pdf](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs/asy-jan00.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> [www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs/asy-dec00.pdf](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs/asy-dec00.pdf)

introduced computer systems failure; the introduction of new casework arrangements; insufficient staffing; poor quality decision-making).

### ***9. Gypsies are begging aggressively***

Although the numbers of cases of begging has increased over the past year, the extent of begging by gypsies – particularly aggressive begging - is being massively exaggerated. The fact that more cases of begging are occurring is linked to the extremely low level of state support available (around 70% of income support) and the lack of economic opportunities, which can leave some with little choice but to beg for survival.

Many Roma are coming to the UK because of serious persecution. A study by the OSCE (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe) which was published in April 2000 confirmed that the plight of Roma has worsened dramatically in recent years, with increases in racially motivated attacks against them, rising levels of unemployment, evictions, and even exclusions from their home towns in countries including the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia<sup>11</sup>.

### ***10. Asylum-seekers should be locked up because they're criminals***

The majority of asylum-seekers are granted temporary admission pending an outcome of their claim. However, many asylum-seekers are held in detention whilst their claim is processed. At the end of December 2000 there were 1195 immigration detainees held in prisons and detention centres throughout the U.K.<sup>12</sup>. They are detained at some 30 detention centres and prisons around the country. In breach of international human rights law, there is no adequate judicial oversight of the decision to detain and it appears that detention is being used routinely rather than in exceptional circumstances only. In March 2000 a detention centre for newly arrived asylum seekers was opened in a former army barracks at Oakington in Cambridgeshire, and further expansion of accommodation places is planned. There is significant concern that they are being held at Oakington on the basis of their country of origin alone, echoing the much criticised 'white list' procedures operated by the previous government (subsequently abolished by the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act). They will also have their claims determined within 7 days – far too little time to ensure a fair and thorough examination of their cases.

### ***11. Dispersal is working***

The current arrangements for dispersal (ie. moving asylum seekers from London and the South-East to other parts of the country to designated accommodation on a 'no choice' basis) are presenting significant difficulties for asylum seekers. The absence of specialist legal representatives is widespread. Most are located in London and the south-east; without good legal advice there is a real danger of asylum-seekers being returned without being able to make a fair application. There is also a significant lack of interpreters available in dispersal locations. And no-choice dispersal is separating

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<sup>11</sup> Van Der Stoel, M, (2000), Report on the Situation of Roma and Sinti in the OSCE area, High Commissioner on National Minorities, Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe

<sup>12</sup> [www.penlex.org.uk/pages/avebury3.html](http://www.penlex.org.uk/pages/avebury3.html)

asylum seekers from their communities and other essential support networks (family, friends and the cultural and linguistic support). There is a significant danger of racial harassment and attack. As a result, many asylum seekers have abandoned the designated accommodation, preferring to return to London to live in overcrowded settings with other asylum seekers and refugees<sup>13</sup>.

### *12. Politicians and the press are simply stating the facts*

The Press Complaints Commission has recently cautioned editors about 'the danger that inaccurate and misleading reporting may generate an atmosphere of fear and hostility which is not borne out by the facts'. This statement is drawn from a ruling to uphold a complaint by Harman and Harman solicitors in Kent against an article in the Folkestone Herald. More recently, the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) has expressed its concern at the 'ill-informed, adverse media coverage' which has contributed to a rise in racial tension in local communities. In a report on policing issues around asylum, ACPO concluded that: 'Racist expressions towards asylum seekers appear to have become common currency and acceptable in a way which would never be tolerated towards any other minority'<sup>14</sup>.

Unfortunately, some politicians have on occasion also helped to entrench some of the myths set out above. In 1999, the leaders of all the main UK political parties supported an 'All Party Declaration' on the Asylum Bill which states that 'the right to free political expression must not be abused in pursuit of political advantage by inciting or exploiting prejudice on the grounds of race, nationality or religion'. Political parties must uphold this principle in their public statements on asylum issues.

**If you would like further information please contact the UK Poverty Programme on: 0141 331 1455 or write to – UKPP, Oxfam, Floor 5, Fleming House, 134 Renfrew Street, Glasgow G3 6ST.**

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<sup>13</sup>Audit Commission, (1999), Another Country: Implementing dispersal under the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999

<sup>14</sup> [www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4121943,00.html](http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4121943,00.html)

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> For example in this period see stories concerning asylum seekers in: *The Daily Mail* June 14, July 11, July 15, November 13, December 6, December 18 and *The Sun* April 10, April 11, April 12, June 1, September 6, November 25.

<sup>2</sup> **Asylum seekers** are people who are applying to seek refuge in Britain and are awaiting a decision on their case.

**Refugees** are people who have been granted refugee status according to the 1951 Geneva Convention definition which states refugees are ‘persons who are outside their country because of a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion’.

**Immigrants** are people who come to Britain by choice for a variety of reasons, for example, to work or to join other family members.

<sup>3</sup> see for instance Vaughan Robinson’s work on refugees in Wales.

<sup>4</sup> Robinson, V. (1997) *Refugees in Wales: An ‘Invisible Minority’* Migration Unit Research Paper 13.

<sup>5</sup> The Home Office does not collect statistics as to how many refugees live in different parts of the UK. The collection of ‘numbers of refugees’ is a difficult task – some people label themselves ‘refugees’ for the length of time they are outside their homeland (thus they are always a ‘refugee’) whereas other ‘refugees’ prefer to drop the label once they recognise that they will most likely not be permitted back to their homeland.

<sup>6</sup> Source: Welsh Refugee Council.

<sup>7</sup> See Footnote 1.

<sup>8</sup> See Appendix 1 for a full list of papers.

<sup>9</sup> Source: *Audit Bureau of Circulations*.

<sup>10</sup> Research by Teun A. van Dijk, *Racism in the Press*, and T. Speers ‘*Novelty or Nuisance: Refugees in the British Press*’, Unpublished MA Thesis, Cardiff University, Ronald Kaye in *The New Migration in Europe: Social Constructions and Social Realities* (1998) and the *Runnymede Bulletin* Dec 95/Jan 96 (available from The Runnymede Trust) find that refugees and asylum seekers are rarely used as sources.

<sup>11</sup> See for instance the *Daily Mail*, December 6, 2000.

<sup>12</sup> Patrick Jones is a Welsh poet who has lent his support to refugees and asylum seekers. He has participated in a number of events and is the sole Welsh ‘celebrity’ to support this issue. He is included as a separate category as his image is used a significant number of times. Similar to the analysis of sources, by analysing the images in photographs we can begin to understand how the public develop their understanding of who refugees are and who is coming to their community.

<sup>13</sup> See above *Racism in the Press*.

<sup>14</sup> *Another Country* (2000) National Audit Commission, Page 93.

<sup>15</sup> ‘Special Report: Race Issues in the UK’, *Observer*, 18 February 2001.

<sup>16</sup> For a discussion of themes used by the national press when reporting refugees and asylum seekers see sources listed in footnote 10.

<sup>17</sup> For two very good discussions of the use of terms like ‘flood’, ‘swamp’ and ‘barrage’ to describe the arrival of asylum seekers in Britain’s national press see two publications listed above: *Racism in the Press* and Ronald Kaye in *The New Migration in Europe: Social Constructions and Social Realities*

<sup>18</sup> It is estimated that the numbers of female asylum seekers making it to Europe is around 30% but more recent estimates put this number closer to 40%. Home Office

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official statistics state that approximately 67% of principal applicants in 1999 were male however like most Home Office statistics, this needs to be interpreted with care, because it does not include dependants of asylum-seekers. The Home Office's tends to regard males as principal applicants and women as dependants, even if the woman expresses the desire to claim asylum as well as or instead of her male partner, and even if it is the woman who has suffered persecution (the tendency of men to be treated as principal applicants might also have to do with gender relations in the various countries of origin of the asylum seekers).

<sup>19</sup> See footnote 1 for examples of this type of reporting in the Britain's press.

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BACK COVER – if possible

In April 2000 Wales was set to receive asylum seekers as part of the government's 'dispersal' programme. As a result, the Welsh media, like the national media based in London, started to report increasingly on this marginalised group. However, by the end of the year, the dispersal programme had not been fully implemented in Wales. **Welcome or Over-reaction** examines how the Welsh Media covered issues concerning asylum seekers and refugees during this period of intense media scrutiny. Do the Welsh media see this issue differently from the London-based media or are they preparing for a different kind of welcome?

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