



37 Kingsmills Road  
Wrexham  
LL13 8NH

01978 262588  
[www.tcc-wales.org.uk](http://www.tcc-wales.org.uk)  
[office@tcc-wales.org.uk](mailto:office@tcc-wales.org.uk)

## Refugees Welcome in Wales

### Writing to your county councillor

#### Why should I write to my county councillor?

In September 2015, the Prime Minister announced that the UK will resettle up to 20,000 Syrian refugees over the rest of the Parliament.

This programme is called the Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (VPRS) and so far four Welsh authorities have taken part: Caerphilly, Ceredigion, Neath Port Talbot, and Torfaen. In total they have received 50 refugees.

If other local authorities are willing to take part in the scheme they must put themselves forward to the Home Office. If you'd like your county to welcome Syrian refugees you can encourage your county councillor to call for your local authority to join the scheme.

#### The Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (VPRS)

The VPRS applies to those currently in camps in countries neighbouring Syria who cannot be supported effectively there. This includes women, children and young people at risk, people in severe need of medical care, survivors of torture and violence, and those with medical needs or disabilities.

By the time a refugee arrives in the UK through this scheme they will have been through a thorough two-stage vetting process to ensure government knows who is entering the country.

Refugees will be granted a five year humanitarian protection visa. This will entitle them to certain rights, including access to public funds, access to the labour market and the possibility of a family reunion.

The UK government is providing £590 million to local authorities over the five years to contribute to the cost of supporting refugees. This is a much more generous package than other previous schemes, and provides funding for items such as housing, health, and education.

Each local authority would only need to welcome a small number of families each to reach a total of 20,000.

#### What to do

Firstly, find out who your county councillor is if you don't know already. This information can be found on your council's website. If they represent a political party you may wish to research their party's position on the issue. If you don't have internet access please get in touch with us for information.

Contact your councillor via letter or email asking them to take action to encourage the council to



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Rhif elusen / Charity number: 1086434



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sign up to the scheme. It's important to show that there is public support for welcoming refugees, but do stress that action needs to be taken urgently.

Make sure you give your address so they know you're a constituent of theirs. Points you could include are:

- Facts and figures such as:
  - 13.5 million people in Syria are in need of humanitarian assistance.
  - 4.6 million Syrians are refugees. Half of these are children.
  - Around 10% of the refugees have come to Europe, but most remain in the Middle East.
  - Now that it's winter refugees in the camps are facing cold and snow. Many people are in need of adequate food, clothes, shoes, blankets, heaters, and fuel – it's really urgent that we act now.
  - The VPRS is only for the most vulnerable people who need it most.
  - The poor response from the UK so far: the conflict in Syria has been ongoing since 2011, yet the UK's a previous scheme for Syrian refugees only resettled 143 people in total.
- Local support for welcoming refugees:
  - What you could offer: how would you be a welcoming community? Are you involved with groups which could provide social interaction for adults or for children?
  - Other people, faith groups, or communities who are willing to be involved.
- Why you think it is important – a personal message can have a big impact.
- A specific ask – that he or she will ask the council to sign up to the VPRS, and soon.
- Ask for a response, or better yet ask for a meeting to discuss the issue in more depth.

Please encourage others to do the same – the more positive letters encouraging action a councillor receives the better. With many negative stories making headlines, a positive letter can help show that there are many members of the public who are supportive of welcoming refugees to Wales. For greater impact you may also wish to write to the leader of the council and the chief executive.

Don't be party political, especially if writing representing a group. Do stay positive and offer a willingness to work together in whatever way you can. Try to challenge your councillor to take action without becoming confrontational, so that a dialogue can be opened.

For more information and support please get in touch with TCC's lead organiser, Kay Polley.

Sources:

- <http://www.local.gov.uk/refugees>
- <http://www.worldvision.org/news-stories-videos/syria-war-refugee-crisis>



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