

1. The key issues which impact social cohesion in Wales and consider whether interventions need to target specific groups of people, geographical areas or particular key issues.

The lack of Home Office engagement with local authorities, and the lack of community engagement or preparedness prior to asylum accommodation being stood up impacts on social cohesion. We are not aware of any local authorities in Wales who have done any community cohesion/preparedness work in advance of full dispersal. An example of a success was when an IA was being stood up in Derby. The Local Authority worked and funded the local Derby City of Sanctuary group to leaflet and talk to communities on the doorstep about the proposal. The opposition to the accommodation in the end was minimum and prevented the Far Right from fear mongering and gaining support by capitalising on the opportunity.

The social unrest of Summer 2024 highlighted the key issue of misinformation, disinformation and online hate specifically aimed at migrants and working against effective social cohesion. Before these riots, as an organisation, we experienced specific attacks with regards to our Schools of Sanctuary programme following a GB news/Farage 'piece'. This led to the specific attacks by the 'Voice of Wales'. This meant a lot of our capacity was diverted from our social cohesion activities in response, particularly in relation to putting in place security measures. In the aftermath of the far right riots in July, [City of Sanctuary](#) groups across the country played a crucial role in safeguarding communities affected and working to rebuild trust and understanding. Examples from across the UK have shown that by educating communities about issues around asylum and talking about people seeking sanctuary with humanity, the community can come together with shared values and welcome people effectively and to the benefit of the whole community. The Norwich City of sanctuary group delivered our Speak Up For Sanctuary workshop which led to successful cohesion. They are also working with 33 organisations to support them to be awarded as places of sanctuary - ensuring every member of staff within these organisations are educated and know how and why to provide welcome, leading to social cohesion.

2. Examples of best practice and other interventions/needed to support social cohesion and overcome tensions. This includes understanding the role the third sector plays in supporting social cohesion and what barriers it faces, including funding.

Supporting social cohesion and overcoming tensions aimed at refugees and asylum seekers is best achieved through focused strategic projects on both a micro and macro level in our communities. Best practice sees embedded welcome and compassion, so that wherever people seeking sanctuary go - schools, services, businesses, faith and

community groups, their own neighbourhoods and streets – they will find people who welcome them and understand why they are here. Movement building is at the core of this. Building a strong and widespread movement will translate into public support and understanding for people seeking sanctuary, ultimately leading to cohesive communities. By working at these levels, and through place-based approaches and meaningful partnerships with the statutory, third and private sectors we can build communities in which people seeking sanctuary and their local communities can build better futures together.

At the micro level, The 8 City of Sanctuary groups working across Wales are instrumental in making this aspiration a reality, with best practice involving facilitation of social contact between local communities and migrants. For example, the [Hay, Brecon and Talgarth City of Sanctuary group](#) successfully welcomes people seeking sanctuary to their region through their regular 'Welcome Days'. In a community that is not experienced in welcoming migrants, they facilitate social contact that builds friendship, kindness and compassion, developing positive community attitudes towards successful social cohesion. The most effective way to motivate people to get involved is by providing opportunities for the receiving community members to meet with people from a sanctuary seeking background. The City of Sanctuary networks are uniquely positioned to facilitate social connections that can turn people's compassion into action.

Case study - [Community Cohesion Project - Swansea City of Sanctuary](#)

Unfortunately many of our groups, and the refugee sector more widely, have needed to provide 'emergency' response to support people seeking sanctuary due to the hostile environment and their unmet needs. The unmet needs present a barrier to integration for people seeking sanctuary but also then takes away capacity for groups and organisations to engage in social cohesion projects and activities.

Social contact is also effectively facilitated through everyday contact/communication between members of the community who are equipped with the skills to have conversations that tackle the misinformation and hate so often spread around communities in Wales. Through City of Sanctuary's training resource '[Courageous Conversations](#)' and the workshop '[Stand Up for Sanctuary](#)', cohort's of attendees are trained to communicate a positive vision of welcome by promoting the counter-narrative to negative rhetoric and celebrating the contribution of people seeking sanctuary. The Speak Up for Sanctuary programme is designed to support people to recognise their power in making change and to speak up for refugee rights. This course has been vital in strengthening our efforts to build welcoming and compassionate communities, especially pertinent in light of the riots of July 2024. The programme has received exceptional feedback, with all participants committing to follow-up activities. Unfortunately due to lack of funding we have been unable to run this course in Wales outside of the Swansea Cohesion project.

Working at a more macro level, a cohesive community is best achieved through working with mainstream organisations like schools, councils, universities, libraries and more to

ensure that wherever someone seeking sanctuary goes, they are met with understanding, compassion and empowering opportunities. The streams of sanctuary and awards programmes are effective strategic tools which support the movement building goal. Through the [Sanctuary Awards](#) process, organisations are supported to:

- Learn: find out what it means to be seeking sanctuary; and be actively involved in awareness raising.
- Embed: take positive action to make welcome and inclusion part of the values of the organisation or community, to support people seeking sanctuary, and to include them in activities.
- Share the vision and achievements: let others know about the positive contribution people seeking sanctuary make to our society and the benefits of a welcoming culture to everyone.

These Streams of Sanctuary encourage professionals or practitioners within a sector to come together and collaborate with other interested parties including people seeking sanctuary. Through active learning about issues faced by people in the asylum system, the promotion of an inclusive and compassionate approach and the sharing of ideas and resources, the members of the Stream work together to make welcome widespread within their sector. There are currently 143 organisations within the sanctuary network in Wales, with 54 of those awarded. In the Schools of Sanctuary stream, in which 43 schools are awarded, our annual survey shows a strong positive impact on improving school provision and practice, boosting understanding and empathy, and building solidarity with the wider local community. We also have commissioned research which has demonstrated the 'ripple' effect Schools of Sanctuary has in the wider community. The Schools of Sanctuary programme is delivered with a 'local lead' delivery model. There are 4 local leads in Wales that work within education departments in local authorities - providing effective and sustainable support to developing cohesion through their schools.

A crucial stream in movement building is the [Local Authority](#) network which is a movement of local councils who are working to create a culture of welcome, inclusion and empowerment for people seeking sanctuary. The impact of this network can clearly be seen in other areas of the UK, and if supported to become embedded across Wales would see best practice on a wide-spread scale across our communities.

Case study - [How Local Authorities are stepping up for people seeking sanctuary](#)

Best practice puts people with lived experience at the heart of community cohesion initiatives, ensuring that they are not just active participants but are empowered to be part of decision making processes at all levels and in all activities. People seeking sanctuary are supported through the [Sanctuary in Politics](#) training programme ensuring they can effectively get their voices heard, understand how systems in Wales work and can effectively contribute to cohesive communities. Built within this course is mentoring

opportunities which supports social contact, the mentors also support the participants to undertake a project and signposts them to others which has an impact on that person's social capital.

- 3. What support the Welsh Government provides to community groups and organisations and identify whether there are any opportunities to provide additional support. This includes examining the limitations and barriers which exist given some aspects of support for social cohesion are reserved to the UK Government (for example policing, media and internet regulation), and what action could be taken to overcome these challenges.**

Currently the social cohesion initiatives outlined above receive no funding from Welsh Government (with the expectation of the Swansea City of Sanctuary project) resulting in a lack of capacity to further embed the impact more widely across Wales. Additional support for these initiatives could be facilitated by developing the relationship/partnership between community cohesion teams and the City of Sanctuary network, via the Wales Coordinator. The movement building model is not restricted by UK government and is a proven model to invest in for better social cohesion.

The funding that is provided is often very small pots of money for short term one off social cohesion projects. The Welsh Government needs to lead on a strategy to address the rise in the Far Right and to meet the vision of Wales becoming a Nation of Sanctuary. There needs to be a 'Team Wales' approach with a shared understanding of 'how' this can be achieved collectively with appropriate funding in place.