

Archwilydd Cyffredinol Cymru  
Auditor General for Wales

# Speak my language – Summary report



WALES AUDIT OFFICE  
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU



## KEY FACTS



**84,500**

people in Wales have a main language that is not English or Welsh

**19,500**

do not speak English or Welsh well

**3,500**

do not speak English or Welsh at all



**POLISH**  
17,000

**CHINESE**  
8,000

**MORE THAN 80**

other main languages are spoken in Wales

**BENGALI**  
5,000

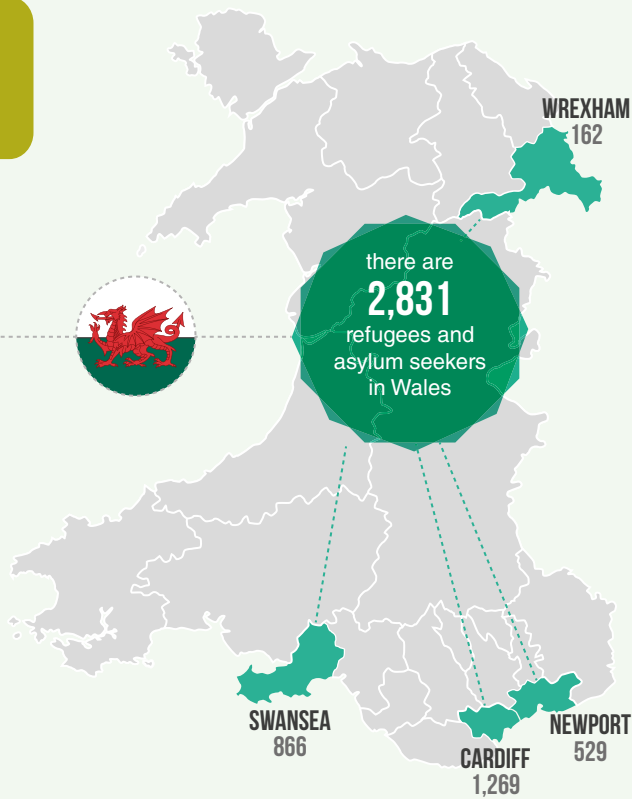
**ARABIC**  
7,000

Source: 2011 Census, figures rounded to nearest 500.

## REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS



there are  
**2,831**  
refugees and  
asylum seekers  
in Wales



Most research suggests that asylum seekers do not have good English/Welsh skills on arrival

**96 PEOPLE**  
settled in Wales under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme.

The number of refugees and asylum seekers has doubled in Wales since 2011

**1,398**  
Q1 2011

**2,831**  
Q1 2017

The terms 'asylum-seeker' and 'refugee' refer to people with a different legal status.

Asylum-seekers are people who have lodged a claim for asylum in the UK under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.



Refugees are people whose claim for asylum has been approved.

Source: Home Office Immigration statistics, last quarter 2017

# SENSORY LOSS



The term 'people with sensory loss' refers to:

- People who are Deaf; deafened or hard of hearing;
- People who are Blind or partially sighted;
- People who are Deafblind: those whose combined sight and hearing impairment cause difficulties with communication, access to information and mobility.

**7,200 BSL USERS**

in Wales, of whom,  
4,000 are deaf.

(source - British Deaf  
Association, 2017)



**1,118 PEOPLE**

said sign  
language was their  
main language

(source - 2011  
Census)



**100,000 PEOPLE**

are blind or  
partially sighted

(source - RNIB  
Cymru)



**575,000**

people experience  
deafness or hearing  
impairment

(source - Action  
on Hearing Loss  
Cymru, 2017)

British Sign Language is a visual language unrelated to English. The Deaf community in the UK who use sign language are a distinct cultural and linguistic group with several regional dialects. During our work, we found that many people including service deliverers had little understanding of Deaf culture or sign language.

Sign language interpreters help Deaf people to communicate. Other support includes lip speakers, palantypist who convert speech to text and note takers.

# Summary report

- 1 Public bodies must ensure that everyone can get the services they need, whatever their language and communication needs. Without interpreters and translation services, people who don't speak English or Welsh, including deaf people who use sign language and face language barriers, will have poorer outcomes and experiences. If they don't make sure that people get the support they need, organisations risk complaints and legal action.
- 2 Public bodies may employ staff as interpreters. Mostly they buy services from third sector and commercial providers. They can ask staff with language skills to help with communication but only until a professional interpreter is available.
- 3 The Wales Audit Office looked at how public bodies make their services more accessible to people who don't speak English or Welsh as a first language. We concentrated on councils and health services. We carried out research and interviewed people from the representative groups and policymakers in Wales, as well as people who manage interpretation and translation services. We held two shared learning events in 2017.
- 4 This report focuses on people who don't speak English or Welsh. People who experience other communication barriers will also benefit from many actions to improve access to services for those who face language barriers. This includes people who are deaf or hard of hearing, those with sight loss or with dual sensory loss (a combination of sight and hearing loss) as well as people with learning disabilities or difficulties and people on the autistic spectrum.

## What we found

- 5 Organisations differ in how well they understand the language and communication needs of the communities they serve.
- 6 Half of the councils and NHS bodies that responded to our information request had a formal policy on using interpretation and translation services. All provided training for some or all staff on language needs or sensory loss. We did not judge how effective this training has been.
- 7 We do not know how much the public bodies spend on interpretation and translation services in total. They spent around £2.2 million through the Wales Interpretation and Translation Service (WITS) and other companies in 2015-16 and 2016-17. Organisations did not give us enough information to let us estimate the total spent on providing interpreters or employing staff as interpreters or translators.

- 8 We have found that public bodies across Wales are trying new ways to overcome language barriers for people who don't speak English or Welsh as their first language. For example:
- Health Access Team – providing health services to refugees and asylum seekers (Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board)
  - Video Remote Interpreting – to make interpretation more available (Daisy project, Centre for Sign-Sight-Sound [working with Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board]; Cwm Taf University Health Board; Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board; and the NHS Wales 111 Service)
  - Keep Safe Cymru – providing emergency and non-emergency contact (South Wales Police)
  - Pegasus – emergency contact and non-emergency text (Dyfed Powys Police)
  - Orange Wallet scheme (Arriva Trains Wales)
  - Pre-hospital communication card and app (Welsh Ambulance Service Trust)
  - Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme – supporting people resettling in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan (Taff Housing)
  - Advice services to speakers of other languages in Community Hubs (Cardiff Council)
  - Making a public website accessible to people with sensory loss or who don't speak English or Welsh (Wales Audit Office)
  - Providing mental health services to vulnerable migrants (Mind Cymru)

## Recommendations for change

- 9 Every public body needs to make sure that it is providing reasonable support so that people who don't speak English or Welsh as their main language can access services. The Wales Audit Office has developed a checklist of issues to consider when planning how to meet the needs of people who do not speak English or Welsh. The checklist covers five areas 'understanding the communications needs of the local population', 'policies and procedures', 'sourcing interpretation and translation services', 'training for staff' and 'providing information to service users'.
- 10 The report recommends that public bodies review how they make services accessible to people who face language or communication barriers using the checklist. It recommends that the Welsh Government consider widening the scope and coverage of relevant standards that currently apply to the NHS in Wales. It also recommends that the Welsh Government should work with public bodies, representative groups and others to consider issues relating to the supply of interpreters in Wales and quality assurance and safeguarding procedures.

More information is available: [Making services more accessible to people who do not speak English or Welsh](#).

If you would like to find out more about the work or like to tell us what you think, please contact the Communications Team 029 2032 0500 or email [info@audit.wales](mailto:info@audit.wales).

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