

# Key Messages



## 1. ExCoS aims to make Exeter a welcoming city for refugees and asylum seekers.

### *Sub-messages:*

- Welcoming refugees and asylum seekers is the right thing to do. We are part of a global community and share a common humanity. We should be there for people in need, wherever they come from.
- Welcoming asylum seekers and refugees is a legal obligation. Under international human rights law, anyone is entitled to seek asylum and governments, including our own, are obliged to provide asylum to those who meet the criteria for it.
- Making new arrivals feel welcome offers us the opportunity to celebrate diversity and the contributions different people and groups can make to the life of our city.
- Devon has a proud tradition of welcoming refugees. Past groups made welcome here include Huguenots (from 17<sup>th</sup> century France), Belgians (during the First World War) and Poles (after the Second World War). In the early 2000s, Exeter welcomed asylum seekers from Afghanistan, Iraq and other countries. Today we have an opportunity to reaffirm this tradition of welcome and to leave a legacy of which future generations can be proud.
- The focus of ExCoS is on those who are forced to seek sanctuary. At the same time, we hope that by working towards a culture of hospitality we will also benefit other migrant groups as well as all sections of our community.

## 2. Partnership is essential to the success of ExCoS and we seek to work with a wide range of organisations and individuals.

### *Sub-messages:*

- ExCoS is part of National City of Sanctuary (CoS), a grassroots movement that links communities across the UK in an effort to spread and enhance the culture of welcome. We seek to learn from the experiences of other CoS groups.
- In Exeter, we aim to work with and draw together people and groups across all sections of the community, including faith groups, voluntary organisations, businesses, educational institutions, medical centres, etc. We encourage them to welcome refugees and asylum seekers and include them in their activities.
- We work especially closely with Refugee Support Devon (RSD), the county's dedicated service provider to the refugee and asylum-seeking community. We complement RSD's activities by promoting a community response to the challenges of welcome and integration.
- All members of the community can play a part in making our welcome a reality. We invite organisations and individuals to pledge their support for refugees and asylum seekers. Practical support can include inviting them to take part in social events and activities, offering them work or training opportunities, raising awareness of the problems they face, and campaigning to improve the way they are treated, both locally and nationally.

### **3. Refugees are an opportunity. We campaign to see the contributions they make more widely realized and appreciated.**

#### *Sub-messages:*

- Research shows that refugees contribute positively to our economy. Immigrants as a whole increase growth (by about 0.6% a year), pay more in taxes than they claim in benefits, and have little or no depressive effect on wages. Immigrants do not “steal our jobs”: some studies have shown that they even create jobs. They often start new businesses and the skills they bring can support whole sectors (e.g. our health service). Most refugees are young and can, literally, rejuvenate our economy.
- Refugees and asylum seekers enrich our culture. They contribute greatly to the arts, the sciences, politics and sport. Their influence is evident in almost all walks of life; for instance, in the architecture that surrounds us, the food we eat, and the music we listen to. Einstein was a refugee.
- On arrival, refugees and asylum seekers do exert short-term pressure on certain services and sectors. Housing is an example – and a particular challenge in Exeter and Devon. However, the challenges of absorbing and integrating refugees do not excuse us from our duty of compassion towards them.
- Given the contributions they make, the UK should do more to welcome refugees and asylum seekers. The government should allow more of them into the country, work with our European allies to provide them with safe and legal routes to get here, and reform our punitive and outdated asylum system.
- ExCoS would like to see more refugees welcomed to Exeter and other parts of Devon. We are pleased that Exeter City Council is participating in the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (for ‘eligible’ refugees from UN camps bordering Syria). We think this welcome should be extended to other vulnerable asylum seekers, as it was in the past when Exeter was a dispersal city for asylum seekers. The desperate situation of unaccompanied children seeking asylum is of deep concern nationally and locally and we ask Devon County Council to urgently offer a refuge to some of these children. We also support the lead campaigning groups working nationally for reform on issues of detention and destitution, including Detention Forum (<http://detentionforum.org.uk>) and Still Human Still Here ([stillhumanstillhere.wordpress.com](http://stillhumanstillhere.wordpress.com))

### **4. We invite you to become involved!**

#### *Sub-messages:*

- You can pledge your or your organisation’s support for asylum seekers and refugees in Exeter. You can do this either online or by downloading a pledge form from our website: <https://exeter.cityofsanctuary.org/pledge-your-support>. We are happy to meet with organisations to discuss practical offers of support. See also the ‘Ideas for Action’ document on our website.
- You can help raise public awareness of the issues facing refugees and asylum seekers. Our awareness raising group delivers talks, organises workshops and other events and sets up meetings with local organisations on specific issues.
- You can put pressure on our politicians to do more by joining our lobbying and campaigning group and/or supporting the group’s activities. These include attending rallies and demonstrations, asking questions at council meetings, writing to MPs and MEPs, using social media, and so on.
- You can also help by donating to or joining in our fund raising activities.

Email us to find out more: [info@exeter.cityofsanctuary.org](mailto:info@exeter.cityofsanctuary.org)