

# The Detention Forum



## Parliamentary Inquiry into the use of immigration detention in the UK

### Submission by the Co-ordination Group of the Detention Forum

#### Contact

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1. The Detention Forum is a network of over 30 organisations who are working together to challenge the UK's use of immigration detention. We have three objectives:
  - To put a time limit on immigration detention
  - To end the detention of vulnerable people
  - To improve the judicial oversight of detention
2. The three Working Groups of the Detention Forum (Indefinite Detention Working Group, Vulnerable People Working Group and Judicial Oversight Working Group) have made separate submissions regarding the above three and we will not repeat them here.
3. In this submission, however, we would like to make recommendations about the next steps that the panel could take to make this inquiry as effective and as meaningful as possible.

#### **Recommendation 1 – The panel conducts one of its oral evidence sessions in Sheffield to hear directly from the community about the impact of detention on them**

4. Since the launch of the inquiry, the Detention Forum has encouraged its members and other groups and individuals to make submissions to the panel. We directly and indirectly assisted a number of groups, [who have used the guides and form that we produced](#).
5. Because of the complexity and barriers involved in collecting evidence from people directly affected by detention, we are of the view that submitted evidence will not tell the whole story about immigration detention. We assisted evidence gathering sessions in London, Middlesbrough and Newcastle, supported by a large number of NGOs, including our members. Results of these sessions have been submitted to the panel. Similar sessions took place in Bristol, Manchester, Glasgow and Sheffield. Some of our members also did their best to collect testimonies from people who are currently in detention. This was far from an easy process. We have heard that at least in one centre the detention inquiry website's pages were blocked apart from the

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homepage, making it impossible for people in detention to find out how to send submissions.

6. Many people who came to the evidence gathering sessions preferred not to prepare their own submissions: although we took care to include as much information as possible, this process is bound to miss out some crucial information. Most people are unfamiliar with the practice of writing down their evidence and, of course, for many, English is not their first language. We offered opportunities to speak to us on a one-to-one basis. However, many seemed uncomfortable with the idea of speaking to a stranger. Frequently small local groups were often overstretched and were unable to assist these individuals either. Many people also told us that their friends and colleagues were simply too traumatised and scared to talk about their experience of detention, as it so profoundly negative. It needs to be recognised, therefore, that we are unlikely to hear from the very people who are best placed to shed light on the true impact of immigration detention on human beings.
7. Nevertheless, every evidence gathering session produced so much rich material that it was hard to capture in written format, and we believe it is vital that the panel hears directly from those people and their communities more during the inquiry. It was astonishing to find out how much damage detention is causing to their communities, outside the gates of the detention centres. Practitioners, including ourselves, tend to focus on the impact of detention as it happens in the detention centres. As a result, we are blind to the real long-term damage detention is creating in people's lives, as so many people actually get released from detention every year. Most of the local practitioners who attended these evidence gathering sessions noted afterwards that they were unaware of the gravity of the situation until they heard people's experience of detention directly.
8. We therefore recommend that the panel conducts one of its oral evidence sessions in the region to hear directly from these communities to gain a fuller understanding of the long-term impact of detention on society. Our member, SYMAAG in Sheffield, is happy to assist the panel in November with this. The Detention Forum will also provide necessary assistance to make this possible. It is also worth noting that for many people who were in detention travelling to London is difficult.

**Recommendation 2 – The panel, in concluding the inquiry, establishes a parliamentary mechanism that monitors how its recommendations will be implemented by relevant parties.**

9. While we welcome this inquiry and hope positive changes will emerge as a result, we are anxious that the panel's recommendations be explored fully after the inquiry. In comparison to many other states in the world, considerably more analysis and critique of its detention policy is available in the UK. This is partly due to a well-established monitoring mechanism that includes the Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons, the Chief Inspector for Borders and Immigration and Independent Monitoring Boards which produce regular monitoring reports, as well as active NGOs who combine their service delivery with policy work. No doubt the panel will obtain some new information about the state of detention from the submitted evidence but we expect that, broadly speaking, most of the problems and issues have already been identified by these monitoring bodies or by NGOs. The panel is also likely to detect

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the sense of frustration that many of us have, that there has been very little progress in reforming immigration detention in the UK despite much evidence of harm and abuse that is already available in the public domain.

10. Given the likely slow pace of change as a result of the inquiry, we recommend that the panel establishes a parliamentary mechanism that ensures that the recommendations made by the panel will be implemented by relevant parties. It could be that an All Party Parliamentary Group on Immigration Detention is set up or one of the existing APPGs or parliamentary committees is tasked to continue the vital work started by this panel. We draw the attention of the panel to the fact that the issue of immigration detention does not sit well with any of the existing APPGs or parliamentary committees. This is evidenced by the fact that, despite widely publicised problems with immigration detention that span years, this is the first inquiry to look into immigration detention as a whole.
11. The ongoing, unscrutinised expansion of the detention estate also makes it paramount that such a parliamentary mechanism exists to continuously examine the role of detention in the UK's immigration control system. In 2014, the overall detention capacity is likely to go over 5,000<sup>1</sup>, through small and large scale expansions at various Immigration Removal Centres (IRCs) and the increased use of prisons for immigration detention. On 28 September 2014, The Verne was re-roled as an IRC, adding 580 detention bed spaces to the estate. There is also a plan to expand the capacity of Campsfield IRC in Oxfordshire from 260 to 610 bed spaces. Instead of expanding harmful and expensive detention infrastructure, efforts should be made to consider how these migrants can be supported in the community. We are disappointed that such expansion is going ahead with no reference to this parliamentary inquiry into detention.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.aviddetention.org.uk/images/uk%20detention%20september%202014.pdf>