

Migrant Artists Mutual Aid is a Liverpool based group that run a weekly anti-deportation campaigning and support group for mainly women in the asylum system. We source information and training for our members to self-educate and become empowered within their asylum process. We encourage and keep contact with MP's and local asylum support and advice services and raise funds for crises and a legal fund. We have so far supported two of our members through detention in Yarl's Wood and Colnbrook Detention Centres, one of which was forcibly removed.

1. One of our biggest worries has been that detention centres provide a fertile environment for bogus law practitioners. In one case contact was made through a guard at Colnbrook Detention Centre through the public phone in the centre and the distressed detainee was offered bail in exchange for a substantial amount of money. It transpired later that the solicitors firm was non-existent. The woman in question had had no chance to see her solicitor after a negative decision was served at the same time as the detention. The woman's family upon contacting Colnbrook was informed they were aware of this and that Yarl's Wood would be notified. Despite this she was not given the opportunity to file a report with the Police and press charges before she was forcibly removed. In another case again a visiting solicitor at Yarl's Wood Detention Centre offered his services to a very vulnerable woman and accepted payment without then acting on her behalf. That solicitors firm is now closed.
2. One of our members' mental health, compromised by childhood trauma and a trafficking experience, deteriorated considerably when detained, and she consistently reported that when she sought access to medical attention she was mocked by the guards. There was a consistent reporting of guards entering her room and those of other women without waiting for an answer to a knock.
3. Impacts of immigration detention on individuals, family and social networks, and wider communities – fear of detention. One of our members who is a grandmother who couldn't say goodbye to her grandchildren who are British citizens, people are being removed from their support networks without notice or time to prepare.
4. We have recently come across two particular cases where a coach and a local bus were stopped in the North West and immigration police proceeded to check everyone's identity and detained one woman on the basis of that information. We believe that these are by no means isolated incidences. We feel that such arrangements for authorizing detention are clearly beyond the law and unacceptable, as they criminalize asylum seekers and migrants in the eyes of the wider public and serve to produce fear amongst asylum seekers. More should be done to stop unlawful practices by government bodies or companies who offer outsourced services.
5. In our experience of working with around 30 women seeking asylum, at least half of them are survivors of sexual or gender based violence. The experience of detention serves to re-traumatize them and delays the disclosure of sexual violence. This delay in disclosure to professionals results in complications to legal arguments and often adversely affects credibility decisions. With women who are survivors of trafficking, this directly results in mental health issues that retard their ability and the ability of the relevant public bodies to prosecute and convict people involved in trafficking. From our experience of supporting a group of women in Yarl's Wood that were befriended by one of our members, the profile of women and girls who are victims of trafficking has changed. Young women are trafficked for forced marriage and sexual slavery, but this is being done by members of the family and the community, the ties to larger international criminal organizations is complex. Successful prosecutions and an end to all trafficking of women and girls is going to rely on the survivors being supported, healing and feeling safe so that they become not just witnesses but active participants in the work to end trafficking. The many levels are traumatisations that

happens to women in detention centres means that they don't heal mentally and they do not develop the trusting relationships necessary.

6. What are your views on the current conditions within UK immigration detention centres, including detainees' access to advice and services? Please highlight any areas where you think that improvements could be made. The decision to detain women is in no way evidence based. Women should not be held in detention centres where guards are men. Rape and female genital mutilation are considered torture and the detention centres are filled with women who are survivors of both. It is not and could never be the type of environment where personal disclosure of sexual and gender based violence are possible.
7. The use of charter flights floods the centres with detainees and means that there is less access to advice, waiting lists for legal support are long, and there is a general level of hysteria that creates levels of distress that have proven to have adverse affects of people's health.
8. How far does the current detention system support the needs of vulnerable detainees, including pregnant women, detainees with a disability and young adults? One of our members reported that another detainee had a miscarriage while in the centre and was not sure if this was reported. Another of our members gave birth inside a detention centre even though she was involved in an age assessment dispute, and the child that she gave birth to was a result of non consensual sexual intercourse/sexual slavery
9. What are the wider consequences of the current immigration detention system, including any financial and/or social implications? The current system is detrimental to local and global efforts to end FGM, human trafficking, domestic violence, and extremism. Woman who are standing up to injustice are being treated like criminals, while actually they are the greatest political hope to create change on an international level.
10. How effective are the current UK alternatives to detention (e.g. bail, reporting requirements)? Are viable alternatives to immigration detention in operation in other countries? There are clearly problems with the current system. Community based support and accountability is one solution. The more that people are involved in their communities, and the more integrated their community is with the mainstream British communities, the less likely somebody is to abscond. This is dependent of course of the person believing that the system is fair. Women and young people are less likely to abscond. The choice to perpetuate a climate of fear is short sighted in that in the long run it will add to the rise of extremist and anti-British views and will not help in the eradication of trafficking and FGM.