

1. My name is Jenni Clapham and I work as a volunteer caseworker for The Unity Centre, a Glasgow based organisation providing support and information to Asylum Seekers, Refugees and the wider community. Our organisation continues to support people in detention centres and we have a huge range of contact with hundreds of detainees around the country. Also many of our friends here in Glasgow have past experience of detention.
2. It is the view of our organisation that the system of Immigration Removal Centres in the UK is completely failing asylum seekers and refugees, who are amongst many of the most vulnerable people in our society. This includes access to services and general treatment.
3. Healthcare is a huge problem and we regularly hear about people being denied access to healthcare or given inadequate treatment. Often people's symptoms are dismissed and health centres often appear to be downplaying symptoms to disguise signs of abuse or torture- which in theory are conditions in which not to detain.
4. Access to legal services is also an issue. Regularly the system of submitting evidence or claims is not explained clearly to detainees, and we find ourselves on the phone explaining a process which the IRC staff should have made clear. The same goes for access to lists of, and appointments with, legal aid lawyers. When people have their phone number taken off them it also makes contacting lawyers difficult, obviously.
5. Moving detainees from Scotland to England without much warning also interferes with legal representation and we have seen have a detrimental effect on a case progressing with justice.
6. The system also fails to provide extra support for vulnerable people: underagers are sometimes disbelieved and detained with adults. Pregnant women often do not get proper healthcare access, or are roughly handled by staff.
7. Effects of detention continue after the process and affect more than just the detainee. The stress placed on family, friends and community members is huge, and families are often separated. This stress makes it notably harder for people to carry on their normal lives, or be pro-active in their legal cases. People who have been detained exhibit high levels of fear and tension when reminded of the process. Few people have the chance to process what has happened to them and try and deal with the experience- where they do have this chance, it is always in spite of rather than thanks to the Home Office.

8. The open ended nature of detention is very damaging. People talk of the horrible situation of simply not knowing how long until they are released, or even removed. This uncertainty about confinement is very damaging, as is recognised by even the penal system which is obliged to be clear about length of stay.

9. In many cases, detention simply seems unnecessary. Those with health problems, pregnant women, families and many other social groups are very unlikely to go underground. Absconding rates from 'signing on' at Home Offices are not high and asylum seekers are willing to participate in the system. The length of time many people are kept in detention really shows that it is not a last minute trip to plane, but a huge system of control exerted over thousands of people, often for the profit of private companies.

10. The UK government is insistent that this is the only option available but even within Europe other types of detention systems do exist. There appears to be no effort made to look into other options.

11. For any more information please contact me or any of my colleagues on 0141 427 7992 or info@unitycentreglasgow.org. For more details on our organisation please see our website