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Bail for Immigration Detainees

# “Nothing good comes from detention”: Voices from Detention



## About BID

BID is an independent national charity established in 1999 to challenge immigration detention. We assist those held under immigration powers in removal centres and prisons to secure their release from detention through the provision of free legal advice, information and representation. Between 1 August 2017 and 31 July 2018, BID provided advice to 5,941 people. Alongside our legal casework, we engage in research, policy advocacy and strategic litigation to secure change in detention policy and practice.

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## Acknowledgements

This report was written by Cheryl Bellisario, Rudy Schulkind and Celia Clarke. The interviews that make up this report were conducted by Cheryl Bellisario and Rudy Schulkind. Elisa Smith designed the report. Thanks also to all of BID's staff and volunteers for their tireless efforts challenging immigration detention, and to our funders without whom our work would not be possible.

Most of all we would like to thank the people who agreed to share their experiences of immigration detention. We hope this report does justice to the honesty and generosity of the testimonies you gave us.

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“

*I came from jail and I know how they treat people there and it's the exact same here.*

”

A VOICE FROM MORTON HALL



## Introduction

In September 2017, the BBC broadcast a “Panorama” programme entitled “*Britain’s Immigration Secrets*” which showed secret footage taken by an undercover officer at Brook House Immigration Removal Centre (IRC).

The footage showed numerous incidents of verbal and physical abuse of detainees by officers, including one incident in which an officer appeared to throttle a detainee who was on constant watch at the time because of the risk that he would commit suicide. The footage also showed medical staff and other detention officers discussing how to cover up the assault.

It was only after legal proceedings that the Home Office agreed to undertake a ‘bespoke and independent Article 3 ECHR-compliant investigation’ into the abuse exposed by the documentary.[1]

In the meantime, and despite ongoing investigation, a new multi-million pound contract for running Brook House IRC was awarded to G4S for another two years.

Meanwhile, G4S responded by commissioning Verita to carry out an investigation into conditions in the centre. Verita approached BID and we agreed to carry out a set of interviews, based on questions provided by Verita, with clients that we were in touch with who had been in Brook House, the results of which we then submitted to them.

However, we remained concerned that conditions in other centres for detainees were as bad or worse than those revealed in Brook House and we therefore decided to expand the interviews to other detention centres to produce our own report of people’s daily experiences of detention across all centres, and provide a platform for people’s voices to be heard.



# Our Approach

During the six month period from December 2017 to June 2018 we interviewed 89 individuals who were either detained at the time of their interview with BID or had previously been detained. We recorded their verbatim testimonies which make up the substance of this report. Below is a breakdown of where respondents were detained:

| Place of detention | No. of respondents |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| Brook House        | 17*                |
| Morton Hall        | 19                 |
| Colnbrook          | 19                 |
| Harmondsworth      | 16                 |
| Yar's Wood         | 15                 |
| Campsfield House   | 3                  |

\*6 detained during Panorama filming, 11 detained after Panorama filming

BID's research threads together testimonies from a diverse group of people, some of whom may have committed offences in the past and are facing deportation, others who are survivors of torture or trafficking, and some who have severe health problems; all of them have been deprived of their liberty for immigration purposes. Our aim is to reflect their experiences of the injustice of detention.

Our sample was limited to people held in immigration detention centres and not those who are held in prisons under immigration powers. Those detained under immigration powers in a prison experience specific disadvantages, such as a lack of access to communication (such as telephones and internet) and legal advice, thus imposing further isolation.

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“

*Every day you hear people talking about human rights, one year in this place you've got no human rights, and you're not even a criminal...*

*Theresa May goes to other countries and tells them about human rights but detainees don't have human rights here.*

”

A VOICE FROM COLNBROOK

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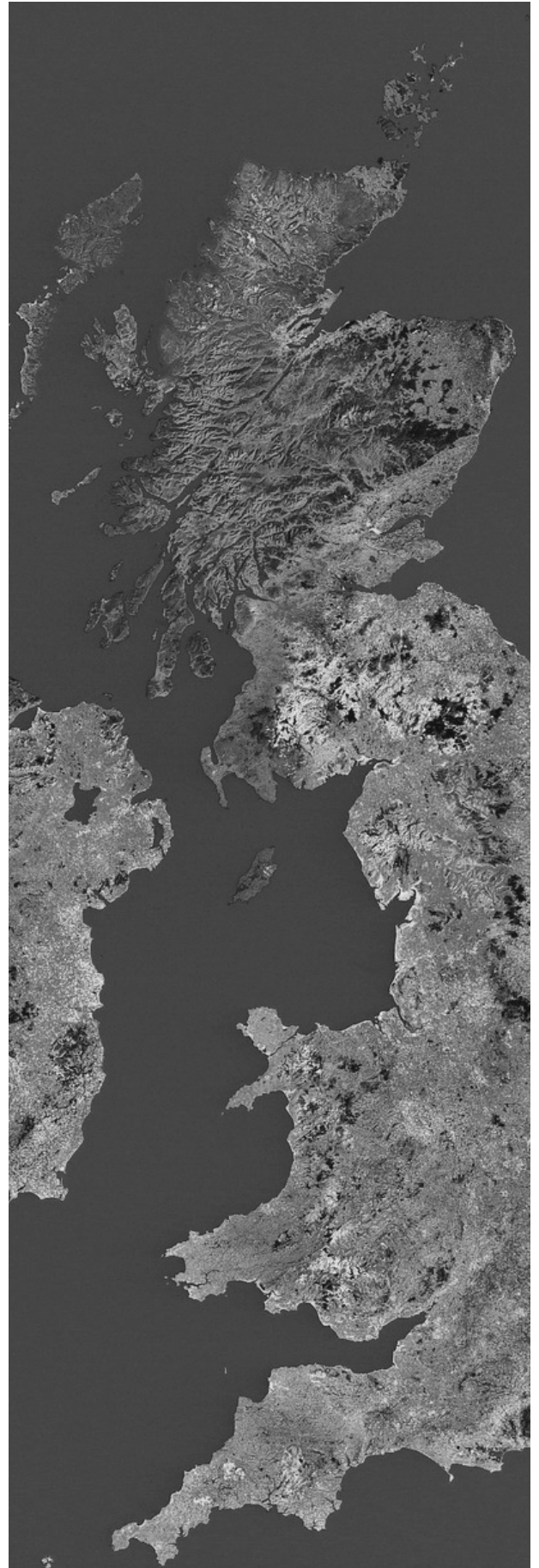


# About detention in the UK

24,748 individuals entered detention in 2018. [2]  
There are 3,500 bed spaces for people to be  
detained under immigration powers, including  
400 spaces in HM prisons. [3]

Anyone subject to immigration control can be  
detained. There is well established common law,  
known as the ‘Hardial Singh’ principles, which  
set out limits on the lawful use of detention:

1. “The Secretary of State must intend to  
deport the person and can only use the power  
to detain for that purpose;
2. The deportee may only be detained for a  
period that is reasonable in all the  
circumstances;
3. If, before the expiry of the reasonable  
period, it becomes apparent that the Secretary  
of State will not be able to effect deportation  
within a reasonable period, he should not seek  
to exercise the power of detention;
4. The Secretary of State should act with all  
diligence and expedition to effect removal.”  
[4]



However, in BID's experience many decisions to detain are a long way from satisfying these criteria. It is virtually impossible for a detainee to challenge to the lawfulness of their detention (which can only be done through judicial review) without a lawyer, and detainees are not given reasons for detention which could form the basis of such a challenge.

Detention for immigration purposes is an administrative and not a criminal process. There are none of the safeguards that there should be when depriving someone of their liberty. The decision to detain an individual is taken by an immigration officer and not overseen by a court. Subsequent decisions to maintain detention are also not subject to independent judicial oversight. After being released people can be re-detained at any point without warning. Sometimes people are detained while reporting to the Home Office, (thus demonstrating compliance with their conditions) and others are forcibly removed from their homes in a raid.

A Home Office official authorises detention without the need for judicial approval. Foreign nationals who have committed offences in the UK and face deportation are routinely detained at the end of their sentence. Many have been brought up in the UK, have families in the UK, and face the prospect of challenging deportation to a country they have no connection to, without the availability of legal aid to challenge it.

Families are routinely separated by immigration detention, and parents are detained with scant attention paid to the effect of their incarceration on the welfare of their children.

# 143 days

AVERAGE LENGTH OF TIME DETAINED  
ASYLUM SEEKERS ARE HELD

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Vulnerable adults, including survivors of torture or trafficking, or people with severe mental health issues or learning difficulties are regularly detained for long periods. Detained asylum seekers are held for an average of 143 days.[5]

Unlike people charged with a criminal offence, there is no automatic legal advice or representation to challenge immigration detention, and bail hearings are heard in the Immigration and Asylum Chamber of the First-tier Tribunal, which does not have the same provisions to ensure a fair trial and prevent wrongful deprivation of liberty as those which exist in the criminal justice system.[6] In no other context is the right to liberty treated so casually and with so few safeguards.

The UK is the only country in Europe without a time limit on immigration detention. The longest length of detention that BID is aware of related to a man in Lincoln Prison who had been held for nine years after the date his sentence should have ended.[7] More commonly, people are detained for months and sometimes years. The Home Office does not count cumulative lengths of detention, so it is possible that some individuals have been detained as long or longer for several consecutive periods.

It is difficult to underestimate the harm caused by detention. The detention process itself renders every individual vulnerable to harm. In his 2016 report into vulnerable adults in immigration detention, commissioned by then Home Secretary Theresa May, former Prisons and Probation Ombudsman Stephen Shaw argued that *'vulnerability is intrinsic to the very fact of detention'*.

Detainees experience loss of liberty, social isolation, uncertainty about their future, lack of agency and poor healthcare. Studies have consistently demonstrated the negative impact of immigration detention on mental health.[8] The negative effects of immigration detention on detainees and their families endure long after a person is released from confinement.

The Royal College of Psychiatrists has argued that *"the very fact of detention (which, unlike imprisonment, has no punitive or retributive function) mitigates against successful treatment of mental illness"*[9] The British Medical Association recently argued [10] that detention *"should be phased out and replaced with alternate more humane means of monitoring individuals facing removal from the UK"*.

While longer periods of detention increase the risk of harm, research has demonstrated that short periods in detention can also have an adverse impact on individuals' mental health. [11] Since the year 2000, there have been 49 deaths in immigration detention, including 9 in 2017.[12]

Ministers and Home Office officials always emphasise that detention is a necessary part of the UK's border regime. However, a glance at the history of immigration detention suggests that this has not always been the case.

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# 56%

OF DETAINEES ARE RELEASED BACK INTO THE COMMUNITY AT THE END OF THEIR PERIOD OF DETENTION.  
SOURCE: HOME OFFICE DATA

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# “

*Ultimately, we believe that the use of detention should be phased out and replaced with alternate more humane means of monitoring individuals facing removal from the UK.*

# ”

BRITISH MEDICAL ASSOCIATION  
LOCKED UP, LOCKED OUT:  
HEALTH AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN  
IMMIGRATION DETENTION 2017

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## The history of immigration detention

The Immigration Act 1971 provides the majority of the statutory powers of detention for those subject to immigration control [13], although these provisions have been amended and added to by subsequent legislation. The total capacity of the detention estate was 250 places in 1993, but this had increased to 2,644 in 2005, reaching a peak of almost 5,000 by the end of 2015. As early as 1995 the UNHCR deemed detention an *'undesirable solution to immigration control'*[13], but this did not prevent the rapid expansion of the UK's detention estate in the years that followed.

It was the 1999 Immigration & Asylum Act that formalised the existence of detention centres. Up until the 1990s, detention was used to accommodate arrivals of specific cohorts of people such as Ugandan Asians in the early 1970s, and Sri Lankan refugees in the late 1980s.

The organisation Right to Remain argues that the 1999 Act *"marked a shift in Britain from detention as an exception, something temporary to be resorted to in times of major crisis, to detention as an administrative measure and mechanism underpinning Britain's refugee and asylum regime"*[14].

The Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government of 2010 introduced strict limits on the detention of families with children: detention is only permitted for 72 hours, extendable to a maximum of a week with ministerial approval. Meanwhile the detention of adults continued to rise after 2010, as the government sought to create a 'hostile environment' for so-called 'illegal migrants'. As BID's Celia Clarke argued in an evidence session before Parliament's Joint Committee on Human Rights, what we have witnessed over the last two decades has been a *'normalisation of detention'*.

# DETENTION CENTRE STAFF, CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

*“I had to say ‘I can’t breathe.’ They didn’t care.”*

## Treatment by Staff

The Home Office outsources the running of most detention centres to private companies- G4S, Serco, Care and Custody and Mitie. Just one centre – Morton Hall – is run by the prison service. Interviewees’ attitudes to staff varied widely, and for many the ultimate focus of anger and frustration was the Home Office rather than the sub-contractors. Nevertheless, there were a number of deeply disturbing threads that emerged from the interviews about staff being rude, degrading, racist, and abusive.

These accounts were not limited to people detained in Brook House at the time of the Panorama programme. Many respondents felt that staff did not treat detainees with respect because they were asylum seekers or ‘illegal immigrants’ and thus deserving recipients of hostility. Some individuals who were detained in Brook House at the time of the documentary also disclosed incidents of violence.



*“I’ve seen staff, when 2 detainees are having an argument, I’ve seen staff tell those detainees to go into the room, and ‘knock fists’ out of the view of the cameras. I found that unprofessional. For you, who’s getting paid to look after me, you are encouraging detainees to fight?”*

- a voice from Brook House, detained at the time of Panorama footage

*“A small percentage of guards treat people with respect. Loads of guards just treat people disrespectfully. The guards cover each other’s backs, so when they’re being disrespectful, they know that nothing’s going to come from it because they know that the other staff aren’t going to grass them up.”*

- a voice from Brook House, detained at the time of Panorama footage

*“They were rude, the officers were beating other people... I’ve seen it...Kicking the people. In the night time, some people have a medication problem, crying ‘please officer, give me medication’. And they just receive painkillers. If the officer comes into the cell, they will push you, break you, kick you, treat you like you are a criminal.”*

- a voice from Brook House, detained at the time of Panorama footage

*“They will shout at you and think you’re a piece of shit, because you’ve got immigration issues they’ll just treat us wrong. That goes for some of the staff – probably the majority are like that. But there’s others that are all right and treat people how they should be treated.”*

- a voice from Colnbrook

*“The staff they treat the detainees like slaves, they want command of us.”*

- a voice from Harmondsworth

*“They been rude, because they think you’re an illegal immigrant, who are you going to complain to...”*

- a voice from Yarl’s Wood



## Racism

It is highly alarming that detainees across different centres reported racist abuse from staff. These ranged from explicitly racist comments, to lack of respect for those who don't speak English well. Sadly and shockingly, many detainees seemed to accept that as individuals with irregular immigration status they could expect to be ostracized and vilified, and were not surprised by the racism they received from IRC staff. Encountering this kind of fatigue was saddening. 'Illegal immigrant' is a term that has no statutory definition, despite which it is widely used to demonise and denigrate those with some form of irregular immigration status. Some respondents acknowledged its significance in shaping public discourse around migration, and the repercussions this has on how they as individuals are perceived and treated.

*"Because some of the people there don't speak English, they think 'oh, it's an illegal immigrant' and they don't give a shit. 90% of them were racist.... The kinds of abuse is racist: 'paki', or they call you curry."*

- a voice from Brook House, detained at the time of Panorama

*"It's because we are foreign nationals and there is a kind of racial discrimination. We are not treated like human beings we are treated like animals. There are a few staff who are quite reasonable and will tend to you with humanity but others treat you like animals."*

- a voice from Harmondsworth

*"One of the officers said that the detainees are like slaves. Some are very racist..."*

- a voice from Harmondsworth

*"...when the officers get together, they're laughing about the detainees, they make comments. They laugh at the ones that can't speak English, they see them as ignorant and stupid and just see us as detainees who are waiting to be deported. It seems like they just can't wait to get rid of all the detainees... The comments they make are things like 'why don't they go back to their country' or 'how come they're in this country and they can't speak English'*

- a voice from Morton Hall

*"I saw two officers talk about this guy from Afghanistan who's been in England 4 years and had his asylum refused. The guy got a letter to say he's going to be deported in a week's time. He went to the officer to try to see the welfare people but it was difficult for him to explain because he doesn't speak English. The officer asked where he's from and he said Afghanistan. And the officer said 'why don't you want to go back to Afghanistan, it's a good country, it's warm, they've got sunshine, here it's rainy and cold'. It's a joke when he knows the situation in Afghanistan. And the guy said 'no no no solicitor solicitor solicitor' and the officer just said 'yeah you can have a solicitor in Afghanistan as well'. And they joke about the people's situation here, they don't take us seriously."*

- a voice from Morton Hall

## *“They treat me like I’m a violent criminal”*

Many people we spoke to felt a great indignity at being treated as if they were criminals. Although detainees in some centres are allowed to move more freely than people in prison – lock-in regimes vary across centres – deprivation of liberty is an extreme measure. For those subjected to it, it is experienced as a violation of agency and autonomy.

Private companies who run detention centres often stress the ‘care’ that is provided, rather than the inherently coercive nature of detention. Rupert Soames, CEO of Serco (the firm that runs Yarl’s Wood IRC) said, in an evidence session to the Home Affairs Select Committee, *“I feel happy and proud of—to the extent that one can be in an uncertain world—the fact that we look after people really well in terms of their residency at Yarl’s Wood.”* [15]

The Home Office’s casual attitude to liberty is encapsulated by its frequent refusal to allocate Asylum Support accommodation to detainees to enable them to apply for bail on the grounds that *“applicants housed in detention are not destitute by the fact that they are being housed and their dietary needs are catered to. Detention is based around shared facilities (bedrooms, shower rooms & dining rooms) which is not too dissimilar to emergency accommodation with lack of liberty being the main difference”*.

This dismissive attitude towards incarceration provides a stark contrast with the lived experiences of detainees.

*“I don’t have a visa, I just have been refused asylum. But they treat me like I’m a violent criminal, all are treated like that, that’s how some of the officers think anyways.”*

- a voice from Harmondsworth

*“Often, the problem is that the staff see the people as prisoners, I know a lot of people come from prison but they are not prisoners here. But because of that, the staff threaten and manhandle them like inmates.”*

- a voice from Harmondsworth

*“I have a problem with them because they’re trained to deal with prisoners and they use the same experience to deal with detainees. I came from jail and I know how they treat people there and it’s the exact same here.”*

- a voice from Morton Hall

## Use of Segregation

Some detainees mentioned the over-use of what detainees call “the block” – the site of solitary confinement within IRCs, officially called the “Care and Separation Unit” (CSU). The CSU is intended to be a last resort measure for protecting the safety and security of the segregated individual as well as all other detainees; the Home Office’s guidance on these units states that *“its use must be necessary”* and *“all other options [should] be exhausted.”*[16] While in segregation, detainees are most often locked up in their cells for 23 hours per day without access to IRC facilities.[17] Each year, between 1,200 to 4,800 detainees are placed in segregation units in IRCs in the U.K.[18]

Detainees reported the CSU being used for minor issues as well as in anticipation of detainees resisting a scheduled deportation.

One detainee we spoke to had been held there for the last 9 days because of a non-violent protest he had staged to draw attention to the fact that he had received no response to his complaints. Another had been moved there a week before his removal, which was subsequently cancelled.

A report by Medical Justice on the use of segregation published in 2015 argued that *“despite repeated damning critique from HM Inspectorates of Prisons (HMIP) and Independent Monitoring Boards (IMB), the overuse and misuse of segregation continues in IRCs across the UK”*. It found segregation being used for those whose age is being assessed by the Home Office, and found an individual with a serious mental health condition that had spent a total of 22 months in segregation units across different IRCs.[19]

*“I’m in the block because they were refusing to let me see the manager... I kept asking to see the manager for 4 days and got brushed off every day... So I climbed on the basketball hoop and I stayed there. I waited ‘til all the detainees were locked up and before they were going to go home, because they’d been wasting my time so I thought I’d waste their time. They told me that if I came down they’d escort me back to my room and I’d see the manager in the morning. So I came down, and they dragged me into the block and I’ve been here ever since... about 9 days”*

- a voice from Morton Hall

*“Some of the officers were alright, but if you get into trouble and they take you to the block, they can do whatever they want to do to you. Two of them came to my room, and when I refused to go to the block, they beat me up, and I had to say ‘I can’t breathe’. They didn’t care. I fought back and they called the police.... When you get to the block, it’s only English officers. And if you don’t speak English, you’re fucked. They’re just going to abuse you in there. They pick their targets. If you’re not good in English, you’re a target. Not everyone in Brook House is criminals, some are just over-stayers. And they’re not used to this environment that they’re in, and the staff know they can get away with murder... When you get in the block, you’ve got to do what they tell you to do. They will strip you, make you stand there with no clothes on. Sometimes they will use so much force that you will shit yourself, and then they’ll laugh at you after that, in front of the other detainees.”*

- a voice from Brook House, detained at the time of Panorama footage



*“I was in my room sleeping, during bang-up time, and they came and told me that they had to move me to CSU. It was without explanation. They’ve been doing it when they arrested me from my house. They refused to explain why. I didn’t fight or argue with them- they wanted to handcuff me, and I said why are you doing that? I said no, I’m not having handcuffs on my hand. I was complying. They were videoing me at the same time, I said ‘why are you videoing me’ and they said it’s part of the procedure. I asked for a copy of the video, and they said I have to ask my solicitor. When I got there they explained it’s because they’d had a call from immigration, who said they had a travel document and a deportation had been authorized and I had a flight on the 31st. One officer told me that it is normally only a day before the flight that you get moved to the CSU (the block). He said it was the first time that they’d done it like this- he’d never seen someone be moved to the block a week before their flight. My ticket has been cancelled and they’re saying that once they get confirmation of it they will move me back to the unit. At the moment I don’t have access to the gym, to welfare, to association with people, no TV, I have to come outside into the corridor to watch TV.”*

- a voice from Colnbrook



## Lack of help when needed

Many interviewees reported that when there were problems that needed addressing, whether maintenance repairs or serious emergencies, staff were either absent or unhelpful. Some felt this was mainly caused by understaffing, others felt that staff simply couldn't be bothered to help.

Many interviewees had had similar experiences of staff dismissing problems or seriously delaying their attendance to emergencies involving the detainees' wellbeing. The National Audit Office and NGOs have raised the issue of understaffing and an inability to respond to emergencies, but detainees have found that regardless of whether staff are present, their needs will not be met.[20]

*"There is no free access to welfare here – you have to book to see welfare, and you have to wait for an hour or two to see welfare. There's only one welfare officer."*

- a voice from Brook House post-Panorama

*"One hundred and twenty people per wing and just two staff at a time. Not enough staff. One problem is that they're not opening the courtyard. They said that there is not enough staff, so they can't open the courtyard."*

- a voice from Brook House post-Panorama

*"They all tell you to go to someone else, it is nobody's job, they don't want responsibility."*

- a voice from Harmondsworth

*"If there's an emergency you need to go find the good officer, of which there are about 2 in 100."*

- a voice from Morton Hall



## Invisibility

There are many processes which serve to hide immigration detention from the public eye and to that extent also isolate immigration detainees. People in detention are geographically isolated; channels of communication are restricted; journalists and politicians have serious difficulty gaining access. Many detainees feel ignored and forgotten.

People are resilient and find ways to make their voices heard and resist the structures that alienate them. In Yarl's Wood, there was a large scale hunger-strike in detention, during which a sizeable group of women declined food, water, medical and legal services; those that held jobs (paid at a rate of £1/hour) refused to work; and they staged peaceful occupations within the centre.[21] There have been similar protests in different detention centres over the years.

However, those who attempt to assert their rights from within a detention centre regularly face harsh repercussions by the Home Office or IRC staff.

Some of the people who participated in the Yarl's Wood hunger strike were swiftly threatened with deportation.[22][23] The man referred to earlier who staged a protest over the lack of uptake of his complaint had been held in the block for 9 days as a result. Similarly, detainees at Morton Hall were threatened with relocation to Brook House if they made a noise with protestors outside the centre.

*“On this weekend there was a protest outside Morton Hall. Officers were saying that they’d been watching every detainee, to see if they’d been protesting against the officer, that they would move them to Brook House. They’re looking out for anyone who might go outside and make noise from Morton Hall with the outside protestors. They were saying if you do that, they will move you a few days after that because they don’t like you to protest. This is not fair though, everyone has to have the right to protest.”*

- a voice from Morton Hall



## Complaints procedure

An alarming number of people we interviewed did not know about the complaints process. Those detainees who knew about it and understood how it worked had no confidence in the process. Of the people we interviewed, 22 said that they had submitted one or more complaints; of those 22 people, 17 of them said that nothing was done to resolve their issue.

Some mentioned that the only thing that happened after they submitted a complaint was that they were harassed by staff because they had submitted a complaint. Others were discouraged from complaining in the first place, fearing it would invite punitive retaliation from either the Home Office or IRC staff.

*"If you make a complaint about the staff, they will make your life hell, and you worry that it may damage your case."*

- a voice from Brook House, detained at the time of Panorama footage

*"I don't want to complain because immigration might read it and it might go on my monthly progress report."*

- a voice from Colnbrook

*"To make a complaint you have to fill out an application form and you have to put it in the mailbox, and it's going to be an officer who reads it, so it's going to make you a target, as they know who is complaining, and what about. Most detainees, like me, won't complain because of the process."*

- a voice from Morton Hall

*"There's nobody to complain to and nothing happens if you complain."*

- a voice from Brook House, after Panorama

*"...whenever he sent a letter, someone would just come to the room to ask why he had complained. When he explained, they just wouldn't listen, would keep asking 'why did you complain' and then they would just walk off, and not sort it out."*

- a voice from Colnbrook

*"During the induction, I think they're supposed to explain to you how to complain, and they never did. I think they never explain it to anyone."*

- a voice from Colnbrook

*"...if you're new to this country they'll take the piss out of you – complaint forms will go missing, you won't get a reply until you're released/deported..."*

- a voice from Harmondsworth

*"I've done complaints twice. I know the process. But nothing happens when I complain. I complained in writing to IMB [Independent Monitoring Boards] and to the Home Office but I didn't hear anything from either."*

- a voice from Harmondsworth

*"I was a member of the complaint team but they wouldn't listen. There was a complaint about in case of fire, there was no extinguisher and they have some sprinklers that barely work, so something bad could happen. But they don't care."*

- a voice from Harmondsworth

# Medical care

*“I need to get out of here before I die.”*

Many people who enter immigration detention have serious health conditions, or have been through traumatic experiences that render them particularly vulnerable to harm in detention. Many have fled war-torn countries, and may be victims of torture or trafficking. There is a high incidence of mental illness within IRCs. Depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are particularly frequent. Weaknesses in safeguards mean that individuals with serious health conditions or disabilities are regularly detained.

The British Medical Association’s recent report which argued for an end to immigration detention showed how such specialized medical needs cannot be managed in a detention context, where the aims of immigration enforcement are prioritised above all else.[24] Similar views have been expressed by the Royal College of Psychiatrists.[25]

Furthermore, as expressed in Stephen Shaw’s report into vulnerable adults in immigration detention, vulnerability is dynamic and those who were previously healthy may become vulnerable as a result of immigration detention. As argued by the Centre for Mental Health, *“every person in detention faces some challenge to their mental wellbeing and experiences psychological and emotional distress.”*[26]

*“My experience in Colnbrook is that I need to get out of here before I die. Because I have a heart problem...I’ve been here 5 and a half months, I’ve got heart problem, blood pressure... they took me to hospital in December. It was to have an x-ray on my heart and lungs. And after that the doctor in the hospital said that I have a problem with my heart and with my lungs. First, they can’t provide me any medicine, just a tablet for my blood pressure.... The medical care here is not enough for me because I have serious health problems. They know it’s serious- they took me to hospital- but they don’t provide any medicine and are not treating me.”*

- a voice from Colnbrook

*“My own experience, I had a problem inside, and in my head. I went to [the] unit, to get an appointment. And after 2 weeks, they did call me. I went to the appointment, tested my blood pressure. After that she called me same day and said everything is fine and that if you have any more problems take some paracetamol. But my problem is in my head, the issue was not going to be sorted out with a paracetamol. I’ve been detained nearly 6 months here and I have depression and when I speak to the unit manager, they can’t help me with the medical condition. In the healthcare, if we explain what we are suffering, what we are feeling, they need to make a witness statement about us, a rule 35 something like that. If I say I’m depressed and can’t sleep, they just give you sleeping tablet. They don’t listen properly or give proper healthcare.”*

- a voice from Harmondsworth



# 48%

**HEAVILY CRITICISED THE QUALITY OF HEALTHCARE**

The quality of healthcare inside detention was heavily criticised by 43 of the 89 individuals interviewed (48%). In Harmondsworth, 11 out of 16 interviewed (69%) criticised the medical care; in Yarl's Wood this was 11 out of the 15 interviewed (73%). Interviewees had concerns about the very limited care that is provided to detainees, with a common complaint being that they routinely receive paracetamol to treat all injuries and ailments. There is very little access to mental health services.

Numerous interviewees felt there was a culture of disbelief among medical staff, who were frequently perceived as rude or disrespectful or failing to take medical emergencies seriously, including suicidal ideation. We were told of detainees being wrongly denied rule 35 reports. Some interviewees said they had given up on trying to access medical services in detention, whether because of repeated unanswered requests, lack of adequate solutions offered by medical staff, or lack of reporting by medical staff about detainees' health conditions.

*"I am now [in detention for] two and a half months. I had infection a few times, now it has been three and a half months. There could be amputation of the leg. I try to write to see a proper doctor. Here the doctor is no very good, very bad, nobody wants to see me. Two and a half months, I'm worried about my leg to be amputation. Now I don't have chance to do something for my leg because of detention. The doctor about two months ago, he gave me cream for dry skin, when I put on this cream, after the hole was bigger."*

- a voice from Harmondsworth

*"They don't wanna take anyone to hospital, cause it costs too much and too much paperwork. I've even heard them say that personally. They'll try and make light of your situation and make a joke out of it. It was only a month ago I sprained my ankle and they didn't wanna take me to hospital. I had to get a manager involved in order to get taken to hospital."*

- a voice from Harmondsworth

## Adults at risk

The stated purpose of the Home Office's Adults at Risk (AAR) policy, introduced in 2016, was to reduce the number of vulnerable people being detained. BID's 2018 *Adults at risk report* found a number of serious shortcomings in the design and implementation of the policy, which was manifestly failing to achieve its stated aim.[27]

In his 2018 report on vulnerable adults in immigration detention, former prisons and probation ombudsman Stephen Shaw found that *'throughout this review, I was told by IRC staff and managers that there has been little change in the number of vulnerable individuals in detention following the introduction of AAR.'* [28] Home Office official statistics show that rule 35 reports leading to the release of detainees peaked around the release of Shaw and have steadily declined since. In Q3 2016 prior to the introduction of the policy, 39% of those with a Rule 35 report were released. By Q1 2018 this had fallen to 12.5%.[29]

The Adults at Risk policy relies on the rule 35 process, through which doctors write reports which flag concerns regarding vulnerability to the detainee's Home Office caseworker, who is then obliged to consider whether or not detention should be maintained. Some of the people we spoke to criticised the rule 35 process, including the difficulty persuading doctors to write rule 35 reports, or the fact that such reports rarely lead to release.

Worse still, the rule 35 process does not apply in prisons and there is no equivalent process that exists in its place.

People who are held in prisons under immigration powers have no prospect of having their vulnerability recognised and their detention reviewed as a result. We were not able to speak to any people in prisons for the purpose of this research but it is important to note that no matter how dysfunctional the rule 35 process as it operates in IRCs, the situation is worse for those detained in prisons.

*"I've been injured in the head in 2016, and was treated in Royal London Hospital. When the surgery was done there was a blood clot. I've given the details to the Home Office and also have had a Rule 35. I still have health problems. I am on medication and I have had a CT scan in detention healthcare. After the doctor saw the scan he said that I need to see a neurologist because there was white patches. I had an appointment made with the neurologist from outside, the doctor said that I needed this because they wanted to check my brain and my head. It was on 17/01/18, but the neurologist never came. I asked about this in the healthcare and they told me that there's no doctor so they have to re-book you. Or otherwise you can complain to the Home Office. I feel that I need to go to the Royal London Hospital, I have written to the Home Office asking for TA but they're not giving it to me. The main problem is that I am in so much pain but they are only giving me medication for painkiller. I have been told that I need an appointment with the neurologist but it's not coming. I have pain in my head, and I need to find out what it is."*

- a voice from Colnbrook



*“My friend who got deported 2 weeks ago, he kept going for a Rule 35, and the doctor wouldn’t put him through for a Rule 35, and so he never got one and he got deported.”*

- a voice from Morton Hall

*“For me being a disabled detainee, I have health issues, mental health as well, before Yarl’s Wood I wasn’t on medications, I got Rule 35, twice, the doctor said that I am not fit to be in detention....I was supposed to go tomorrow for an operation, but it is no use having an operation here because I will be alone. I am on crutches because I cannot walk. A few days ago I was by myself and I fell, I could not get to my phone or the emergency bell, nobody helped me, I pulled myself up and eventually went to the healthcare and they gave me an ice pack. I could have bashed my head...I should be released; I’ve been in the UK for over 30 years. Because I have what I have, I have gotten weak. I’m falling more and they don’t listen...I came from HMP [prison] and all my medications have been cut, they took some medications away from me...I have an overactive bladder and [detention centre] healthcare refuse to provide me with accommodations, in prison they gave me a special machine. This is why my health is getting worse....here life is wasted, there’s nothing, no education, nothing that you can learn to do back home...They kept me here, my consulate refuse to give me travel documents, I’m a victim of domestic violence and rape, all my children are here and are British citizens, 5 children, 4 of them have health issues and need my help, I have no family in [my birth country]. What life is that? I’ve been here 10 months...”*

- a voice from Yarl’s Wood

*“I’ve got mental issues and I’ve been asking to move. I’m hearing voices, in the night. For all of this, I get nothing at all. I was on anxiety and depression tablets before, and now I need it again and I can’t get it in detention..... I don’t feel for one second like they’re helping me. All they do is give me Paracetamol. If they listened to me, the doctors and nurses, I’d be out by now. But nobody listens; we’re just numbers to them.”*

- a voice from Colnbrook

*“If you want Paracetamol, you have to wait 30 minutes for them and because of lock up and also the small amount they allow you to have it leads to people selling Paracetamols illegally.”*

- a voice from Harmondsworth

*“When you tell them your health problems they don’t care... If you have back problems they just give you paracetamol. They don’t really listen and do their job properly, and they don’t treat us well. It’s like you owe them something when you go there. It’s not a nice feeling it’s like you’re not welcome”*

- a voice from Morton Hall

*“...if you go see the doctor here, whatever your problem, he just give you Paracetamol.”*

- a voice from Morton Hall

*“They just give me Paracetamol but I’ve got a hernia. I’ve been taking it for so long it will damage my liver.”*

- a voice from Morton Hall

## Culture of disbelief

Many detainees we spoke to felt that doctors and nurses often don't take their problems seriously or don't believe them.

*"...the medical staff treat us like we are making things up.... They think that you are pretending, they do not take us seriously."*

- a voice from Harmondsworth

*"...don't get ill in here because it's the worst thing that can happen, they do nothing about it, it takes 2-3 weeks just to see the doctor. I seen some people who are in a bad condition and the doctor did nothing."*

- a voice from Morton Hall

*"One other detainee is here with us and she just came back from there and she said that the medical staff said that if she wants to do something to herself, like kill herself, that she can because she is an adult, that they can do nothing....if you can't help her, that is not right to say that."*

- a voice from Yarl's Wood

*"...healthcare they laugh at you, you know, check them first, they shouldn't assume."*

- a voice from Yarl's Wood





## Medical Emergencies

The way that medical emergencies are dealt with in detention has frequently been criticised, and this was reflected in the accounts of interviewees. Since the year 2000, there have been 49 deaths in immigration detention, including 9 in 2017. [30]

Deaths of immigration detainees, Inquest, last updated 26/04/18. These figures separate out deaths of immigration detainees in prisons and in IRCs- since 2000, 36 immigration detainees have died in IRCs, and 13 immigration detainees have died in prisons. Of the 2017 deaths, 6 were in IRCs and 3 were in prisons.

*“They don’t come on time when you call them for an emergency. They don’t let the Home Office know what somebody’s suffering from. If I’m in there for 2 years, the only people I can come into contact with is them. They should provide a link to the Home Office.”*

- a voice from Brook House, detained at the time of Panorama footage

*“Healthcare don’t even have a say, whatever Home Office says is final, to healthcare. To me it looks like they’re scared to talk. When it comes to my health, and they won’t tell the Home Office what’s happening.”*

- a voice from Colnbrook

*“Yesterday there was a gentleman that smoked and passed out, they just dragged him to his room and left him there. The nurses did not even do anything. He was completely unconscious. I asked them about it because he definitely did not seem alright, but they said he was fine. You see the way detainees are treated, they are treated like they did something wrong.”*

- a voice from Harmondsworth

*“...I personally am scared of going there for a medical prescription. I’ve heard from about 2 detainees, some people tell me that they get the wrong prescriptions, which could have a serious adverse effect...and the medical staff just called to apologize about 2 days later when they realized. I myself get scared about it then.”*

- a voice from Harmondsworth

# DAILY LIFE FOR DETAINEES

## The indefinite nature of detention

It is a common misconception that immigration detention is preferable to prison – Rule 3 of the Detention Centre Rules (2001) states that *“The purpose of detention centres shall be to provide for the secure but humane accommodation of detained persons in a relaxed regime with as much freedom of movement and association as possible”*.<sup>[31]</sup> The reality is very different.

Kweku Adoboli (deported to Ghana after coming to the UK at the age of four) recently stated that the 36 days he spent in Immigration detention did more damage to his mental health than 3 and a half years in prison.<sup>[32]</sup>

Many of our interviewees echoed this view – in prison, you are given a sentence in proportion to the crime you have been convicted of, as well as a definite release date. By contrast, the experience of immigration detention is fraught with uncertainty. It is often said that whereas in prison you count down the days until your release date, in immigration detention you count up. Detainees don't know when they will be released, and whether they will be released back into the community or onto a removal flight.

*“...they are funded by immigration so they don't really have the push to give us things to do.... You just get lost in the days here. They do try to put on certain events, but as for daily activities, I find myself sleeping very late... They need some type of motivation. I can see that it would be quite difficult because people don't usually stay here for a long time so that needs to be taken into consideration for them as well.”*

- a voice from Campsfield

*“The way they treat you here is worse than prison. In prison you give away your liberty. Here it's for immigration detention, it's not a crime. And you've been treated worse than in prison because of profits. Because everything done here comes out of their budget so in every way possible they try to cut costs in terms of healthcare.”*

- a voice from Harmondsworth

*“...there's not much to do, it can be very stressful because there is not much to do, I've been here 6 weeks now and I've lost my patience here now. The longer you stay the more frustrating it gets.”*

- a voice from Campsfield

*“I think prison is better than here, this place is like mental torture – some people here don't know when they're going to get deported or released. Detention is far worse than prison because you know when you're going to get out.”*

- a voice from Colnbrook

*“Everyone was really really upset, and a lot of people here have got mental health issues. I felt safer in prison because if somebody had mental health problems in prison they would be separate, but here they're not separate and it's really really dangerous.”*

- a voice from Morton Hall



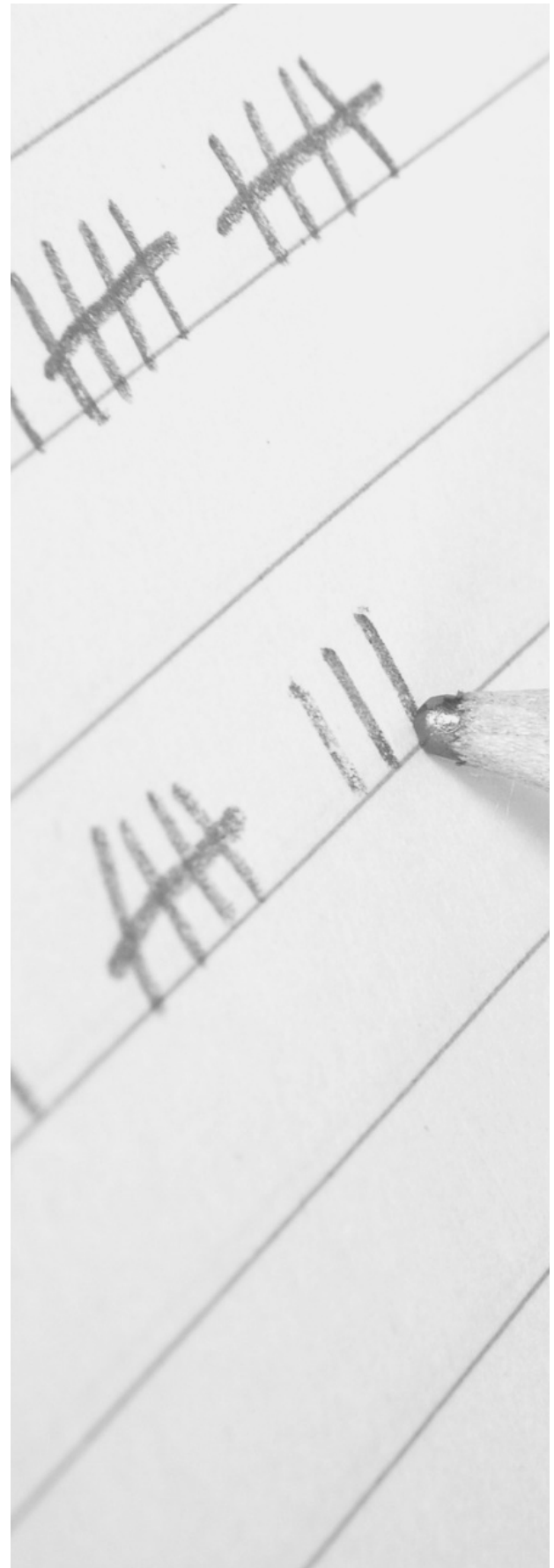
## Length of detention

People are often held in detention for significant periods of time. Although our interviews did not specifically ask detainees how long they had been detained at the time of the interview, thirty-five individuals told us how long that they had been detained, shown on the chart below. Of these thirty-five people, at the time of their interviews, fourteen had been detained between three and six months, and twelve had been detained for six months or more.

In Stephen Shaw’s 2018 report he noted that there had been a “*reduction in the average length of detention since 2015*” but that the “*number of people held for over six months has actually increased*”.[33]

| Number of weeks detained | Number of individuals |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| 3 weeks                  | 11                    |
| 6 weeks                  | 1                     |
| 1 month                  | 2                     |
| 1.5 months               | 1                     |
| 2 months                 | 4                     |
| 2.5 months               | 1                     |
| 3 months                 | 3                     |
| 4 months                 | 3                     |
| 4.5 months               | 1                     |
| 5 months                 | 4                     |
| 5.5 months               | 2                     |
| 6 months                 | 5                     |
| 8 months                 | 3                     |
| 9 months                 | 1                     |
| 10 months                | 2                     |
| 22 months                | 1                     |

Chart A



# 9 years

**IS THE LONGEST PERIOD OF IMMIGRATION DETENTION ON RECORD. SOURCE: LINCOLN PRISON INSPECTION 2012**

He found that among the individuals that were detained at the very end of 2017, 305 had been held under immigration powers in excess of six months, compared with 275 when he took the same measurement in January 2016.[34] The number of asylum seekers that had been held for more than six months had almost doubled, from 35 individuals in January 2016 to 64 individuals in December 2018. [35]

Various studies and investigations, including Stephen Shaw and Amnesty International, have found that detention causes *“serious long-term harm to detainees’ mental and physical health, as well as harm to immediate family members who are not themselves detained”*. [36]

In addition to harmful and costly periods of long-term detention, the Home Office also routinely releases people only to re-detain them shortly after – a number of interviewees told us this was their second or third time being detained under immigration powers. Unfortunately, there is no means of knowing how widespread this practice is because the government doesn’t record data on re-detention.

*“They held me there 2 years for not signing on. I missed just one month and I had a good reason.”*

- a voice from Brook House, detained at the time of Panorama footage

*“...A few people got violent, because they’ve been here for a long time, and also about the food. And the fax machine doesn’t always work properly. Lots of stress and anger, and people feel powerless.”*

- a voice from Brook House, after Panorama

*“In the detention centre, some of these people are detained for more than 15 months. I’ve seen too many people detained for such a long time. And if you do this to people, people are going to go crazy. People get angry and violent, and this gives me more stress.”*

- a voice from Brook House, after Panorama

*“...it can be very stressful because there is not much to do, I’ve been here 6 weeks now and I’ve lost my patience here now. The longer you stay the more frustrating it gets.”*

- a voice from Campsfield

*“When I was taken to detention I was told I was going to be there only 28 days. But now it’s been 8 months...”*

- a voice from Colnbrook

*“It’s confusing. A lot of people are here... I did my sentence for 8 weeks, and I’ve been here for 5 months.”*

- a voice from Morton Hall



## Drug use

The Panorama programme revealed that, as with all sites of incarceration in the UK, drug use is prevalent in immigration detention. Many individuals we spoke to expressed serious concerns not only about the prevalence of drugs in detention but also the attitudes and responses of staff towards drug-related issues.

*“I’ve seen an officer, a guy in someone’s room, ‘man down’ (someone who’d smoked spice). He was on the floor, shaking and vomiting. And then I got out and called the officer to say what was going on. She just came and looked at him and said ‘oh he’ll be alright’, and then she just left and didn’t tell anyone else.”*

- a voice from Brook House, detained at the time of Panorama footage

*“Put it this way...drugs is more rife in that place than on the roads, and I’m not exaggerating. In Brook House, you see loads of people on something called spice, and when they smoke it they fall on the ground and become abnormal, and it’s loads of them. And the staff are not capable...One time there was a bad batch inside, and they were smoking it, and everyone who was smoking it was blacking out. And I heard that they had to call someone from outside because so many people were dropping on the floor.”*

- a voice from Brook House, detained at the time of Panorama footage

*“The culture is like a two-sided coin, in the sense that you have people who are conscious and aware of the reality of being in a detention centre and are realistic about the prospect of coming out. And then there’s the other side of people who are trying to escape the reality, with drugs, things like that.”*

- a voice from Colnbrook

## Violence

Violence is common within detention. Individuals are locked in confined spaces with people that they do not know, many of whom are acutely vulnerable, alienated from society at large and facing an uncertain length of detention and the threat of potential removal from the country. Interviewees made it clear to us that any issues of violence are exacerbated by endemic staff shortages.

One interviewee even voiced fear that detention would push people towards radicalisation:

*“It’s not a good place for anyone to be for a long term stay- it puts fear and pain in people- talking to people and listening to people I can hear, they’re saying when they go back to their country they’re going to become terrorists, to kill every English. When I hear things like that, it makes me think, why is it happening like that. Really and truly, detention shouldn’t be used....Some of them, the words that come out of their mouth – I’m gonna kill this, bomb this, do this, some people maybe start to think that it’s the right thing to do....Sometimes I hear things and I can’t say anything about it because the person is talking from his heart, he is talking from pain, and I understand and I can’t change their mind because it comes from pain... People here don’t get emotional support. And so they might be led to go out there and kill white people. And it’s not right, but people are saying that because they have pain in them and they don’t have support. It’s very sad when I hear these conversations, and it’s sad on English people. What the Home Office does, I don’t think the British people know....There’s a lot that’s going on here that is going to make some dangerous people.”*

- a voice from Colnbrook

# 49 deaths

**SINCE 2000 49 PEOPLE HAVE DIED IN DETENTION INCLUDING 9 IN 2017**

*“I’ve seen detainees pick on other detainees, bullying the other person. If they see you’ve got money, they’ll follow you, and force you to buy them what they need.”*

- a voice from Brook House, detained at the time of Panorama footage

*“Someone threw a cup of hot coffee in my face, I nearly lost my right eye, and nothing happened. I had to go to hospital. There’s not enough staff – just 2 people on the whole wing.”*

- a voice from Brook House, after Panorama

*“People get beat up all the time here basically. You can talk to the staff about it but nothing’s really happening and that’s not gonna produce any benefit. Some people are suffering, bullying and no-one ain’t gonna do nothing really.”*

- a voice from Colnbrook

*“...they get into squabbles, it’s quite serious. I saw some guy get his eye socket broken.”*

- a voice from Colnbrook

*“...literally when I was on the wing someone head-butted someone and bust his face...”*

- a voice from Colnbrook





## Violence of removals

Numerous interviewees gave vivid, violent descriptions of removals and escorting processes where people are moved between detention centres or onto a flight. Processes to remove people on charter flights are understood to be particularly brutal and intimidating, with reports of people being restrained even when there is no reason to do so.[37] Stephen Shaw accompanied a charter flight in November 2017 [38] which raised a number of concerns, including excessive use of restraint equipment, and failure of staff to escalate what was clearly a medical emergency – a situation which had to be rectified by Shaw’s own team of inspectors.

*“When some people refuse to go, they inject them. This is very, very bad, you can’t inject people and put them on the plane because they’re going to fight their removal. No matter what people have done it doesn’t mean people should be treated like that.”*

- a voice from Colnbrook

*“When they moved me from Brook House to here they tied me up, cuffed me, put me in a van. It was painful for me.”*

- a voice from Morton Hall

*“When they took me to the plane, there was 5 big guys. I said I don’t wanna go, and he was pushing me, and they put me in a headlock and tried to close my mouth. 6 foot 5 inch guy and he broke my hand. I told the doctor that my hand was broken, and he wrote something down, and he just gave me painkillers. No one helped me- immigration people don’t care about medical care. I was there 9 months, three times they took me to the airport to send me back...I’ve been 11 years in England.”*

- a voice from Brook House, detained at the time of Panorama footage

*“...one thing I don’t understand is why some people who are getting removed end up getting beaten up... Some of them get tied up and then taken- they tie their legs and arms with rope so they can’t obstruct the removal. Sometimes it’s very painful and traumatizing to see, when you see they’re treating the inmates like that it makes you think they might treat you like that when it comes to your time. And it puts fear in you.”*

- a voice from Colnbrook

*“I’ve seen an officer bring a man into the office, to move him, he didn’t want to go. There was about 10 officers, they tried to force him, and forced him down and he hit his head on the table. They tied his hands behind his back and put him in the van and took him away. It was really violent. When I said to one of the officers ‘you can’t treat people like that’ he said ‘it’s none of your business get out of here’.”*

- a voice from Morton Hall



## Self-harm and suicide

2017 was the deadliest year in immigration detention; and of the eleven individuals who died, six were the result of self-inflicted wounds.[39][40] Incidents of self-harm are frequent. Responses to FOI requests revealed that between January 2016 until August 2017 there were 647 reported cases of detainees needing medical assistance because of self-harm inside IRCs, which is more than one per day[41], although this figure is far lower than the total number of people on suicide watch.

*"My friend, from India, they were sending him back and so he was trying to kill himself. When I go to sleep, this is still in my dreams. If you tell the staff about suicide attempts, they don't care. They say 'listen I'm just working here, I can't do anything about it. Sorry mate.'"*

- a voice from Brook House, detained at the time of Panorama footage

*"When I was there, there were 3 or 4 suicide attempts."*

- a voice from Harmondsworth

*"I've seen people try to kill themselves. But whatever they're doing, no one is there to really talk to them. People here going through difficult time need someone to talk to, someone to express their feelings to. But there's nothing here like that. When you wake up you don't know if you're going soon."*

- a voice from Colnbrook

*"I have seen one guy kill himself here in Morton Hall..."*

- a voice from Morton Hall

*"In this place there was a guy who took his life... On that day we went to see the big manager because of the officers, she was a woman, she said 'I don't care if he killed himself, I'm happy' and she was smiling. We were all shouting and asking her, we were getting very angry."*

- a voice from Morton Hall

*"One guy committed suicide just a few doors down from me..."*

- voice from Morton Hall

## Lock-in

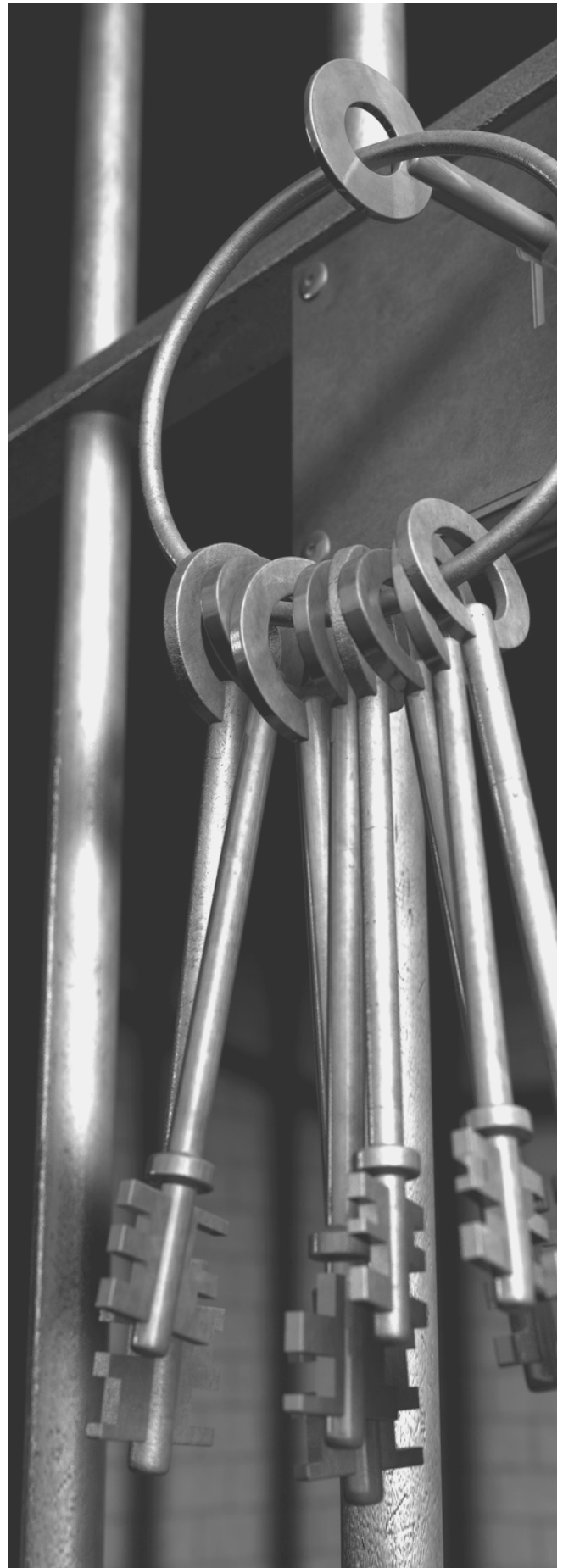
Lock-in practices vary across IRCs. The lock-in regime in Brook House has been the subject of media scrutiny and litigation[42], and was criticised heavily by some of the detainees we spoke to.[43]

*"The door is closed for 12 hours in the night time, every night. It's not good for people who have problems- my room-mate had a breathing problem at 1am, so we called the emergency nurse who said that he should try to go to Tinsley House because there they don't lock the people. Also, after opening the door in the morning they close it at 12 o'clock for 1 hour and then again at 5 o'clock for 1 hour. So in total it's about 14 hours every day that we're locked in our room and we are not criminals."*

- a voice from Brook House, after  
Panorama

*"They open the door at 8am. But two days ago they didn't open it on time, and so people were throwing things and shouting...I was refusing [to go back in my room], but he kept saying I had to go in, so I went inside. After 25 minutes, I didn't know what was happening outside because they had covered the window with the metal cover... They took me out after 20 minutes for breakfast. Everything was a little calmer, but they tried to put us back inside at 11:45. Everyone was refusing, and I refused as well because they hadn't let me out in the morning after I cooperated. Nobody was going into their rooms, people got mad and broke everything- the pool table, the bin, some people can't control their feelings. They lock us up for 13.5 hours in a day. They lock everyone up for longer if people have a flight."*

- a voice from Brook House, after  
Panorama



## Other concerns

Various interviewees criticised the poor quality of hygiene of the detention facilities: dirty toilets and showers; an outbreak of chicken pox in Harmondsworth and bed bugs in Brook House; lack of ventilation. Many also said that any repairs that they would request would take an unreasonably long time.

Many websites are blocked within IRCs, including sites that could help detainees prepare their case. BID's Spring 2018 legal advice survey found that 73% of the 103 individuals surveyed who had used the internet to research their case had been blocked from accessing websites that might help them with their immigration case.<sup>[44]</sup> Access to fax machines is also restricted. This serves to heavily disadvantage people who need to prepare their case from within detention. Concerns about the facilities and conditions in detention were relayed to us:

*"All sites are blocked. BID website is blocked. We asked the staff about it and they said they've updated the system. The staff said that they can't do anything about it."*

- a voice from Brook House, after Panorama

*"If you want to scan documents, you have to go to welfare. There's a 2 hour wait for the scanner, because there's one scanner for 600 or 700 people. Only small windows of time when you can go to welfare: 9:30 – 11, 1:30 – 5, 6:30 – 8:00 or 8:30. Very often that I don't have time to scan a document and have to go back to my room before I have time to send it..."*

- a voice from Brook House, after Panorama

*"There's no windows here, so there's no ventilation coming in. Even prison has windows."*

- a voice from Colnbrook

*"Fax machine – there's only one fax machine in the library, and there's like 800 detainees in Harmondsworth all of them using one fax machine. If you need to send a fax urgently, you have queue up for long time. Sometimes people have to send 100 or 200 pages to their solicitor or to the court. You can be waiting for more than an hour."*

- a voice from Harmondsworth

*"When my kids came to visit me, I told them to bring their homework, and when they came with their homework they were told they weren't allowed to come in with their homework. I don't know what the reason is, my solicitor didn't know the reason why either, because the kids should come first. And they had to bring their homework back home. I was pleading to them for them to sort something out, and they never done nothing. The last time I was detained at Brook House, I didn't take any visits from my children because of my experience the first time. I was worried they didn't like it after the first time."*

- a voice from Brook House, detained at time of Panorama

*"The place is crowded, in some rooms there is supposed to be two people, but it ended up four people."*

- a voice from Harmondsworth

*"The shopping here is extortionate prices- for a £1 item, you'd get an added 79p. I brought this up in the detainee meeting and the shop manager laughed about it and said 'it's a business after all'. They're in a position of power so they abuse it."*

- a voice from Harmondsworth



A common complaint among interviewees was about the food; without being prompted 31 individuals commented on how bad the food is – that it's the same meal each day and inappropriate for those with health conditions and dietary restrictions.

*"It's a terrible place. I've been here for 7/8 months. Sometimes I don't eat for 2 or 3 days because the food makes me feel sick."*

- a voice from Brook House, after Panorama

*"The main thing for a diabetic is dietary needs – part of the treatment is to see a dietician. They just feed me on the two cheapest things, rice and potatoes. Some days I can eat it, some days I can't. The food is not appropriate for me."*

- a voice from Colnbrook

*"They don't care about the different nationalities here- they give every day the same food, the food that Indians eat but not the food that Africans eat. They don't make sure that there's food for people from the different nationalities."*

- a voice from Harmondsworth

*"My roommate has some issues, he was diagnosed with a health problem, they put him on a diet, when he went to collect his food, it was not properly cooked, he complained and they did nothing. He abstained from eating from 2 whole weeks, he only was drinking water. When you go to eat, you have to show your ID for them to check off that you have eaten. They didn't care or check on him when he did not eat. He made a complaint about this and they told him that it is not in the system that he has not been eating these weeks. It doesn't make sense. They don't care."*

- a voice from Harmondsworth

*"Food is no good. Some time it's not properly cooked, sometimes overcooked, sometimes there's not enough food."*

- a voice from Morton Hall



## Conclusion

Each complaint from the people we interviewed adds to a body of evidence which amply demonstrates that there is no way to humanely deprive people of their liberty for immigration purposes. In no other context could the right to liberty be taken away from a particular group of people with so few safeguards. Six times the UK government has been found to have breached Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights. Detention is isolating and de-humanising and causes irreparable harm to people, families and communities. The call to end detention is strongest when articulated by those who have been subjected to its inhumanity.

*"I'm telling you the truth sir, they were treating the people like animals, no respect nothing like that. They swear at you. I told them I was trying to hang myself- I said 'I'm going to hang myself, please release me'. They said, 'I can't release you, you're going back to Afghanistan.' But I have no family there. I have no one there. The G4S staff said 'I don't care.'... I did not receive good treatment or good care. These people made me damaged and treated me like an animal. I'll never forget it. This is not human rights- I spent 9 months and did nothing wrong, and I've been tortured. These people playing with my life."*

- a voice from Brook House, detained at time of Panorama footage

*"...some people have been here for years, and there is nobody who cares about us here."*

- a voice from Brook House, after Panorama

# £21.2m

AMOUNT PAID OUT IN  
COMPENSATION FOR UNLAWFUL  
DETENTION CASES IN THE LAST 5  
YEARS [45]

*"You just get lost in the days here...it makes you get very depressed and unmotivated."*

- a voice from Campsfield

*"And they say this is the best one [IRC] in terms of treatment, staff, drugs problem, everything. Imagine what the others are like when this one is some kind of hellhole... Every day you hear people talking about human rights, one year in this place you've got no human rights, and you're not even a criminal... Theresa May goes to other countries and tells them about human rights but detainees don't have human rights here."*

- a voice from Colnbrook

*"We are not properly British people, we don't have a British passport, so they don't care if anything bad happens to us."*

- a voice from Harmondsworth

*"It's not a good thing that I'm experiencing here. There's people suffering here, people dying here."*

- a voice from Morton Hall

*"The detention centres should be closed down...You are stressing me and more importantly you are stressing the kids. Nothing good comes from detention."*

- a voice from Yarl's Wood

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# Appendix:

## Questions Asked

Below is the set of questions that we asked to interviewees. In certain cases we would also ask follow up questions in response to something that had been said.

1. What was your experience of the culture and environment at -- IRC? And the care and treatment you received from the staff?
  2. How would you describe the relationship between staff and detainees at -- IRC?
  3. Did you experience or witness poor treatment, verbal or physical abuse of detainees by staff, or poor or inappropriate attitudes or behaviours by staff?
  4. Did you experience or witness violence, abuse or bullying between detainees?
  5. Did you receive appropriate medical care while at -- IRC?
  6. What was the attitude of medical staff towards detainees?
  7. What did you know about the complaints process? Did you feel that you could make a complaint if you wanted to? Did you ever make a complaint and if so, what was your experience?
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