

The background of the entire page is a close-up, slightly blurred image of white metal prison bars. In the lower right quadrant, a grey padlock is visible, partially obscured by the bars. The overall tone is somber and institutional.

SURVIVORS BEHIND BARS

SUPPLEMENTARY STATEMENTS
BY PRACTITIONERS + NGOS

4 February 2021

SUPPLEMENTARY COMMENTS

The following statements have been provided by non-profit organisations, and practitioners, in response to After Exploitation's briefing *'Survivors Behind Bars: The detention of modern slavery survivors under Immigration Powers (2019-2020)*. Many of the below statements relate to developments in casework, seen by Non-Governmental Organisations providing support to trafficked detainees during the coronavirus pandemic (2020).

Voke, expert-by-experience at **Women for Refugee Women**:

'Voke' (not her real name) was detained in Yarl's Wood for nearly eight months in 2017. While in Yarl's Wood, she was referred into the National Referral Mechanism and given a negative 'reasonable grounds' decision. Three years later, in 2020, the Home Office reversed this decision and recognised her conclusively as a survivor of trafficking. She said:

"The Home Office didn't ask me what had happened to me before they detained me. Then, when I told them in detention, they dismissed what I said. They treat you as a number, not a human being. They just want to send you back to your country, to meet their deportation targets. When I finally received my positive decision I thought: why have you only decided to believe me now? My story is the same as it was when I told you years ago."

Theresa Schleicher, Casework Manager at **Medical Justice**, said:

"We are greatly concerned by the high numbers of people with trafficking indicators who have been detained. Immigration detention which is known to cause lasting harm to mental health, especially for those with previous histories of trauma, such as trafficking. These numbers, although high, are likely to be the tip of the iceberg. We frequently encounter survivors of trafficking in detention who have not been recognised as such by anyone before, despite having gone through the Home Office processes that should have identified them and safeguarded them from detention: the screening interview, consideration by the Gatekeeper team, the detention healthcare screening."

“We are concerned that the Home Office is currently considering introducing changes to its policy of detaining survivors of trafficking which we fear could further undermine safeguards and lead to more survivors languishing in detention for longer. We urge the Home Office to reconsider: rather than weakening existing safeguards, there is an urgent need for strengthening them and ensuring they are properly effective. Survivors of trafficking should never be subjected to immigration detention.”

Rachel Witkin, Head of Counter-Trafficking at **The Helen Bamber Foundation**, said:

“It is shameful to see that so many victims of the serious crime of human trafficking have been detained. We know that traffickers routinely keep control over their victims with the threat that if they ever dare to escape they will be detained by the UK authorities: it is an effective threat because it frequently proves to be true.”

“Once survivors have been detained they feel betrayed, frightened, isolated and alone. The trauma of their trafficking is increased by the experience of further confinement, and many survivors will struggle to ever find the courage after detention to speak out about the criminals who have trafficked them.”

“In many cases we know of, clear indicators of trafficking were not picked up or acted upon, or survivors’ accounts were wrongly disbelieved. As with other serious crime, trafficking is most likely to be disclosed when a relationship of trust is built and survivors have time to absorb information and speak freely about all that has happened to them. The Recovery & Reflection period was specifically designed for this purpose and it should never be spent in detention. Survivors need to be identified, protected and supported to rebuild their lives.”

Gemma Lousley, Policy and Research Coordinator at **Women for Refugee Women**, said:

“The ‘Adults at Risk’ policy, introduced in 2016 to supposedly reduce the number of vulnerable people in detention, has consistently been found not to have achieved this. During the coronavirus pandemic, the situation for vulnerable people in detention has become even worse. The detention of thousands of people who are potentially trafficking victims cannot be understood as the result of unresolved ‘problems’ or ‘deficiencies’ within an overall well-intentioned system. Rather, it is the inevitable outcome of the hostile and neglectful system that has been put in place.”

“The consequences of ‘Adults at Risk’ demonstrate that ‘reform’ of the detention system and minor policy changes will not stop people who are vulnerable from being detained. The only way to achieve this is to dismantle the UK’s institutionally racist and cruel immigration detention system.”

Rudy Schulkind, Research and Policy Co-ordinator at **Bail for Immigration Detainees (BID)** said:

“These numbers show the staggering extent of the government’s failure to protect victims of trafficking from detention. Immigration detainees are deprived of their liberty in prison-like conditions, with no idea of when or where they will be released to. This is difficult enough for anybody. For survivors of trafficking, the experience is frequently re-traumatising and we encounter people whose mental health has deteriorated significantly as a result of detention. There is a lack of quality independent immigration advice which is essential for people entering the NRM.”

“Furthermore the only first responder in Immigration Removal Centres is the same authority responsible for maintaining detention and executing enforced removal from the UK. Clearly immigration detention is not a conducive environment to the disclosure of trafficking or other traumatic experiences. There may be many others who go through the detention system and are released or deported from the UK without ever having been identified as a victim of trafficking.

Sarah Teather, UK Director of **Jesuit Refugee Service**, said:

“These statistics are further compelling evidence of the reality JRS UK’s detention outreach team see time and again: victims of trafficking are routinely held in immigration detention. This incarceration brings back memories of abuse at the hands of traffickers. This happens because, too often, immigration control is prioritised over identifying and protecting victims. This needs to change. If we are serious about combatting trafficking, we need to stop incarcerating those victim to it.”

Kate Roberts, UK & Europe Programme Manager at **Anti Slavery International**, said:

“The UK needs to prioritise a human response to trafficking, which treats people as individuals and which focuses on their needs and priorities. There needs to be a support system which is independent of immigration control from start to finish, and which gives people choices and options, supporting them to put their exploitation behind them and to begin to rebuild their lives.

To go from exploitation to immigration detention is the opposite of this. From initial identification and support to the provision of security, immigration controls remove people's options, playing into the hands of traffickers."

Maria Thomas, Solicitor at **Duncan Lewis' Public Law team**, said:

"We believe that the Secretary of State's practice of truncating asylum screening interviews, pursuant to an unpublished policy, has contributed to the detention of hundreds of vulnerable trafficking survivors. By failing to ask asylum seekers about their route of travel, those who had suffered horrific abuse and exploitation in Libya were detained and processed for removal when they should have been identified for support. This practice has undoubtedly added to the traumatisation and anguish already suffered by these individuals whilst exploited and enslaved."



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