



## Help end the detention of refugee women

Write to your MP!

Dear [MP's name],

I am writing to you about the use of immigration detention for women seeking asylum, which I am very concerned about.

About 2,000 women seeking asylum are locked up in detention in the UK every year, predominantly in Yarl's Wood detention centre, near Bedford. Research by the charity Women for Refugee Women has found that the majority of women who seek asylum in the UK and are subsequently locked up are survivors of rape, sexual violence or other forms of torture. For these women, being locked up is incredibly distressing and can force them to relive the trauma they experienced in their countries of origin. Consequently, there are high levels of mental distress and self-harm in Yarl's Wood.

As you may be aware, there are also significant concerns about conditions in Yarl's Wood. Women for Refugee Women has documented how women are routinely watched in intimate situations by male guards, and their research findings have been corroborated by independent monitoring bodies such as the Prisons Inspectorate. There are also longstanding concerns about sexual abuse at Yarl's Wood. Additionally, healthcare provision there is very poor. For women who are already vulnerable, the conditions at Yarl's Wood exacerbate the trauma of being detained in the first place.

As well as being harmful to individual women, detention is ineffective. In 2014, three-quarters of asylum-seeking women were released back into the community to continue with their cases, and so their detention served no purpose whatsoever. Locking people up in detention is also expensive - in 2013-14 more than £160 million was spent on running detention centres in the UK.

Detention is a completely unnecessary part of the asylum system. It is more humane and effective, and much cheaper, to resolve women's asylum claims while they are living in the community. In fact, international evidence shows that community-based 'alternatives to detention' have high levels of compliance, and much higher rates of voluntary return for those whose cases are ultimately refused.

As my MP, please ask the Home Secretary to meet with the charity Women for Refugee Women, and women who have been detained, to hear their concerns first-hand. If you are still undecided on this issue and feel you need more information, I wonder if you would meet with Women for Refugee Women, to discuss it further?

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes,