

Quick Guide to visiting Detention Centres

There are now just seven Immigration Removal Centres in the UK. Several have been closed in recent years. Most are either within a few miles of a large airport like Heathrow or Gatwick, or hidden away out of site of the public. The [Association of Visitors to Detainees](#) (AVID) has been supporting detainees since 1994 through its member visitors' groups. You will find a list of groups on their website, as well as a guide to becoming a visitor and a useful handbook for visitors. The groups include those that visit immigrants in prison who are awaiting deportation after finishing their sentence for a crime.

The AVID website also contains invaluable information about the process of detention and the effects it has on inmates, as well as links to other partner organisations that are making a huge contribution in different ways, whether that is through legal work, healthcare, campaigning or applying for bail. For a general overview of the topic, the AVID website is the place to go.

If you know of someone in an IRC and want to visit them, the Home Office website gives details of visiting procedures in IRCs [here](#). Without prior booking and the correct ID you will not be allowed in, so make sure you prepare well. If you are taking clothing and other items, make sure you know the weight limit (usually 20kg) and what the contents are, and ensure that the bags can be opened, as they will be thoroughly searched and items logged. This can take some time, so allow extra time on top of your visiting slot.

If you are not within range of an IRC, there are other ways in which you can get involved. [Detention Action](#) is a campaigning organisation doing excellent work both with individuals in detention and also on public campaigns like ending indefinite detention. It also contains additional information about the system. Above all, praying for change to a humane system and [alternatives to detention](#) is vital. In order to pray effectively for justice it is important to know the facts about the injustice of immigration detention. [Medical Justice](#) has for many years highlighted the lack of healthcare and appropriate treatment available in IRCs that has led to a number of avoidable deaths. [Bail for Immigration Detainees](#) (BID) works to get detainees released on bail when they are unlikely to be removed. Anyone who has been involved in trying to get bail for a detainee will tell you that it is an archaic, expensive, ineffective and haphazard system in dire need of change.

Finally, if you want to do some further research into Immigration Detention, this is the lengthy and damning ['Review into the Welfare in Detention of Vulnerable Persons'](#) by Stephen Shaw, which was published in January 2016. The key passage is the list of the 64 recommendations to the Home Office on page 193. There have since then been some welcome changes in the mode of operation, but the most important recommendations, such as alternatives to detention, have not been implemented. [A follow-up report](#) was published in 2018.