

**Our theory of change**

**February 2021**

This document sets out how the members of Detention Forum think change is going to happen on immigration detention in the UK.

**Context**

**Our members**

Since we started working together as a forum our membership has changed substantially both in terms of numbers but also in terms of activity. We now have over 40 member organisations of the Forum, some of them are specialist organisations in immigration detention, and others are organisations that have an interest in this issue. We have warmly welcomed both types of organisations into the Forum. We also have member organisations which are now much more involved in active campaigning for change on immigration detention. We have members who are leading public campaigns to change policy, and we have members who are actively involved in the inside track seeking to influence officials on elements of policy.

Detention Forum has always sought to add value to the activities of our members. We hence never seek to compete or to duplicate what our members are doing, rather we seek to amplify to reach wider audiences, and, only if necessary, fill in any gaps in the context of our members’ activities.

We do not necessarily set out with the ambition of achieving a consensus across our network. Rather we want to create a safe space to think, advocate, challenge and reflect. We can then develop a menu of policies and messages – into which our members can dip to enhance their capacity and confidence to communicate and campaign.

We see ourselves as part of a growing movement for change.

**Government view**

We have a government in the UK with a strong majority in the House of Commons, which both defends the use of immigration detention, but is also interested to explore community based alternatives. The public rhetoric has though become increasingly hostile on subjects such as a time limit and on the channel crossings, but there are members of their own backbenches, who are prepared to advocate for specific policy changes. We recognise that it is a challenging political environment, but we seek allies from all parties to promote the need for change.

**Public view**

Recent public opinion polls have shown strong support for the central important principle of asylum, and has also shown support for the introduction of a time limit for immigration detention.We want to encourage more diverse parts of civil society to speak out in their own way against the use of immigration detention and join this growing movement for change.

**Our Mission**

We want to end the use of immigration detention in the UK because we think that it is unjust and inhumane.

**Policy changes**

As we work towards achieving our mission, we are keen to promote **specific proactive change** in the following policy areas:

* Time limit
* Community based alternatives to detention
* Improving the government reform agenda (ie: response to Shaw reports)
* Asylum policy
* Time-served prisoners
* Short-term holding facilities in Northern France

As a forum we also ensure that we have capacity to enable us to **react to external events** in furtherance of our mission. All members have the right to bring proposals for reactive action by the whole forum, and to set out how they think their proposal meets our selection criteria for urgent actions.

**Discussion in the Forum**

In such a fast moving world, we are setting up a discussion process at Detention Forum, open to all of our members, where we will seek to do the following:

1. Develop an initial **discussion paper** with some key framing questions
2. Hold a **discussion meeting**, open to all of our members, to discuss our responses to these questions
3. Develop a **policy statement** on each issue, which clearly sets out how we see the specific problem and what we want to happen
4. Develop clear **communication messages** to help us to promote the issue
5. Develop **comprehensive FAQs** where we respond to the key rebuttals on the issue

We do not necessarily set out with the ambition of achieving a consensus on all of these issues. Rather we want to create a safe space to think, advocate, challenge and reflect. We may then develop a menu of policies and messages – into which our members can dip to enhance their capacity and confidence to communicate and campaign.

It may well be that we need to keep repeating this process for some issues in response to external changes.

At this point in time, the key issues, to which we want to apply this process, are:

1. Alternatives to Detention
2. Government response to the Shaw Reports
3. ‘Foreign National Offenders’
4. The Home Office ‘asylum overhaul’
5. Key arguments advanced by Ministers during the Immigration Bill
6. Short-term holding facilities in Northern France

**How change happens**

We know that change happens in a number of different ways and that the change process is never straight forward and linear. We are always open as to the best way to bring about change. As a forum we cherish different ways to promote change. We create a safe space, with mutual respect, where colleagues with different approaches can come together and share learning for maximum external impact.

**Our ways of working**

To help achieve our mission, and our specific aims, we work in the following manner:

Firstly, we have our **quarterly members meetings**, which are the most important meetings for us, open to all of our members, whereby we set the strategic direction for the Forum and take an overview of all of the different parts of the Forum’s work. We hold occasional **meetings/ webinars** on specific issues of topical concern to stay connected with our members.

The catalyst for all of our activity comes from our **working groups**, which comprise representatives from our member organisations:

* **Communications**: developing our overarching message, our key messages and working on our most affective responses to opposing arguments.
* **Parliamentary:** ensuring effective collaboration amongst our members in our engagement with parliamentarians promoting reform on immigration detention.
* **Grassroots/ community campaigning:** bringing our members together who are more focused on this type of activity to ensure that we integrate this campaigning energy into our work.
* **New allies:** approaching organisations with a working interest in detention to join us as members, and developing a new category of a ‘friend of Detention Forum’ (both organisations and individuals) to be able to build greater support and action from the wider civil society.
* **Home Office:** connecting with the existing NGO stakeholder forums so that our members are connected with the ongoing discussions with officials.
* **Policy:** working together to develop solutions to complement and add content to our communications messages.

**Communications**

We see our communications as an opportunity to add value and amplify the existing communications of our member organisations, and in particular we are keen to use the following channels in a vibrant and accessible way:

* Website
* Blog – with external bloggers always welcome
* Twitter
* YouTube channel
* Unlocking Detention – our annual social media campaign

All of this work is co-ordinated on a regular basis by our **co-ordination group**, which is a small group of our members, setting the strategic direction of the forum and ensuring the synergy between the different working groups.

**Regular review**

We know that any theory of change will never last long, and with each contact with the outside world, we need to review our approach. We are committed to keeping our approach under regular review to ensure that we are responding in the most effective way to the realities of our external environment for maximum impact.

ENDS