Write to your MP about the Immigration and Social Security Coordination Bill

**Information and links**

The Home Secretary’s statement about immigration on 19 December: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2018-12-19/debates/9BA7B2F2-3B9A-4E09-8E02-EC7F459592F6/FutureImmigration>

White paper (government policy paper) published on 19 December 2018: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/766465/The-UKs-future-skills-based-immigration-system-print-ready.pdf>

Immigration and Social Security Coordination Bill: <https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2017-19/immigrationandsocialsecuritycoordinationeuwithdrawal.html>

A response to the white paper from the Immigration Legal Practitioner’s Association: <http://www.ilpa.org.uk/resources.php/34996/ilpa-response-to-immigration-white-paper-the-uks-future-skills-based-immigration-system-19-december->

Private Member’s Bill on Family Reunion: <https://services.parliament.uk/bills/2017-19/refugeesfamilyreunionno2.html>

Private Member’s Bill on Immigration Detention: <https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2017-19/immigrationtimelimitondetention.html>

Please tell us you’ve written at: <https://forms.quaker.org.uk/politics/>

Find your MP: [www.theyworkforyou.org.uk](http://www.theyworkforyou.org.uk)

**Template letter**

This letter is a rough template for you to use as you wish. There are also additional messages and paragraphs at the end of this document, and the information and links above.

Dear [name of your MP]

Re: the Immigration and Social Security Coordination Bill

I am writing to you as a constituent to express my concerns about our broken and cruel immigration system. I am disappointed that the Immigration and Social Security Coordination Bill does not touch on some of the most important issues around immigration.

I would like new immigration legislation to include the following key issues:

1. A time limit for detention. Indefinite detention is neither right nor necessary. Other more humane policies are more effective and should be introduced. There’s no judicial oversight of the decision, and nearly half of those detained are subsequently released back into the community. The damage to their relationship with the state, and to their own mental and physical health, can be permanent. A time limit of 28 days was recommended by all-party parliamentary inquiry of 2015.  
     
   Please support the Immigration (Time Limit on Detention) Bill which was introduced on 6 December, and ask for the government to adopt it. Please pursue community-based alternatives to detention.
2. Family reunion for refugees. Leaving unaccompanied refugee children unable to sponsor their parents or siblings condemns them to a lifetime of separation from their families. People fleeing war or starvation should not be forced to choose between their family and their safety. The UK’s restrictive rules have a negative impact on community cohesion, and there is no evidence that children would be “sent ahead” if the restrictions were lifted. It cannot be morally right to keep families apart when we have the ability to reunite them.  
     
   Please support the Refugees (Family Reunion) Bill which was debated last March, and ask for the government to adopt this in future immigration legislation.
3. Right to work. People seeking sanctuary in the UK have skills and experience, and the system should and could allow them to use these for the greater good of British society. At the moment, a small number of asylum seekers in specific jobs can work after six months. Most asylum seekers are prevented from working for as long as their case takes, which may be years. To deny a right to work is to impose an unnecessary burden on the taxpayer, as well as imposing lasting damage on people who may be granted leave to remain and asked to integrate into British society.  
     
   Please extend the right to work after six months to all asylum seekers.
4. The burden of proof is laid on the person seeking asylum. As the Windrush scandal has shown, the “hostile environment” faced by asylum seekers results in a situation where it is often impossible to prove rape, torture, trafficking, sexuality, or membership of a specific religion or belief. Research from Freedom From Torture found that appeal judges were having to correct the Home Office’s decisions, with 76 per cent of cases involving torture going to appeal being overturned in favour of the applicant.  
     
   Please raise awareness of the heavy burden of proof which is laid on asylum seekers, and ask the Home Office to review its policies and requirements.

As a Quaker, I recognise that of God in everyone, no matter where they come from or what they have faced in their life so far. Our immigration system is cruel and inhumane. It imposes lasting damage on people who may ultimately be granted leave to remain in the UK, with ongoing consequences for their perception of British society and ability to integrate successfully.

[You could add in a paragraph here – see paragraphs at the end of this letter.]

I understand that the Bill only considers a small part of the wider immigration system. The White Paper published on 19 December made it clear that the government would listen to both businesses and people over the next year, before providing more details on proposed immigration policy. As my MP, please help by representing my views to the Home Secretary and by raising these issues at the Second Reading of the Immigration and Social Security Coordination Bill.

In Friendship

[Your name and contact details, including your address.]

**Suggestions for other paragraphs you could add in:**

I am copying this letter to [name AM], who is my representative in the Welsh Assembly. Although immigration is a reserved matter, it has important consequences for Wales, consequences which are different from those for London or other parts of the UK.

I am copying this letter to [name MSP]. I believe that not only is the immigration system cruel to the individuals who find themselves trapped in it, but as this Bill stands it has the potential to heavily impact Scotland in a negative way. It will impact our health and care services, our world class universities, agriculture and many small businesses. The accumulated impact will be felt in many communities large and small, and Scotland would be a poorer country, both economically and socially.

Living so close to [name] detention centre, I have heard some of the stories of those who have been in detention. This is an inhumane system, which no person should ever be subjected to. Please help us to close this detention centre.

My local Quaker meeting is a sanctuary meeting. We have made a commitment to join local initiatives to build a culture of welcome, build alliances with groups opposing racism, and work with others to change the laws on destitution, detention, deportations and removals. Please read our sanctuary everywhere manifesto here: <http://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/sanctuary-everywhere-manifesto>

**Further key messages and wording**

The forthcoming white paper and bill provide an invaluable opportunity to address these issues in the context of broader changes to create a more humane system. Here is some additional wording which may help you when writing your own letters.

Refugee family reunion

The current situation where children coming legally to the UK under the various agreements are not usually able to be joined by a family member such as a parent or sibling, cannot be allowed to continue.

By accepting that it is unsafe for such children to return to their country of origin, but refusing to allow them to be joined by even their closest relatives, we are condemning them to a lifetime of separation from their families. Recent events in the United States have demonstrated the widespread recognition of the importance of keeping families together.

The moral case for action is supported by a pragmatic one. There is strong evidence that ongoing forced separation from loved ones seriously hampers the ability of all refugees, and particularly children, to integrate into British society. As well as the personal misery for individuals, this has a broader, negative impact on community cohesion. The measures set out in the Government’s recently published Integrated Communities Strategy – whether promoting learning English or greater social mixing – will fail to reach children whose emotional energy is consumed by loneliness and fear for the safety of their families.

Allowing children to be joined in the UK by close family members – along the lines set out in Angus Brendan MacNeil’s private member’s bill – would make an incalculable difference to the small number of children facing this desperate situation. Last year, fewer than 800 unaccompanied children who arrived in the UK were granted asylum. We urge you to take this opportunity to transform their lives.

Right to work after six months

Most asylum seekers are prevented from working whilst their cases are decided, which may take months or even years.

The current system imposes lasting damage on people who may ultimately be granted leave to remain in the UK, with ongoing consequences for their perception of British society and ability to integrate successfully. It also places unnecessary burdens on the taxpayer. People seeking sanctuary in the UK have skills and experiences they could use for the greater good of society. The system should allow and encourage this.

We recognise the concern to maintain a distinction between asylum seekers and those seeking a better life as economic migrants. This distinction would be maintained by a six month delay. But it is wrong to leave individuals unable to contribute to the UK while, through no fault of their own, they wait for prolonged periods for decisions on their cases.

Limits to immigration detention

The UK is the only European country not to have set a time limit on detention. This harms our reputation at a time when we are seeking to forge new relationships with the world.

We welcome your recent announcement that you have asked Home Office officials to work with others, including faith groups, to explore community-based alternatives to detention. Evidence from other countries suggests that these can achieve good outcomes in terms of compliance, well-being and cost-efficiency. We would be keen to support this work.

Our position remains, however, that the physical and mental damage caused by immigration detention, and its lasting impact on individuals’ relationship with the state, means that it should be abolished. As a first step towards this, we would ask that legislation introduce a detention time limit of 28 days, with no re-detaining.

We note that you have asked for a review of international evidence on how time limits work in other countries. We consider that any such evidence is secondary to the compelling moral case for reform: every day this is delayed is another day that people experience needless suffering.

We therefore ask that the review be concluded quickly, and that its findings be considered alongside the existing, robust body of evidence on the appalling impact of indefinite detention as experienced by people in the UK. A clear timetable should be set for the review to report, with the expectation that the necessary legislation to implement a time limit will be brought forward in the forthcoming immigration bill.

Detention of vulnerable people

We are extremely concerned that the Home Office’s Adults at Risk policy, intended to stop the detention of vulnerable people – including pregnant women and those who are victims of torture – has not been effectively implemented.

We are aware of multiple cases where evidence of vulnerability has been dismissed by Home Office decision makers, who incorrectly apply standards of proof. The result is that vulnerable people continue to be routinely detained. Victims of torture have even been released from detention under Rule 35 only to be re-detained, a practice which defies logic.

We welcome your announcement that you will examine how to improve the consideration of Rule 35 reports in possible cases of torture. We ask that you ensure this examination is undertaken in close consultation with civil society organisations supporting torture survivors. It will be essential that any reforms do not have the effect of further raising the standard of proof to the detriment of survivors.

20,000 people have been put on suicide watch in detention since 2007, while attempts to commit suicide are made at a rate of more than one a day. There can be no justification for continuing an approach which results in such human misery.

Standard of proof

As the Windrush scandal has shown, the “hostile environment” has resulted in a situation where it can be nearly impossible for people to prove the truth of their position. This applies as much to asylum seekers asked to prove aspects of their experience which are inherently difficult to evidence – that they have been victims of torture, or that they hold a religious belief which would leave them at risk of persecution in their country of origin – as it has done to the Windrush generation.

We welcome the work underway to improve training for immigration officers in relation to those fleeing persecution on account of their religion or belief. We will want to see this rolled out quickly, with robust evaluation of its impact.

There remains much more to do. A number of us wrote to you recently to express our alarm on the broader impact of the hostile environment. The Windrush lessons learned review is a valuable opportunity to examine the way the standard of proof is applied in Home Office decision-making in relation to both immigration and asylum. Only by doing so will we ensure that, as you [Sajid Javid] said, the experience of the Windrush generation “never happens again to any group of people”.