

## New report calls for a halt to video-link bail hearings for immigration detainees

Two of the leading agencies working with detained asylum seekers and migrants today call on the Home Office to suspend the roll-out of video-link hearings for detainees applying for bail from immigration removal centres.

People who are detained under Immigration Act powers, including asylum seekers, are locked up without time limit and without an automatic independent review of their detention. The right to apply for bail is a vital safeguard against prolonged and unnecessary detention; it is therefore essential the process is fair and accurate.

Evidence contained in a joint report by Bail for Immigration Detainees and the Refugee Council shows that this is not the case. A high number of people apply for bail without legal representation, there is failure to comply with rules about how quickly bail hearings must be listed, and frequent delays in the Home Office producing their case for why detention should be maintained.

The report also highlights how the current plan to hear all bail hearings by video link, rather than taking people to court, is making it harder for detainees to access a fair hearing in court.

One of the detainees interviewed for the report said:

“The judge would not answer me, or listen to anything I said. She did not treat me like a human being. I think in a proper court it is not so easy to ignore the person who is front of you and I might have been able to make my case.”

The two organisations have called for a halt to the roll out of video-link hearings until detainees are consulted about their impact, informed about the process and given a meaningful choice between a video link and an in-court hearing.

Donna Covey, Chief Executive at the Refugee Council said:

“It is clear from this survey that the bail system is not set up to make sure people get a fair hearing. Over half the detainees had no legal representation, and none were offered a choice of whether they wanted to go to court. Yet the majority of people surveyed for this report said they would have preferred to be in the court room when their case was being decided. These issues must be addressed so that bail processes are fair.”

Celia Clarke, Director of Bail for Immigration Detainees said:

“Locking people up without charge is unfair. The ability to apply for bail is an essential safeguard. It would appear that the introduction of video link hearings is mainly for the government’s convenience. We know some people want to have their hearing by video link, but they must have the choice - the government should suspend video-link hearings until they can get the process right for people in detention.”

### Notes for editors

1. For copies of the report and further information please contact Hannah Ward at the Refugee Council on 020 7346 1213 or [hannah.ward@refugeecouncil.org.uk](mailto:hannah.ward@refugeecouncil.org.uk), or Amanda Shah at BID on 07962 460 956 or [amanda@biduk.org](mailto:amanda@biduk.org) The report can also be accessed via the Refugee Council’s website [www.refugeecouncil.org.uk](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk) or the website for BID [www.biduk.org](http://www.biduk.org). - Ends-