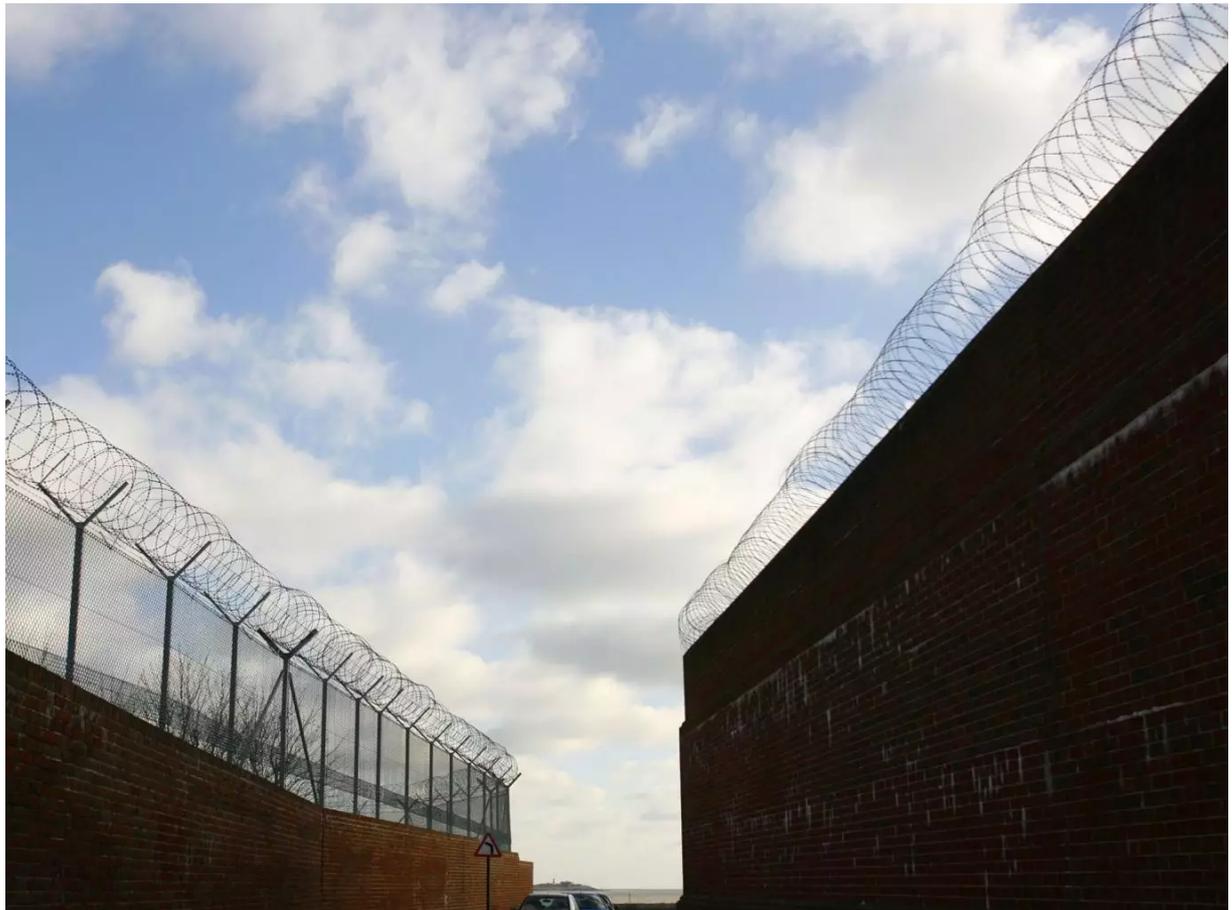


News › UK › Home News

More than £500m spent on UK immigration detention over four years

Exclusive: Soaring costs lead to renewed calls for statutory time limit on holding migrants

May Bulman Social Affairs | @maybulman | 14 hours ago |  51 comments



The figures, revealed in response to a written question by the Liberal Democrats, have led to renewed criticism of Britain for being the only EU country without a statutory time limit for the detention of immigrants *PA Wire/PA Images*

More than half a billion pounds has been spent on **immigration detention** in four years, figures show, prompting renewed calls for a limit on length of time immigrants can be held in removal centres.

The Government shelled out £523.5 million on detaining people for immigration reasons between April 2013 and March 2017, with an additional £16.2 million spent on damages awarded to immigrants who were detained unlawfully in the same period.

The figures, revealed in response to a written question by the Liberal Democrats, have led to renewed criticism of Britain for being the only EU country without a statutory time limit for the detention of immigrants, with Tory MPs and lawyers now calling on ministers to impose a strict 28-day limit.

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May faces Tory revolt over the indefinite detention of immigrants

I'm an MP, and I visited an immigration detention centre undercover

Asylum seeker describes alleged abuse at G4S detention centre

Immigration detention is the practice of holding people who are subject to immigration control while they wait for permission to enter or before they are deported or removed from the country. It is an administrative process, not a criminal procedure, and is the decision of an immigration official, not a court or a judge.

The practice has been blamed for inflicting mental breakdowns on people charged with no crime and given no release date, with last year seeing six people die in detention – the highest annual count on record. **Survivors of torture, trafficking and rape** are among the tens of thousands held in overcrowded centres.

In the year ending September 2017, 27,565 people entered detention in the UK. Of those who left detention in the year ending June 2017, more than a quarter (28 per cent) were there for between 29 days and four months and 1,943 were detained for more more than four months – of whom 172 had been in detention for between one and two years.

Twenty-eight were held for two years or longer. As of 30 June 2017, the longest length of time a person had been detained for was 1,514 days.

A significant number of immigration detainees are wrongly detained, with £21 million paid out over the past five years in damages awarded for unlawful detentions, as revealed last month in response to a written question by Tory MP Andrew Mitchell.

Politicians, lawyers and campaigners are now urging the Government to impose a strict 28-day limit on immigration detention, with an **upcoming**

immigration bill offering a fresh opportunity for MPs to do so.

Mr Mitchell, who is preparing to vote against indefinite detention, told *The Independent*: “Huge amounts of money are being spent to rectify mistakes and misjudgements. In such circumstances we have to question whether there are serious policy issues here which need to be addressed.



May faces Tory revolt over the indefinite detention of immigrants

“Just as Parliament quite rightly rejected the suggestion that we might hold people without charge for 90 days, so we need to consider seriously the human rights of those we detain in this way and how long a civil society should tolerate that detention.”

Liberal Democrats’ home affairs spokesperson Ed Davey, who will be putting forward amendments to the Immigration Bill to introduce a time-limit, said: “It is completely unacceptable that we are spending these eye-watering amounts on locking up people, many of whom have done no wrong and are later released back into their community.

“It is time that the Government let go of this ideological attachment they have to detention and start seriously looking at cheaper alternatives. As a first step they should introduce a 28-day time-limit on immigration detention and ensure that detaining people is used as a last, not first resort.

“Liberal Democrats have long argued that the UK’s system of detention is inhumane and a stain on our country’s reputation, we can now add a huge

waste of taxpayers money to that list.”

Shadow Home Secretary Dianne Abbot said: “Immigration detention is a highly unusual system, and when introduced it we were assured it would be for a matter of weeks only. Yet we now have people being kept for years. Children are still being detained.

“We spend enormous sums on detention, yet most detainees have a right to be here and are given leave to stay. We need a much better, more efficient system. The current chaos is unfair to everyone, both those who are allowed to stay and those deported.”

Toufique Hossain, director of public law at Duncan Lewis Solicitors, who has represented thousands of people who were unlawfully detained, told *The Independent*: “We have represented thousands of clients who have been detained unnecessarily. These men and women, who pose no threat to society, are often released after months or even years in detention.

“This is all funded through the public purse. Having been unlawfully detained, our clients are then eligible for thousands of pounds in compensation. The financial cost to the tax payer is unjustifiable, and the human cost is fathomless.

“Whether this wasteful state of affairs is the result of incompetence or indifference, the Home Office should be held to account.”



Home Office ignores medical advice to keep mentally ill detained

It **emerged last year** that hundreds of immigrants with mental health conditions had been held in detention centres against the advice of medical practitioners, in a breach of Government policy introduced in 2016 to ensure vulnerable people are not detained inappropriately.

The Royal College of psychiatrists has previously reported in a position statement it is unsurprising the prevalence of mental illness is high in immigration detainees, who are “likely to have experienced stressful life events that probably acted as a predisposing factor to their mental illness”.

Emma Ginn, of Medical Justice, a charity that offers medical help to detainees, described immigration detention as an “unnecessary, unjust, harmful, ineffective and a black mark on our society”, adding: “It is estimated that keeping someone in detention is four to five times as expensive as supporting them in the community.

“The fact that detention has become such common practice does not mean it is necessary. There is incontrovertible evidence that it is damaging to mental health, has led to repeated findings of ‘inhuman and degrading treatment’ and inadequate care in detention has contributed to deaths.

“There has been a significant increase in deaths and 2017 alone saw the death of 10 immigration detainees, the deadliest year on record. Medical Justice and others have been alerting the Home Office for over a decade about repeated systemic failures in immigration detention and warned that these will lead to further deaths unless they are addressed.”

Jerome Phelps, director of charity Detention Action, said the figures showed immigration detention was a “bad idea for the taxpayer, as well as for migrants and their families”, adding: “Vast sums are being entirely wasted, since more than half of migrants in detention are released, not deported.

“The Home Office must urgently make a dramatic reduction in the use of detention, introduce a time limit and commit to using community-based alternatives.”

A Home Office spokesperson said: “Detention and removal are essential parts of effective immigration controls, especially in support for the removal of those with no lawful basis to stay in the UK.

“Most people detained under the Immigration Act powers spend only very short periods in detention and factors that can lead to prolonged detention

include a history of absconding, non-compliance with immigration processes and a prolific offending history.

"Statistics for 2016 show that 93 per cent are detained for four months or less, and nearly two-thirds are detained for less than a month. There is always a presumption in favour of liberty, and published Home Office policy requires that detention is only used sparingly and for the shortest period necessary."

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