



Home Office

Adults at risk in immigration detention

Version v2.0

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About this guidance

This guidance tells you what to do to assess if a person, who is being considered for immigration detention, is an 'adult at risk' in the terms of this policy.

Contacts

If you have any questions about the guidance and your line manager or senior caseworker cannot help you or you think that the guidance has factual errors then email Detention Policy.

If you notice any formatting errors in this guidance (broken links, spelling mistakes and so on) or have any comments about the layout or navigability of the guidance then you can email the Guidance Rules and Forms team.

Clearance and publication

Below is information on when this version of the guidance was cleared:

- version **2.0**
- published for Home Office staff on **6 December 2016**

Changes from last version of this guidance

Reversion to the definition of torture given in the case of 'EO and others'.

Related content

[Contents](#)

Related external links

Adults at risk in immigration detention

The information in this guidance applies to all cases in which consideration is being given to detaining an individual in order to remove them. It also applies to cases of individuals who are already in detention, though there are some differences in the way in which these cases are managed.

There is an underpinning presumption in immigration policy that a person will not be detained. However, detention may still be appropriate at the point at which immigration control considerations outweigh the presumption of release, even for a person considered to be at risk.

In all cases in which an individual is being considered for immigration detention in order to facilitate their removal an assessment must be made of whether the individual is an 'adult at risk' in the terms of this policy and, if so, the level of risk (based on the available evidence) into which they fall. If the individual is considered to be at risk, a further assessment will be made of whether the immigration considerations outweigh any risk identified. Only when they do will the individual be detained.

An assessment of known risk factors must be made:

- as part of operational planning
- on encountering individuals during enforcement operations
- when consideration is being given to whether or not to detain

Assessment: general principles

The decision making process a decision maker should apply is:

- does the individual have need to be detained in order to effect removal?
 - if the answer is no, they should not be detained
 - if the answer is yes, how long is the detention likely to last?
- if the individual is identified as an adult at risk, what is the likely risk of harm to them if detained for the period identified as necessary to effect removal given the level of evidence available in support of them being at risk?

If the evidence suggests that the length of detention is likely to have a deleterious effect on the individual, they should not be detained unless there are public interest concerns which outweigh any risk identified. For this purpose, the public interest in the deportation of foreign national offenders (FNOs) will generally outweigh a risk of harm to the detainee. However what may be a reasonable period for detention will likely be shortened where there is evidence that detention will cause a risk of serious harm. Where the detainee is not an FNO, detention for a period that is likely to cause serious harm will not usually be justified.

An individual will be regarded as being an adult at risk if:

- they declare that they are suffering from a condition, or have experienced a traumatic event (such as trafficking, torture or sexual violence), that would be

likely to render them particularly vulnerable to harm if they are placed in detention or remain in detention

- those considering or reviewing detention are aware of medical or other professional evidence which indicates that an individual is suffering from a condition, or has experienced a traumatic event (such as trafficking, torture or sexual violence), that would be likely to render them particularly vulnerable to harm if they are placed in detention or remain in detention – whether or not the individual has highlighted this themselves
- observations from members of staff lead to a belief that the individual is at risk, in the absence of a self-declaration or other evidence

The nature and severity of a condition, as well as the available evidence of a condition or traumatic event, can change over time. Therefore decision makers should use the most up-to-date information each time a decision is made about continuing detention.

If the SSHD is satisfied that an individual needs to be detained in order to effect removal, the following considerations will apply.

Indicators of risk

Indicators of whether an individual may be particularly vulnerable to harm and therefore at risk include the conditions or experiences (referred to as risk factors) set out below.

Pregnant women

There are particular restrictions on the detention of pregnant women for the purpose of removal – please see Detention of Pregnant Women. In all cases where a pregnant woman is being detained for removal, the fact of her pregnancy will automatically be regarded as amounting to level 3 evidence (see [evidence levels](#)) for the purpose of this policy and the pregnancy will therefore be afforded significant weight when assessing the risk of harm in detention. The instruction on detention of pregnant women for the purpose of removal provides guidance on establishing or accepting a claimed pregnancy, which would be applicable in all cases.

Serious physical disability

The detention setting may not be able to cater for the needs of certain individuals with physical disabilities for anything other than short periods of detention, though this will depend upon the nature and seriousness of the disability. Immigration removal centres do not provide in-patient facilities and can provide primary healthcare only.

Serious health conditions or illnesses

As with physical disabilities, the detention setting may not be able to cater for the needs of certain individuals with physical health conditions for anything other than short periods of detention, though this will depend upon the nature and seriousness of the condition.

See also: [Rule 35- Special illnesses and conditions](#)

Age

For the purposes of this policy an individual aged 70 or over should be (regardless of any other considerations) regarded as being at risk and the fact of their age alone, will automatically be regarded as amounting to, at least, level 2 evidence (see [evidence levels](#)). In the cases of documented individuals, their age will be apparent from the documentation. When the individual is undocumented, however, and there is no definitive information available that indicates their age, a judgment may need to be made on the basis of a visual assessment.

In cases in which an undocumented individual claims to be aged 70 or over, but in which there is no documentary confirmation, the following process should be followed:

- the decision maker (or an officer acting on their behalf) should carry out a visual assessment of the individual
- on the basis of this visual assessment, if the individual is clearly, or is in all probability, aged 70 or over, they should be treated accordingly for the purposes of this policy
- if there is doubt about whether the individual is in fact aged 70 or over:
 - all existing documentation should be double-checked to ensure that there is no information which indicates the individual's age
 - the individual should be asked whether they have any additional information
 - the decision maker should reach a view on whether or not the individual is 70 or over
 - if the view is taken that the individual is likely to be under 70, and that the individual is to be detained (or their detention continued) , this assessment of age must be corroborated by the decision maker's line manager, who should be of at least the grade of HEO

Mental health conditions

An individual may be suffering from a mental health condition or impairment (this includes psychiatric illness, or clinical depression, post traumatic stress disorder and more serious learning difficulties depending on the nature and severity of the condition). Such conditions may inhibit their ability to cope within a detention environment and should be factored into any consideration of detention and, indeed, into consideration of their general management through the immigration process.

Consideration should be given, on the basis of the available information, to whether the condition or impairment can be managed within detention through medication or through other interventions. Even if a condition or impairment can be managed in detention, an individual must still be treated as being at risk as defined by this policy, and the presumption will be that detention is not appropriate.

There may also be specific experiences to which the individual has (or claims to have) been subject, or which indicate that they may suffer particular harm or detriment if detained, because those experiences may have affected the individual's mental state. Indicators can include:

- having been a victim of torture (as established in the case of [Regina \(EO and others\) v Secretary of State for the Home Department \[2013\] EWHC 1236 \(Admin\)](#): 'any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind') - this may emerge from a [Rule 35 report](#) or from a medico legal report supplied by Freedom from Torture or The Helen Bamber Foundation
- having been a victim of sexual or gender based violence; including female genital mutilation
- having been a [victim of human trafficking or modern slavery](#)

Transsexual and intersex people

An individual who has transitioned, or is transitioning, from one gender to the other may be at particular risk of abuse and mistreatment from other detainees. The same could apply to a person who is intersex.

Potential victims of trafficking / modern slavery

Any decision made on the immigration detention of an individual who has received a positive reasonable grounds decision under the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), and who has not yet received their conclusive grounds decision or otherwise left the NRM, will be made on the basis of the modern slavery policy set out in separate guidance.

For full guidance relating to victims of modern slavery and the responsibilities of competent authorities see: Victims of modern slavery – guidance for frontline staff.

Other conditions

Caseworkers should note that there may be other, unforeseen, conditions that may render an individual particularly vulnerable to harm if they are placed in detention or remain in detention. In addition, the nature and severity of a condition or traumatic event can change over time.

Assessing risk: weighing the evidence

Evidence levels

Once an individual has been identified as being at risk, by virtue of them exhibiting an [indicator of risk](#), consideration should be given to the level of evidence available in support, and the weight that should be afforded to the evidence, in order to assess the likely risk of harm to the individual if detained for the period identified as necessary to effect their removal:

Level 1

A self-declaration of being an adult at risk - should be afforded limited weight, even if the issues raised cannot be readily confirmed.

Level 2

Professional evidence (for example from a social worker, medical practitioner or NGO), or official documentary evidence, which indicates that the individual is (or may be) an adult at risk - should be afforded greater weight. Such evidence should normally be accepted and consideration given as to how this may be impacted by detention. Representations from the individual's legal representative acting on their behalf in their immigration matter would not be regarded as professional evidence in this context.

Level 3

Professional evidence (for example from a social worker, medical practitioner or NGO) stating that the individual is at risk and that a period of detention would be likely to cause harm – for example, increase the severity of the symptoms or condition that have led to the individual being regarded as an adult at risk, should be afforded significant weight. Such evidence should normally be accepted and any detention justified in light of the accepted evidence. Representations from the individual's legal representative acting on their behalf in their immigration matter would not be regarded as professional evidence in this context.

When considering the likely risk of harm for the period identified, caseworkers are entitled not to place decisive weight on assertions that are unsupported by medical evidence. Given the difficulty involved in validating cases in which the only evidence available is the self-declaration of the individual concerned, the distinction between such cases and those who are not considered to be at risk may not be great. However, the expectation, where the weight of the evidence is at level 1, is that this will act as a flag to all those involved in managing the case, and that particular attention will be paid to pursuing voluntary return options and progressing the case. The flag should also act as an alarm should additional risk issues emerge as the case progresses, particularly if the person is already detained or, if not, following their detention.

However, caseworkers should not usually disagree with medical evidence unless there are very strong reasons for doing so - for example, a finding by an independent tribunal that rejects the same evidence or credibility concerns arising from other sources. Such matters may be taken into account in deciding the weight that should be afforded to evidence and could result in a reconsideration of the weight of the evidence.

Caseworkers should note that evidence that immigration detention for an undefined period would cause harm does not demonstrate that immigration detention for a very short period will cause harm. It will be a rare case where detention for a very short period will cause serious harm to an individual and medico-legal evidence specifying that detention, even for a very short period, will cause serious harm will generally be required before a risk of such harm is accepted.

Assessment of immigration factors

In all cases in which the detention of an individual is being considered, the decision maker deciding on detention should first assess whether there is a realistic prospect of removal within a reasonable timescale. If there is not, the individual should not be detained. In cases in which there is such a prospect, and in which the individual is

determined to be at risk in the terms of this policy, the decision maker should carry out an assessment of the balance between the risk factors and the immigration factors. This should involve a weighing of the evidence-based level of risk to the individual against:

- how quickly removal is likely to be effected
- the compliance history of the individual
- any public protection concerns

An individual should be detained only if the immigration factors outweigh the risk factors such as to displace the presumption that individuals at risk should not be detained. This will be a highly case specific consideration taking account of all immigration factors. In each case, however, there must primarily be a careful assessment of the likely length of detention necessary and this should be considered against the likely impact on the health of the individual if detained for the period identified given the evidence available of the risk to the individual.

In deciding whether to detain, the likely risk of harm (as assessed in accordance with the risk factors identified and the evidential weight that has been afforded to them), must be weighed against any immigration control factors, set out below:

Length of time in detention

In all cases, every effort should be made to ensure that the length of time for which an individual is detained is as short as possible. In any given case, it should be possible to estimate the likely duration of detention required to effect removal. This will assist in determining the risk of harm to the individual. In balancing risk issues against the prospect of removal, the basic principle is: the higher the level of risk to the individual (on the basis of the available evidence), the shorter the length of detention that should be maintained. In each case there should be a careful assessment of the likely length of detention and this should be considered against the likely impact on the health of the individual given the evidence available. Individuals who arrive at the border with no right to enter the UK are likely to be detainable notwithstanding the other elements of this policy, on the basis that such individuals are likely to be detained for only a short period of time before being removed.

Public protection issues

Consideration will be given to whether the individual raises public protection concerns. The following issues should be taken into account in assessing the level of public protection concern represented by the individual:

- is the individual a foreign national offender (FNO)?
- if so, how serious was the offence / offences?
- is there available police or National Offender Management Service (NOMS) evidence on the level of public protection concern?
- is the person being deported on national security grounds?
- has a decision otherwise been made to deport (or remove through administrative means) the individual on the basis that their presence in the UK is not conducive to the public good?

Compliance issues

An assessment must be made, based on the previous compliance record of the individual concerned, of whether that individual is likely to leave the UK voluntarily or whether the individual is likely to be removable only if they are detained for that purpose (in line with the principles set out in [Assessment: general principles](#)).

All reasonable and proportionate voluntary return options should be pursued before consideration is given to detaining at risk individuals. Where there are reasonable grounds to believe that the individual would not return without the use of detention to support enforced removal (for example, they have previously been offered the chance to pursue a voluntary return and not taken it up or complied with the process, or, they have been living and working illegally in the UK for some time, or they have made attempts to frustrate their return), this should be regarded as a matter of non-compliance.

By definition, all individuals who, for example, enter the UK illegally or who stay in the UK beyond the date of expiry of their leave, will have been non-compliant with immigration law. However, some acts of non-compliance are more significant than others, and the level of non-compliance should be regarded as indicative of the appropriateness of detention for the purpose of removal.

Positive indicators of compliance will include:

- having fully complied with conditions of leave or any restrictions attached to temporary admission, immigration bail or release on restrictions
- having been compliant with attempts to effect voluntary return
- having made any immigration applications at the earliest opportunity

Negative indicators of compliance will include:

- having previously absconded
- having failed to comply with conditions of stay, including having failed to comply with conditions of temporary admission, immigration bail or release on restrictions
- having failed to comply with attempts to effect voluntary return
- having made a protection or human rights claim only after having been served with a negative immigration decision unless there is good reason for them to have delayed the claim
- having been in the UK illegally for a protracted period of time without having come into contact with the authorities
- having engaged in 'nationality swapping'
- having failed to comply with re-documentation processes

The level of non-compliance will be considered against the level of risk and alongside any other relevant immigration factors.

Balancing risk factors against immigration control factors

Consideration of the risk and immigration issues set out above should result in a determination of whether the risk factors are outweighed by the immigration factors. An individual should be detained only if the immigration factors outweigh the risk factors such as to displace the presumption that individuals at risk should not be detained. The guidance below is designed to assist decision makers in weighing the evidence.

Evidence assessment

As in any case of potential detention, in order to detain there must be a realistic prospect of removal within a reasonable period. In cases of adults at risk in which this condition is met, the following is a guide to balancing any identified risk issues relating to the individual concerned against the immigration considerations. In all cases, the primary consideration should be based on the length of time for which detention is expected to be required and the likely impact of the length of detention on the individual given the [evidence of risk](#).

Level 1

Where there is no independent evidence that a person is at risk as claimed, the individual will be suitable for consideration for detention one of the following applies:

- the date of removal can be forecast with some certainty and if this date is within a reasonable timescale given the logistics involved
- any public protection issues are identified – for example, someone whose presence in the UK is not conducive to the public good
- there are indicators of [non-compliance](#) with immigration law which suggest that the individual will not be removable unless detained

Level 2

Where there is professional and / or official documentary evidence indicating that an individual is an adult at risk but no indication that detention is likely to lead to a significant risk of harm to the individual if detained for the period identified as necessary to effect removal, they should be considered for detention only if one of the following applies:

- the date of removal is fixed, or can be fixed quickly, and is within a reasonable timescale and the individual has failed to comply with reasonable voluntary return opportunities, or if the individual is being detained at the border pending removal having been refused entry to the UK
- they present a level of public protection concerns that would justify detention – for example, if they meet the criteria of foreign criminal as defined in the [Immigration Act 2014](#) or there is a relevant national security or other public protection concern
- there are negative indicators of [non-compliance](#) which suggest that the individual is highly likely not to be removable unless detained

Less compelling evidence of non-compliance should be taken into account if there are also public protection issues. The combination of such non-compliance and public protection issues may justify detention in these cases.

Level 3

Where on the basis of professional and / or official documentary evidence, detention is likely to lead to a risk of significant harm to the individual if detained for the period identified as necessary to effect removal, they should be considered for detention only if one of the following applies:

- removal has been set for a date in the immediate future, there are no barriers to removal, and escorts and any other appropriate arrangements are (or will be) in place to ensure the safe management of the individual's return and the individual has not complied with voluntary or ensured return
- the individual presents a significant public protection concern, or if they have been subject to a 4 year plus custodial sentence, or there is a serious relevant national security issue or the individual presents a current public protection concern

It is very unlikely that compliance issues, on their own, would warrant detention of individuals falling into this category – though non-compliance should be taken into account if there are also public protection issues or if the individual can be removed quickly.

The above is intended as a guide rather than a prescriptive template for dealing with cases. Each case must be decided on its own merits, taking into account the full range of factors, on the basis of the available evidence.

Where professional evidence is not immediately available, but where observations from Home Office officials lead to a belief that the individual is at a higher level of risk than a simple self-declaration would suggest, an individual can be allocated to a higher risk category in the terms of this policy on the basis of that observational evidence.

In each case the length of likely detention will be a key factor in determining whether an individual should be detained.

As part of the determination of whether an individual should be detained, consideration must be given to whether there are alternative measures, such as residence or reporting restrictions, which could be taken to ensure an individual's compliance whilst removal is being planned or arranged and to reduce to the minimum any period of detention that may be necessary to support that removal – for example, by detaining much closer to the time of removal.

Detention of people at risk: voluntary return options

Voluntary return options will normally be pursued before consideration is given to detaining at risk individuals.

The level of assistance available to help individuals to return voluntarily will usually be concomitant with the level of risk attached to the individual – in other words, the higher the level of risk, the more assistance available. On that basis, where it is believed that the individual would not return without the use of detention to support

enforced removal, failure to engage with the returns process, even for those regarded as being at significant risk, on the basis of the available evidence, should be considered to be a non-compliance issue.

Individuals already detained may decide to pursue voluntary return options. If this occurs in the case of an individual who is regarded as being 'at risk' in the terms of this policy, the case should be reviewed and consideration given to whether the individual still needs to be detained in order to effect removal and, on the basis of this, whether the immigration considerations no longer outweigh the risk factors. If they do, then the individual should be released in advance of their return to their country of origin.

See also: Assisted voluntary returns

Border cases: adults at risk

Detention in port holding rooms at the border on immigration grounds is likely to remain appropriate, even if an individual is assessed as being at risk. This is because of the inherently short term nature of the detention in these circumstances. If there are significant and obvious indicators to suggest that the individual is at immediate risk, or that the detention of the individual is likely to be prolonged, the case should be reviewed and there should be an assessment of the appropriateness of continued detention, and the appropriate facility for continued detention, in line with the policy set out in this chapter.

Risk factors emerging after the point of detention

Ongoing assessment

Following the detention of any individual (including those regarded as being at risk) there should be an ongoing assessment of risk made by the case owner throughout the period of detention which will facilitate the identification of any emerging risk, or changes to known risk factors. Should any new risk factors emerge, or any existing risk factors change, there should be a formal review of the case, with a fresh consideration of the balance of risk factors against the immigration factors, as set out above. The emerging risk factors may shift the balance to the extent that the risk factors outweigh the immigration factors. In these circumstances, the individual should be released from detention on appropriate release conditions and their compliance monitored. Equally, a failure to remove within the expected timescale might also tip the balance to the extent that release becomes appropriate – though this is less likely if the individual's non-compliance has caused the failure to effect removal.

As part of the induction process into immigration removal centres (IRCs) and short term holding facilities all detainees should have a medical screening within 2 hours of their arrival and must be given an appointment with a GP within 24 hours of admission to an IRC. They will also have access to healthcare services throughout their stay in detention. Information resulting from medical interventions in detention will usually be made known to the Home Office only if it prompts a report under [Rule 35](#) of the Detention Centre Rules.

Home Office staff may, however, be made aware of an individual's medical condition (or claimed medical condition) through (in asylum claims) the asylum screening process in detention or (in both asylum and non-asylum cases) a detainee directly informing a member of Home Office or detention facility staff of it. In these cases, the information should be recorded as level 1 evidence, the appropriateness of detention should be reviewed in the light of the new information, and healthcare staff in the detention facility informed. Where appropriate, the individual should be advised to seek a medical opinion from the health services available in the detention facility in which they are housed.

If, once detained, new information comes to light which suggests that the individual presents an indicator of risk which is not necessarily medically-related (and which is therefore not brought to the attention of the Home Office by the medical services in the detention setting), such as: having been a victim of sexual or gender based violence, human trafficking or modern slavery; having a physical disabilities; or being transsexual, detention should be reviewed in the light of the new information. Should supporting evidence be available, consideration should be given to the weight that should be afforded to that evidence. Individuals self-declaring should be advised that they are at liberty to provide supporting information should it be available.

Rule 35 of the Detention Centre Rules – Special illnesses and conditions

Purpose of Rule 35

The purpose of Rule 35 is to ensure that particularly vulnerable detainees are brought to the attention of those with direct responsibility for authorising, maintaining and reviewing detention.

Rule 35 of the Detention Centre Rules 2001 sets out the requirement for doctors working in immigration removal centres to report on any detained person:

- whose health is likely to be injuriously affected by continued detention or any conditions of detention
- who is suspected of having suicidal intentions
- for whom there are concerns that they may have been a victim of torture

IRC doctors are required to report such cases to the IRC manager, using the prescribed forms appended to Detention Services Order 09/2016 – Detention centre Rule 35. These reports are then passed, via Home Office contact management teams in IRCs, to the office responsible for managing and / or reviewing the individual's detention.

The information contained in the report must then be considered by the case worker and a decision made on whether the individual's continued detention is appropriate, or whether they should be released from detention, in line with the adults at risk process set out above

Rule 35 report

On receipt of a Rule 35 report, the decision maker should review the report to ensure that it meets the required standards and, if the report does not meet the required standards, it should be returned to the medical practitioner with a request for the necessary information. In the meantime, unless an assessment can be made on the basis of the report as it stands, and unless the outcome of that assessment is that the individual should be released, detention should be maintained pending the receipt of a report to the required standard.

For the purpose of the adults at risk policy:

- a report under Rule 35(1) (a detained person whose health is likely to be injuriously affected by continued detention or any conditions of detention) will normally amount to level 3 evidence
- a report under Rule 35(2) (a person suspected by the doctor of having suicidal intentions) will not always necessitate a review of the appropriateness of detention but this will depend on the information provided by the doctor
- a report under Rule 35(3) (a detained person about whom the doctor has concerns that they may have been the victim of torture) will normally amount to at least level 2 evidence

On receipt of a Rule 35 report the caseworker concerned must review the appropriateness of the individual's continued detention in light of the information in the report (see Detention and temporary release) and respond to the centre, within 2 working days of receipt, using CID Doc Gen form IS.335.

It is possible that a detainee may independently make available to the Home Office information in respect of a Rule 35(1) assessment which falls short of the level of concern required for the doctor to submit a report to the Home Office but which, regardless, brings it within the scope of the adults at risk in detention policy. If so, it should be treated accordingly and the case reviewed.

See also: Detention Services Order 09/2016 – Detention centre Rule 35

CID recording requirements

Cases in which Adult at Risk status is identified prior to or at point of detention:

- case is referred to the detention gatekeeper using DG Pre Verification Proforma, DG Intake Proforma or where the Detention Minute Referring Officer adds a special condition flag 'Adult at Risk Evidence Level 1' 'Adult at Risk Evidence Level 2' or 'Adult at Risk Evidence Level 3' as appropriate, dated with the date on which they have accepted that the individual is an Adult at Risk under the policy (which may pre-date detention in pre verified cases)
- if Adult at Risk status is identified by the gatekeeper, they add the special condition as above
- the gatekeeper updates admin events on the current enforcement (or deport) case type as either 'Adult at Risk – Accepted into detention' or 'Adult at Risk – Rejected from detention' dependent on the outcome of the referral

Cases in which Adult at Risk status is identified once someone is already detained:

- caseowner becomes aware of risk factors and considers whether they mean that the individual is now an Adult at Risk under the policy
- if they are, caseowner adds special condition flag 'Adult at Risk Evidence Level 1' 'Adult at Risk Evidence Level 2' or 'Adult at Risk Evidence Level 3' as appropriate, dated with the date on which they have accepted that the individual is an Adult at Risk under the policy
- caseowner conducts ad hoc detention review
- caseowner updates admin events on the current enforcement (or deport) case type as either 'Adult at Risk – Identified in detention' (if detention is maintained) or 'Adult at Risk – Released from detention' (if the detainee is released)

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