

# Meldpunt Vreemdelingendetentie

0800-3388776 (gratis)

## Newsletter February 2020

### Meldpunt

#### Vreemdelingendetentie -

#### The Immigration Detention

#### Hotline

collects reports about the circumstances in immigration detention.

The aim is to gain more insights into the conditions of detention and to disclose this information to politics and the media. In addition, we offer assistance with the follow-up of complaints.

Do you have a complaint? Call **010-7470156**. From detention you can call toll-free at **0800-3388776**.

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### Topics

- Call for Arabic books
- Column: The story of mister K. (part 1)
- The Netherlands harshest asylum policy
- Article LOS foundation in newspaper the Trouw about forced return
- Meeting inspection Ministry of Justice and Safety
- Visiting irregular migrants in detention centre Rotterdam
- Research: less strict regime in detention
- Isolation and observation
- The Immigration Detention Hotline featured on the news
- Cold showers in detention centre Rotterdam
- Pilot court fees
- Report immigration detention National Ombudsman
- Complaint verdict lock down July 2019
- Tour in detention centre Rotterdam
- Tour in GGV Zeist
- Food dissatisfaction detention centre Rotterdam

## Call for Arabic books

The staff and detainees from the immigration detention centre in Rotterdam told us that there is a lack of Arabic books. This is unfortunate, because many detained migrants can only speak and read in Arabic. Therefore, we call for Arabic books to be donated to the detention centre. Also English books are welcomed. So, if any of our readers have English or Arabic books left over, they can contact us so we can donate the books to the detention centre.

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## Column: The story of mister K. (part 1)

*'My story' is part of a column that will be published in our newsletter from now on. Here, life stories of people in the detention centre will be exposed, written*

*and experienced by detainees themselves. 'My story' will be divided in two parts that you can read in every newsletter.*

#### **My story – part one Describing the pain**

Life in a dictatorship is a life that is lived in ignorance and Islamic superstition. It consists only of breathing, you cannot call it actually living. Like Fereydoonmashiri says (an Iranian poet): 'I pass through opaque hallways and by looking in the eyes of the blind passengers – that cause tremendous chaos in my mind and body – I am speechless.'

I was born on a sunny day in June, in the middle of the overwhelming nature and green Zagar mountains, in the province of Kurdistan. Because my date of birth is similar to that of a friend of my father, I was named after him. Because of this, I am conscious about my geographical place and origin in the world.

It was the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war. Until the end of the war (in the Islamic year 1403), I travelled from one safe place to another, whilst still living in a war zone. One night, we were sleeping with the sound of military weapons in the background. I was drowning in a dream of despair. War is a sad tragedy for the people from the Middle East. I have no memories left of my childhood years, except the sound of the dead and the moaning of mothers and their children.

In my mind, I am still playing board games that I played when I was six years old. Now I am thirty years old. Sometimes I desire to go back to that time. This is why I want to defend children as a child rights activist.

At the end of the war I was a teenager. I was seeking comfort in different ideas about Kurdish nationalism. In that time, I went to school and was not able to speak my mother language. It was forbidden for me to wear the clothes of my ancestors and they taught me about a religion that justifies war, in my opinion. This contradiction during my educating makes me question the way we youths were treated. My parents were summoned to school every day. They were told that I had crazy ideas and they were threatened for this. The truth is different. To be a Kurd, an Iranian, a civilian and a citizen of my village, those are my basic human rights. Besides that, it is a big part of my identity. I noticed a great difference between my identity and the Arab identity that I was forced to take over.

The first time I was suspended from school, this was the consequence of a protest of mine against the suspension of a Jewish student – and also a good friend of mine. Short after this, he and his family fled to Israel.

I started behaving poorly during the Islamic religion lessons. I was sent away from school together with two friends, who are also related to me. These two friends were sentenced to death later, by the government of Iran. After some bureaucratic hassle and signing multiple letters, I was sent to another school. Since then I attended the Arabic lessons, but only in favor of my parents and not because I feel involved.

When I was fifteen years old, I went to high school. During this time, I gained knowledge when I started reading about the rest of the world. I for example learned a lot about Latin America, India and the fall of the Berlin wall. I also read stories about heroic figures from Iranian literature: the farmers of my land Lila, Shirin and Farhad.

With this in mind, I started founding the Freedom Guard. Our goal is to overthrow the feared Islamic Republic of Iran. I started secretly keeping

forbidden books, to keep the history alive. These are books of Golesorkh, Kasraii and Behrangi and many other authors that no one is supposed to hear of. We replaced the books in small books, to create a new socialism: the final aim of the Freedom Guard.

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## **The Netherlands harshest asylum policy**

Research from the Investico research platform and newspaper the Trouw state that the Netherlands is one of the strictest countries in Europe in terms of admitting asylum seekers. An instrument that is used here is the list of 'safe countries'. The idea behind this list is that it's assumed that in these countries there is no systematic torture, prosecution or violation of human rights. However, this list is reasonably random and the verdict only states that a country is 'safe' without further details. When an asylum seeker comes from one of these 'safe countries', there is little chance of an approval of the asylum application.

Applicants from these countries are entitled to fewer rights than applicants who come from countries that are not on this list. They have to present more evidence about the reason they fled their country and they get only one hearing instead of the commonly used two hearings. This creates a lot of insecurity and inequality.<sup>[1]</sup>

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<sup>[1]</sup> <https://www.trouw.nl/binnenland/nederland-heeft-een-van-de-strengste-asielprocedures-van-europa~bf3b10d3f/>

## **Article LOS foundation in newspaper the Trouw about forced return**

In December 2019, Rian Ederveen, coordinator of the LOS foundation, wrote an article in the newspaper 'Trouw', about supervision of immigration detention and forced return of irregular migrants.<sup>[1]</sup> The article expresses multiple concerns. There is an increase of irregular migrants in immigration detention from 2180 detainees in 2015 to 3510 in 2018. This is concerning because immigration detention should only be used as a last resort.

Many irregular migrants are detained for more than six months, due to the slow process that contains the granting of laissez passers. This causes a lot of insecurity for the irregular migrants about how long they need to remain in immigration detention and whether they will be deported. Moreover, the complaints about poor access to medical care, illegitimate use of handcuffs and isolation remain. Rian Ederveen's statement that "stricter measures do not lead to more evictions, but to more broken lives" is definitely food for thought.

The Immigration Detention Hotline has worked to gain more insight in the circumstances during forced return.<sup>2</sup> Information was gathered over fifteen cases of (attempted) removal. The cases entailed complaints about the lack of proper medication, isolation, incomplete luggage, the refusal of access to a phone and the unnecessary use of handcuffs.

The conclusion of the inspection from the Ministry of Justice is that there is no need for further monitoring of the removal because in general the process went well. After a meeting between the inspection of the Ministry of Justice and

Stichting LOS/The Immigration Detention Hotline<sup>[2]</sup>, we hope this opinion has changed. We believe that it is very important to continuously monitor the forced returns of irregular migrants.

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[1] [https://www.trouw.nl/opinie/hou-scherp-toezicht-op-detentie-van-vreemdelingen-en-gedwongen-terugkeer~b854054f/?utm\\_campaign=shared\\_earned&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=copylink](https://www.trouw.nl/opinie/hou-scherp-toezicht-op-detentie-van-vreemdelingen-en-gedwongen-terugkeer~b854054f/?utm_campaign=shared_earned&utm_medium=social&utm_source=copylink)

[2] The report can be accessed through [this](#) link.

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## Meeting inspection Ministry of Justice and Safety

In August 2019, the inspection of the Ministry of Justice and Safety published a report that gives an overview of the forced returns in 2018 (Periodiek beeld Terugkeer 2018). This report contains an overview of findings about deportations of irregular migrants in the Netherlands to their country of origin. The general conclusion of the report is that the deportation process goes well most of the time. However, the inspection makes a recommendation that communication between different authorities involved in this process should be improved in order to make it more efficient. These authorities include, for instance, the DT&V en IND.

The Hotline was surprised by this positive conclusion. We ourselves also set up a study about deportations in 2018, where the following themes came up: isolation, luggage, medication, communication and coercive means.<sup>[1]</sup> Our conclusion consists of more critical views, in particular regarding the use of coercive means and availability of information to detainees prior to their deportation.

In January 2019, the Inspection of the Ministry of Justice and Security visited the office of the Hotline. Together with Stichting LOS, we discussed the problems concerning deportations. The inspection showed interest in our research and asked us to keep them updated about critical situations, so that this information can be taken into account in the next report. We also recommended the inspection to take a look at the complaints procedure. Our experience tells us that the complaint procedure is not really accessible once someone has been removed from the country. Besides that, different authorities often blame each other. Also in some cases, certain information is required which the removed individual does not have – and often cannot have – like the booking code of a flight.

We hope that, in the next report, the inspection will discuss a wider range of themes in a critical manner.

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[1] <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2019/11/25/tk-bijlage-2-periodiek-beeld-terugkeer-2018>

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## Visiting irregular migrants in detention centre Rotterdam

In January 2020, we visited many people in the detention centre in Rotterdam. During these visits, we try to listen to their stories. Mostly they want to get something off their chest or we are asked to file a complaint on their behalf. The

visits take place in a small consulting room in the detention centre.

During one of these visits, mister K. told us his life story. He told us that he is from a country where he is being prosecuted because he turned against the current government. He was sentenced to 35 years of prison and to death by hanging twice. Mister K. is passionate about his ideals and wants to share these with the world. For him, what is most important, is that everyone is treated equal. He likes to read and he also writes himself, mostly about his turbulent life. His dream is to eventually publish a book.

Another person, mister H., shared with us that it is currently chaotic in his unit in the detention centre. He tells us that some of the guards quit their jobs after the regime in the detention centre became more strict. Furthermore, it is often the case that products are out of stock, like sugar, which means that people sometimes have to wait for days before they have sugar to put in their coffee. The food they receive is not of good quality and sometimes even has mould on it. Mister H. says that many people become sick because of this. To cook your own meal is rather expensive; a bag of potatoes costs 3,80 Euros in the shop of the detention centre. There is not a lot of fruit available: usually only small 'rejected' apples. Besides that, there are many people suffering from toothache. Mister H. lost a tooth filling himself and the dentist told him that his tooth had to be removed. We often hear that removal of teeth is the only solution that is offered.

A young man has been detained in the detention centre in Rotterdam since September 2019. At his arrival in the Netherlands, he was directly held by the police and almost immediately put in immigration detention. He was not allowed to show the documents that have his date of birth written down. The police therefore gave him a fictional date of birth, one that says he is of age. However, the young man told us he is still a minor.

Mister F. is someone who has been held in immigration detention for several times. During a previous time in the detention centre, he was diagnosed with PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), after he experienced multiple traumatic events in the detention centre. After his release, he was under treatment with a psychologist where he received trauma therapy. Now that he is back in the detention centre, it is not possible to continue this treatment, because the detention centre does not offer this to detainees. According to Mister F., only medication is provided for him.

#### **Visit mister L.**

Since October 2019, we have been in contact with mister L. During several phone calls, he told us about his wellbeing and all the things he went through in his life and during his time in immigration detention. Currently, he is staying in unit B, the extra care unit, where he has a cell for himself. Before he was detained in immigration detention, he worked as a volunteer at the Salvation Army. His colleagues visit him twice a week, once during the week and once during the weekend. We also visited him and during this visit he told us the following. Mister L. was a police officer in Algeria. There were several armed groups that were against the government and everyone in support of the government. These fundamentalist groups fight against the police and the army. Mister. L. left and went to Spain and France. During 1995, when he was in France, there was an attack by the GIA (Armed Islamic Group of Algeria) in Paris. Mister. L. no longer felt safe and travelled to Germany, where he stayed for two months, before he came to the Netherlands. Here, he wanted to apply for asylum, but he did not have a passport. He ended up in immigration detention, where he was put together with other detained migrants who presumably also have a criminal record. When he spoke to them, he noticed

that these people were not afraid to be forced to leave the Netherlands. Mister L. told us that they had enough money because of their criminal activities. This felt very unjust for mister L. Time after time he was detained and treated like a criminal, only because he did not have the right documents.

In the beginning, mister L. was a bit skeptical about the Hotline. Not everyone wants to file complaints and he is unsure whether the complaint procedure is effective. The procedures are slow and people come and go. Sometimes detainees are already released or deported way before their complaint has reached a verdict. However, he values the fact that he can tell his story to the team from the Hotline and that they listen to him. Together we came to the conclusion that it is important that his story and the stories of others are told. With the cooperation of mister L. we decided to publish his story in our newsletter.

### **Visit mister A.**

Mister A. is staying in the detention centre in Rotterdam for three months now. He wrote a story about his experience.

“It is almost 21.45 hours and the door of my cell was just locked, like every other night. Nothing special is going on, we have a limited day program. Just waiting and counting down the days and weeks. It is the same for everyone inside here; the more days go by behind bars, the bigger the hope that you will be released. The next day the door opens around 07.00 o'clock in the morning and I am (like every other day) awake around 08.00 in the morning to drink my coffee with milk. Afterwards, I take a shower to reduce the stress. Due to my accident I don't sleep well. Sometimes only three or four hours a night because of the pain in my neck, head and shoulders. I hope to receive proper medical treatment after I will be released from the detention centre. Maybe the DT&V will visit me tomorrow, and no, DT&V does not stand for Digital Television (as I first thought), but for 'Dienst Terugkeer en Vertrek'. They are going to look for more information about me that can assist them to plan my deportation. They come by once a month. The last time they were here, they told me that I will stay here for a minimum of six months, because – according to them – I do not cooperate with my deportation. Today, I didn't feel like doing sports. The gym consists of two small halls that only consists of enough room for 24 people. Everyone – over 80 people - visits the gym at the same time. Sometimes you have to wait for an hour until there is a free spot. This also goes for other activities, like the Playstation or the pool table.

Life here is very sad and gloomy. The food mostly comes out of the freezer and there are not many vegetables and fruit available; just a small apple or orange a day, no fresh milk and the coffee is of the cheapest kind in the world. To be able to take a shower in the winter days, you have to do this before 09.30 in the morning or after 22.00 in the evening. Otherwise you will only have cold water. To me, my time in the detention centre feels like torture. Here in 2020, in Europe but also in the Netherlands, the situation is the same everywhere. People in the detention centre are suffering from a lot of stress and depression, because of the prison-like regime. People can be detained here for up to eighteen months, only because they don't have the right documents.”

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## **Research: less strict regime in detention**

Recent research from Tilburg University shows that aggression amongst

prisoners greatly decreases if the regime within the prison walls is less strict and has more liberties and privileges. The detainees in the study were allowed to order groceries and prepare food themselves. They received a telephone in the cell and their own key to enter and leave their cell during the day. The visitors' rooms were laid out in a more pleasant way by creating seating areas where direct contact with the visitors was made possible. Giving these extra freedoms and responsibility resulted in 60 percent less aggressive behaviour amongst the prisoners.[1]

When prisoners are given fewer freedoms and privileges, the chance of aggressive behaviour seems to increase. Exploratory neuropsychological research shows that a boring environment, such as a cell, can cause an increase in impulsivity and sleep problems, and a decrease in self-control. All three are risk factors for aggressive behaviour.[2] Professor of clinical neuropsychology Erik Scherder argues that dullness is very harmful to the brain. Animal studies show that if you put a rat alone in a cage, the brain will deteriorate. If you put the rat in a cage with others and toys, the brain capacity actually improves.[3]

Prisoners should therefore not stay in a bare cell with few liberties and privileges, because that makes them less suitable to return to society after detention.[4] Moreover, immigration detention is in some respect even worse than the regime for criminal prisoners. For example, it is standard procedure that irregular migrants in the Netherlands are detained with two people in a cell, they are not allowed to work and they cannot receive any education. This can cause boredom which is apparently harmful to the brain.

In light of these new findings, the proposed law 'Return and immigration detention' (in Dutch: wetsvoorstel Terugkeer en Vreemdelingenbewaring) continues the wrong path. This law was promised to become less strict and more humane. While the new law proposes that the detainees can spend fewer hours outside their cell, it does not change anything about the little activities that are offered. The Immigration Detention Hotline receives many phone calls about the lack of activities, the crowded kitchens and fitness areas. In addition, the new law maintains the same security measures and punishments. Irregular migrants are still not entitled to work or education. Finally, the new law does not focus enough on alternatives for immigration detention.[5]

We fear that the new law will not improve the position of detained irregular migrants. This is disappointing, as the previous mentioned research shows that a less strict regime results in positive behaviour among detainees.

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[1] Postmus, S. (8 januari 2020). Minder agressie in gevangenis door soepeler regime. *Nos Nieuws*. Obtained through: [https://nos.nl/artikel/2317729-minder-agressie-in-gevangenis-door-soepelerregime.html?fbclid=IwAR3dBB4lvzEFhV75gAKI\\_iqMJghUDqTpBsdX4N9XRKLryHCW1HbN6ikiO4k](https://nos.nl/artikel/2317729-minder-agressie-in-gevangenis-door-soepelerregime.html?fbclid=IwAR3dBB4lvzEFhV75gAKI_iqMJghUDqTpBsdX4N9XRKLryHCW1HbN6ikiO4k); Tilburg University (2020). Meer autonomie en contact met de buitenwereld maakt gedetineerden minder agressief. Obtained through: <https://www.tilburguniversity.edu/nl/actueel/persberichten/meer-autonomie-en-contact-met-de-buitenwereld-maakt-gedetineerden-minder-agressief>

[2] Meijers, J. (2018). Do not restrain the prisoner's brain: Executive functions, self-regulation and the impoverished prison environment. Obtained through: <https://research.vu.nl/en/publications/do-not-restrain-the-prisoners-brain-executive-functions-self-regu>; Waterval, D. (28 april 2018) Mag het iets minder saai in de cel? Dat is beter voor iedereen. *Trouw*. Obtained through: <https://www.trouw.nl/nieuws/mag-het-iets-minder-saai-in-de-cel-dat-is-beter-voor-iedereen~b39579c9/>

[3] Veldhuizen, T. (23 maart 2019). Hersenprofessor Erik Scherder: 'het brein verarmt in de gevangenis'. *Nporadio 1*. Obtained through: <https://www.nporadio1.nl/achtergrond/15463-hersenprofessor-erik-scherder-het-brein-verarmt-in-de-gevangenis>

[4] Waterval, D. (28 april 2018) Mag het iets minder saai in de cel? Dat is beter voor iedereen. *Trouw*. Obtained through: <https://www.trouw.nl/nieuws/mag-het-iets-minder-saai-in-de-cel-dat-is-beter-voor-iedereen~b39579c9/>

[5] Idem.

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## Isolation and observation

The team of the Immigration Detention Hotline regularly files complaints regarding the use of isolation cells with camera observation. The stay in an isolation cell is not beneficial for the mental health of detainees. Moreover, the use of camera observation 24 hours a day can be in violation of the right to privacy. Isolation means being locked up in a cell for 23 hours a day. The hour that is left can be used to go outside. Usually, 'outside' means a small outdoor penn with high walls.

The complaint procedure regarding the use of camera observation is difficult. After all, it is not possible for the isolated individual to see whether the camera is turned on or not. Furthermore, it is not registered if the camera is turned off; only vice versa. This makes it especially hard to prove whether or not there was camera observation during the detainees' time in isolation.

At the end of January 2020, the Hotline had the chance to take a look at the isolation cells during a guided tour in the detention centre. We noticed that this unit had sixteen separation cells, all equipped with a camera. There are two different kind of separation cells: a fully stripped cell without a shower and a stripped cell with a chair and a digital 'activities screen', also without a shower. It is not possible to watch television on the screen, it has only a clock, a radio and a few games. Unfortunately there is only one of the sixteen isolation cells has this 'activities screen'.

There are two outdoor pens at this unit, which have four high thick walls. Recently, the detention centre decided to place a chair in the outdoor pen, so detainees do not have to stand for a full hour. There is one outdoor pen that has a standing punching bag. Whenever someone wants to use this, they can receive a pair of boxing gloves from the personell.

In 2019, the Immigration Detention Hotline filed complaints 34 times for detainees who were placed in an observation cell, and many more times for detainees who were isolated in a 'regular' cell. Often it is claimed during the complaint hearings that the cameras were not turned on. However, as detainees cannot tell whether the camera is turned off or on, they always feel watched. We propose that it becomes visually clear whether the camera is turned on, for instance through a small light. This can give the isolated individuals some reassurance. Furthermore, we recommend that the detention centre also starts registering if the camera is switched off. This will make the complaint hearings and discussions clearer and more efficient.

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**The Immigration Detention Hotline featured on the news**

The Dutch news channel NOS contacted the Immigration Detention Hotline in response to the contact between the Dutch Secretary of State and the Moroccan ambassador, concerning forced returns to Morocco. In December 2019, the NOS published a short item on the news in which an employee of the Hotline talked about this slow and difficult about this procedure. The experience of the Hotline is that detainees of Moroccan origin are detained in immigration detention for a long period of time and that their situation is often unclear and insecure.

The Hotline asked Ibrahim if he wanted to do an interview for this item. Ibrahim was born in Morocco but is a resident of the Netherlands since he is nine years old. He went to school here, but is nonetheless undocumented and thus continuously at risk of being deported. This means that Ibrahim is also at risk of being detained in immigration detention, over and over again. We are proud of Ibrahim and are happy that he was able to share his experiences and side of the story with the Dutch society and make it more understandable. This is important, as many people in the Netherlands suffer the same consequences.



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### **Cold showers in detention centre Rotterdam**

In January we have received several phone calls from detainees in the immigration detention centre in Rotterdam who told us that the water from the showers was cold. Mister D. told us during a visit that his unit was only open for four hours. Due to this, everyone took a shower at the same time which caused the water to be very cold. Mister H., who is in another unit, also called us because of this problem. We heard from him that people heat water in the kitchen and then take it to the shower.

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### **Pilot court fees**

The Secretary of State of the Ministry of Justice, Sander Dekker, makes a recommendation to the House of Representatives about, among other things, the launch of a pilot for issuing court fees for detainees and the establishment of an internal, informal complaint procedure to control the influx of 'irrelevant' cases to reduce the burden of complaints and appeals.<sup>[1]</sup>

According to the State Secretary, there has been a growth in the number of complaints and appeals among detainees. This growth also causes an increase in the workload of the complaint and appeal committees. Due to the increased work pressure, the time limits for settlement are compromised. According to the appeal committee (the RSJ), this is also attributed to a certain complaint culture that results into many 'irrelevant' complaints being submitted. As a result, less time can be spent on detainees with legitimate complaints and appeals.<sup>[2]</sup>

The Immigration Detention Hotline acknowledges that 'irrelevant' complaints

should not have a negative impact on the legal process. However, it is doubtful whether issuing court fees and establishment of an internal, informal complaint procedure is the right way of handling the increased numbers of complaints and appeals. After all, the complaints procedure is used to find out whether or not the complaint is well founded. This should not be done in advance through an internal mechanism, as this could lead to certain matters being dismissed as irrelevant while they could nonetheless be important. In addition, it feels illegitimate that people have to pay to issue complaints and stand up for their own rights.

Ultimately, we believe that the complaint procedure serves a greater interest. On the one hand it gives the detained people a voice; on the other hand, a system of checks and balances is created because actions of detainees and detention centre staff are accounted for through a transparent complaint procedure. Meldpunt Vreemdelingendetentie nevertheless hopes that a solution will be found for the long complaints procedures, though this should not be at the expense of the right to complaint of the detainees.

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[1] <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2019/12/17/tk-beleidsreactie-rapport-spanning-in-detentie>

[2] <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2019/12/17/tk-beleidsreactie-rapport-spanning-in-detentie>

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## **Report immigration detention National Ombudsman**

The National ombudsman has published a report about immigration detention in the Netherlands. In this report, concerns are expressed about the prison-like regime and wellbeing of the detainees.[1]

The following aspects are particularly concerning:

- The lack of meaningful daytime activities
- The lack of privacy
- The frequent and prolonged placement in seclusion as punishment

Changes to the above described aspects are urgently needed to improve the conditions under which irregular migrants are detained. The Immigration Detention Hotline is critical of the prison-like regime that exists in the immigration detention centre in Rotterdam. If the previous mentioned aspects are to be improved, we hope that irregular migrants experience immigration detention as less of a punishment and can spend their time more useful.

According to the report, there is a group of detainees in the immigration detention centre in Rotterdam who supposedly cause nuisance for other detainees and the staff. This influences the atmosphere in the detention centre which ultimately hinders possible improvements to the regime and extent of freedom. The Ombudsman would like to enter into a dialogue with all parties involved in immigration detention, to discuss whether repressive measures could be a solution to deal with this group of detainees.

We are pleased with report of the National Ombudsman. The conclusions and critique are in line with our own conclusions. In the beginning of February 2020, we had a meeting with the detention centre, Amnesty International and Doctors of the World. We have discussed the report of the Ombudsman and spoken about isolation and activities. Though it was difficult to come to an agreement, we are positive about the meeting and are satisfied that all parties were able to

speaking freely about the difficulties that exist within immigration detention and its population.

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[1] <https://www.nationaleombudsman.nl/nieuws/2020/nationale-ombudsman-los-urgente-zorgpunten-vreemdelingenbewaring-rotterdam-op>

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## **Complaint verdict lock down July 2019**

During the heat wave in July 2019, a lockdown took place in the immigration detention centre in Rotterdam. Approximately 60 detainees held a non-violent protest in the outdoor area. However, all 400 detainees were locked in their cells for three days. For many, this was a traumatic experience. One detainee was even reminded of the fire at the Schiphol detention centre in 2005, where he lost his cousin.

The Immigration Detention Hotline has complained, on behalf of several detainees, against the decision to lock everybody in their cells for three days and exclude them from activities. We also complained about the violation of the right to be in open air. Not a single detainee was allowed to go outside for at least one day. More than four months later we received the first verdicts of the complaint committee. The detainees were found to be right on the point of the violation of the right to be in open air for at least one hour a day. On the other hand they haven't been proven right in terms of imprisonment and exclusion of activities. They also did not receive compensation.

The complaint committee states, however, that not being allowed to receive visitors and not being allowed to participate in activities at the time of this lockdown, is inherent in the measure imposed by the director. That people suffered of the heat and felt panicked because of the isolation, considers the complaints committee unfortunate for the detainees. Though this does not change the verdict of the committee.

We have decided to appeal the verdict considering the isolation and exclusion from activities. The detention centre has appealed the part considering the right to be in open air for at least one hour a day. To be continued...

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## **Tour in detention centre Rotterdam**

In January 2020, the team of the Meldpunt Vreemdelingendetentie was given a tour of the Rotterdam detention centre. We appreciate that the time was taken to show us everything. We were able to chat with the detainees and we even came across a few of detainees whom we already know from the phone calls and visits. It was nice to see them too.

We have looked at the shopping system and have seen how groceries can be ordered. A detainee joined in on the conversation and told us that the products are very expensive. We hear that often, and we find that unfortunate for the detainees. According to the detention centre, the prices are high because the groceries have to be transported all the way from the store to the cell..

We have also seen the fitness area, the air places, the multimedia room and the recreation room. We were positively surprised that the detention centre offers so many crafting options. For example, detainees can make T-shirts, posters, bracelets and paintings. We were very impressed by the beautiful artwork that was made by the detainees!

Finally, we stood in the isolation cells for a brief moment. This was an intense experience. It is a bare cell with just a mattress, a blanket and a toilet. There is also a small window up high. The cell is closed off with a heavy metal door. We hope that the detention centre treats the use of isolation with caution.

We hope we can do tours of the detention centre on a regular basis as we found it very interesting and are convinced that what we have seen and learned will assist us in helping the detainees as best as possible.



### Tour in GGV Zeist

In Zeist there is an immigration detention centre (Gesloten Gezinsvoorziening) especially for families with minors, women and single minor migrants (AMV). This centre is part of the detention centre in Rotterdam<sup>[1]</sup>. However, it differs from the one in Rotterdam, because it is an open area where people can move freely. The team of the Immigration Detention Hotline visited the centre in December 2019. At the time of the visit, 41 people were staying in the centre.

The tour was carried out by a social worker and we got the chance to ask many questions. The employees don't wear a uniform, which has a positive effect on the atmosphere and for the detainees. The centre has twelve houses with room for six people per house. The houses are surrounded by a courtyard with a big field of grass in the middle. It also has a playground and a vegetable garden. There is a special unit with room for ten single minors. They can have a room for themselves. The doors of these rooms cannot be locked. There are also no isolation cells, only 'time out cells'. This cell can also not be locked. The visitors room was designed more comfortable and friendlier than the one in the detention centre in Rotterdam.

We have almost no contact with the detention centre in Zeist. The reason for this is presumably that the detainees experience this centre as less of a punishment in comparison to the detention centre in Rotterdam. Besides that, the duration of stay is significantly shorter in Zeist than in Rotterdam.

As to the availability of the detention centre in Zeist, there are some improvements to be made. The closest bus stop was next to the highway, where you have to walk at the roadside to get to the detention centre. In our opinion, the route to the detention centre was really accessible which is unfortunate for people who want to visit their loved ones.



[1] <https://www.dji.nl/locaties/detentiecentrum/gesloten-gezinsvoorziening-zeist/index.aspx>

[2] <https://www.dji.nl/locaties/detentiecentrum/gesloten-gezinsvoorziening-zeist/index.aspx>

## Food dissatisfaction detention centre Rotterdam

The Hotline received many reports regarding the quality and quantity of the food in the immigration detention centre in Rotterdam. The detainees receive 12 slices of white or brown bread daily, one piece of fruit and a microwave meal of 500 grams. According to mister H., the daily piece of fruit consists of 'rejected' apples, and a pear or other type of fruit every two to three weeks. Mister W. says that often the same microwave meal is served, which is not very diverse.

In the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (SMR), a guideline indicates how detainees should be treated. Article 20 SMR states that every detainee will be provided with food adequate for the health and strength of that detainee. In addition, the European Prison Rules stipulate that detainees will be provided with a nutritious diet, taking into account the age, health, physical condition, religion and culture of the detainees.

The food in the detention centre in Rotterdam is based on the guidelines of the Dutch 'Nutrition Centre'. The guidelines of this nutrition centre show that a 22-year-old man should receive 2089 calories a day. Although there is the possibility of cooking in the detention centre in Rotterdam, not all detainees can make use of this possibility. Not everyone has enough money to order products. Detainees receive fifteen Euros of pocket money every week, which can be used to pay for phone calls and groceries. By means of a computer system with shopping lists, products can be ordered that are delivered weekly. According to the detainees that we have spoken to, the prices of the products are high compared to supermarkets outside detention. In previous newsletters, we have already expressed our concerns about this.

### Sending a postcard

Do you ever think about the people in immigration detention? Do you want to support them? Write them a postcard! The people in immigration detention are very appreciative of such thoughtful gestures.

You do not have to personally address your card. Just send them to us and we will send them to the immigration detention centre on your behalf. Tip: Choose cheerful cards with supportive messages.

You can send your postcard to the following address:

Stichting LOS  
T.a.v. Meldpunt Vreemdelingendetentie  
Hang 16  
3011 GG Rotterdam

### Vigils

Vigils are organised regularly for detained migrants at the detention centres.

Volunteers think about the people who are locked up and without documents. Do you want to attend a vigil? You can contact the organisers:

Rotterdam detention centre:  
Every first Sunday of the month there is a vigil by [Stichting Mara](#) at 16:00-17:00h at detention centre Rotterdam. For more information click [here](#).

GGV Zeist:  
Every first Sunday of the month there is a vigil from the [Raad van Kerken](#) at detention centre Zeist at 16:30h. For more information click [here](#).



**Meldpunt Vreemdelingendetentie**

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