

Dear Sirs,

We welcomed Neil Mackay's reports last week, highlighting the traumatic and intimidating effects of removals and detention on children and parents seeking asylum and on the wider Glasgow community.

The manner and haste in which families are being removed means they, more often than not, have no time to collect their things, secure their home, or to contact their neighbours, legal representatives or the children's school, and there have been instances where families have had to leave necessary medication behind.

The subsequent detention to which they are subjected, even for a short period, is an inhumane experience for children, having a serious impact on their physical and mental health, personal development and education.

And, as is evident in Kingsway - and other areas across the city where similar vigils to stop dawn raids are being considered - removals and detention are causing huge anxiety and having a profound effect on the school friends and neighbours of those being removed.

We are increasingly hearing of this Home Office practice of removing people when they go routinely to report at immigration centres. This tactic only succeeds in further terrifying the asylum-seeking community, making them even more scared to report. If they don't report, their support will be cut, sending more and more families into destitution. Potential detention if they do report; destitution if they don't. What's the choice?

The Home Office should look at alternatives to detention. They have no evidence that families are a high absconding risk. Why would they abscond when, unable to work, they are forced to depend on government support to survive?

They should also consider the wider humanitarian grounds surrounding a family's circumstances – how long they have been here, how they have integrated within the community etc – before making decisions on removal.

The government has set itself high and arbitrary removal targets, responding to a certain media constituency that wants people to be returned. Compassion and considering cases on individual merit is being sacrificed to meeting these targets.

The Home Office says that there is no country that is unsafe for people to be returned to, with a number of Iraqis, Somalis and Afghans currently being detained across the UK in preparation to be sent home; the foreign office, on the other hand, says no one should travel to parts of these countries under any circumstances.

How can you have confidence in a system that is sending people back to risk persecution in countries still in conflict and instability? It's no wonder people are scared.

Yours,

Sally Daghlian, chief executive, Scottish Refugee Council.