

NICCO: Assisting professionals to support the children and families of Foreign National Prisoners



‘Dear Mummy, I am missing you so much. When are you coming home?’¹

14%

of the UK prison population are Foreign Nationals²

Find out how to support offenders’ children and their families

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Who are we?

The National Information Centre on Children of Offenders – NICCO (formerly i-HOP) is a service that supports professionals to work effectively with offenders’ children and families. NICCO collates and promotes examples of services, interventions, resources, policy and research around this vulnerable group.

Barnardo’s was originally commissioned by the **Department for Education** in 2013 to develop this service as an online information hub with a focus on England (www.nicco.org.uk). The service is targeted at all professionals who come into contact with offenders’ children and their families, from various sectors including education, health and social care as well as the criminal justice system.

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1. Campbell S., Boulougari A., Koo, Y. (2013) *Fractured Childhoods: The separation of families by immigration detention*, Bail for Immigration Detainees
 2. Ministry of Justice (2017) *Foreign National Prisoners*. [ONLINE] Available at: www.justice.gov.uk/offenders/types-of-offender/foreign

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“Please send her home to be with us – please don’t send my mum to Angola again.” – Son of Foreign National Prisoner aged 8¹

There are an estimated 200,000 children in England and Wales affected by parental imprisonment². An increasing body of research highlights the negative impact of this on children and families, including social isolation and stigma, increased risk of poor mental and physical health, and financial instability³.

Foreign National Prisoners, their children and families

“Every night I cry. I don’t speak the language and it is killing me little by little.” – Foreign National Prisoner⁴

Foreign National Prisoners (FNPs) account for 14% of the prison population in England and Wales, and are defined as those serving time in prison, with no absolute legal right to remain in the UK⁵. The term includes those living illegally in the UK, and those with the right to live and work, both of whom may have families and children who are British Citizens⁷.

There is no systematic practice in place for recording the number of FNPs with children and families. However, recent growth in the FNP population has led to an increase in research into this area, highlighting the specific challenges faced by this group⁸.

The children and families of FNPs face many of the same challenges as those who are British Citizens. However, evidence suggests a greater risk of stigma and a reduced likelihood of maintaining family contact⁹ – in turn leading to greater isolation and an increased risk of poor mental health¹⁰. Further research suggests these families also have a poorer understanding of the criminal justice and prison systems, preventing them from accessing the support and provision they are entitled to¹¹. A review of the South West Prisons’ Children and Families Pathway (2015) found ‘there was a lack of information available in alternative languages in visit centres’, further preventing access to support¹².

“My family will be destitute if I am deported.” – Foreign National Prisoner¹³



In addition to these challenges, any FNP serving a sentence of 12 months or more is automatically eligible for deportation¹⁴. This can occur at the end of the sentence, or up to 135 days prior through the Early Removal Scheme¹⁵. The deportation process is complex meaning families and prisoners are often unaware of if, or when, this will happen¹⁶. Research shows the added threat of deportation compounds the already significant impact of imprisonment on families, bringing additional challenges such as insomnia, severe distress, weight loss, nightmares and social withdrawal¹⁷. The consequences post-deportation can be greater still, including significant financial loss alongside potentially permanent separation¹⁸. Remaining family members without citizenship are also at risk of subsequent deportation.

There is little specialist support available for the children and families of FNPs. The level of support required will vary by family, largely determined by culture, language, and length of residency in the UK¹⁹; it is therefore vital professionals are aware of the challenges faced by this group, and are equipped to provide culturally-sensitive, effective support within their role.

FNPs and their families are entitled to the same rights throughout a sentence as British Citizens – including regular family contact and access to information and courses. Professionals are integral in ensuring the children and families of FNPs know their rights, and in supporting them to maintain family contact. Community-based professionals are also well placed to work alongside families, preparing them for the possibility of the deportation of the prisoner, supporting them afterwards with loss and bereavement resources, or supporting the re-settlement of the released family member into the community.

How can NICCO support professionals to work with the children and families of Foreign National Prisoners?

“Easy to access, read and understand information which informs staff of the practices in place.” – NICCO user

NICCO is a national, one stop information service, for all professionals working with children and families affected by offending. It brings together information and resources to support professionals to consider and effectively support the children and families of FNPs, including:

- Details of local and national **services** that work with FNPs and their families

- Multi-agency **training** for professionals
- **Research** into the impact of imprisonment on children and families
- **Resources** for professionals to support FNPs families who are visiting prison, trying to keep in touch or dealing with the impact of the criminal justice system
- Existing multi-agency **strategies** being used by local authorities
- **Guidelines** and toolkits to support professionals to work with these children.

NICCO recognises that professionals work in busy environments with demands on their time. NICCO puts all the resources in one place, so help and information is there when needed. Sign up to become a member for FREE to receive our e-newsletter.

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2. Williams, K., Papadopoulou, V., Booth, N. (2012) *Prisoners' childhood and family backgrounds - Results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) longitudinal cohort study of prisoners*. Ministry of Justice
3. Smith, R., Grimshaw, R., Romeo, R., Knapp, M. (2007) *Poverty and disadvantage among prisoners' families*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation
4. HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2006) *Foreign National Prisoners: a thematic review*. Ministry of Justice
5. Ministry of Justice (2017) *Foreign National Prisoners*. [ONLINE] Available at: www.justice.gov.uk/offenders/types-of-offender/foreign
6. Prisoners' Advice Service (2015) *Foreign Nationals in the Prison System*.
7. Shaw, S (2016) *Review into the Welfare in Detention of Vulnerable Persons A report to the Home Office by Stephen Shaw*. Home Office
8. Banks, J. (2011) *Foreign National Prisoners in the UK: Explanations and Implications*. The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice 50 (2) 184-198
9. Macleod, S. (2011) *Supporting foreign nationals in UK prisons, community cohesion and regeneration: The links*. Centre for Local Economic Strategies
10. Macleod, S. (2011) *Supporting foreign nationals in UK prisons, community cohesion and regeneration: The links*. Centre for Local Economic Strategies
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12. *South West Prisons' Review of the Children and Families Pathway* (2015) Wright, P., Garman, J. and Carter T., Barnardo's and SW Prisons (NOMS)
13. HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2006) *Foreign National Prisoners: a thematic review*. Ministry of Justice
14. Prisoners' Advice Service (2015) *Foreign Nationals in the Prison System*. Ministry of Justice (2017) *Foreign National Prisoners*. Ministry of Justice
15. [ONLINE] Available at: www.justice.gov.uk/offenders/types-of-offender/foreign
16. HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2006) *Foreign National Prisoners: a thematic review*. Ministry of Justice
17. *Childhoods: The separation of families by immigration detention*, Bail for Immigration Detainees
18. *Poverty and disadvantage among prisoners' families*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation
19. The Association of Visitors to Immigration Detention (2009) *Visiting Foreign National Prisoners: Findings from a scoping study*

Examples of existing practice

Hibiscus Initiative provides advocacy, support and specialist services to Foreign National, BMER and migrants affected by the Criminal Justice System, immigration rules and restrictions. Their services include facilitating links to children and families, enquiring whether children are safe following their mother's arrest, liaising with social services and making referrals to family solicitors.

Children Heard and Seen deliver family days at HMP Huntercombe, a Category C prison holding Foreign National Prisoners awaiting deportation. Alongside this they provide support for families in the community, including 1:1 mentoring and weekly group activity sessions.

Visit NICCO

Visit www.nicco.org.uk to discover resources to support you in your work with children and families of offenders and find out more. Sign up to become a member to receive free regular e-newsletters.

