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# ANNUAL REPORT

APRIL 2024



GLOBALDETENTIONPROJECT

# The Global Detention Project

The Global Detention Project (GDP) is committed to ending arbitrary and harmful migration-related detention practices around the world, and to ensuring respect for the fundamental human rights of all migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. To achieve this, we seek to:

- Increase public knowledge and awareness of immigration detention policies.
- Expand coverage of immigration detention by human rights monitoring bodies and other international agencies.
- Expand partnerships with local and international civil society organisations working to end arbitrary and harmful immigration detention practices.
- Strategically target research and advocacy so that it effectively challenges arbitrary and harmful detention laws and policies.

Front cover image:

Haitians detained for deportation stand inside a police truck on a border bridge between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, October 2023 © Alamy

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Global Detention Project  
1-3 rue de Varembé,  
1202 Geneva, Switzerland

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T: +41 (0) 22 548 1401  
W: [www.globaldetentionproject.org](http://www.globaldetentionproject.org)

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# 1. ABOUT THE GLOBAL DETENTION PROJECT

**Around the world every day, thousands of people are detained because they fled their countries, were trafficked overseas, or sought better lives abroad.**

Although typically not charged with crimes, detained migrants and asylum seekers may be locked up indefinitely, often without access to legal assistance or any means to communicate with the outside world. While criminal prisons are supposed to prepare people to re-enter society, immigration detention has no such reform agenda; instead it is a tool whose primary purpose is to ensure that a person is removed from a society. These inherent aspects of immigration detention dramatically increase people's vulnerability to harm.

Headquartered in Geneva, the capital of the international human rights system, the Global Detention Project

(GDP) is committed to ending arbitrary and harmful migration-related detention practices around the world, and to ensure respect for the fundamental human rights of all migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.

At the heart of the GDP is the **"Global Immigration Detention Observatory."** This is a collaborative initiative with partner organisations, researchers, and human rights practitioners in every corner of the world, whose central objective is to promote immigration detention reforms through research, data development, analysis, and reporting. The project seeks to ensure that local detention conditions receive global attention, while helping inform advocacy initiatives at the international level with on-the-ground realities and needs.

## The GDP Explains

### **What is immigration detention?**

The deprivation of liberty of non-citizens for reasons related to their migration status.

### **Where are migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers detained?**

Migration-related detention has spread to nearly every country on the globe. Types of facilities vary from country to country, but they can include dedicated immigration detention centres, prisons, jails, police stations, airport holding rooms, and border camps, as well as ad hoc sites like hotels, school rooms, and shipping containers.

### **For how long are migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers detained?**

The length of time migrants can be held in detention varies widely. Some countries establish a maximum number of days or months—in the EU, there is an 18-month limit—while others subject immigration detainees to indefinite detention, including important detaining countries like Malaysia, the US, and the UK.

## Our Key Areas of Work



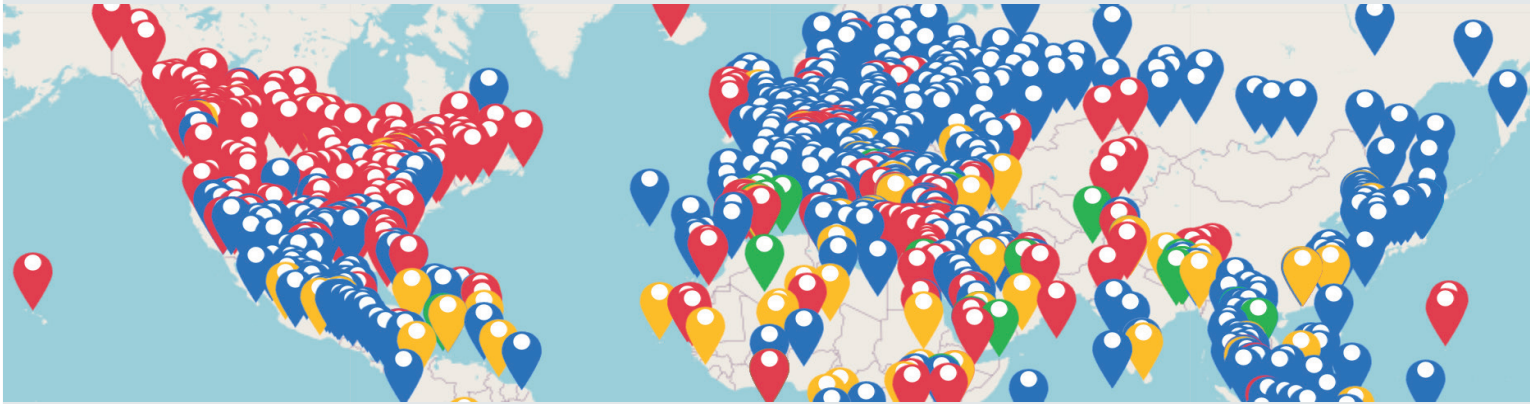
### Investigating Immigration Detention Practices

We investigate where and in what conditions countries detain refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers. We document this information on our website so that anyone can access our findings—helping to ensure greater transparency and accountability in the treatment of detainees.



### Advocating For Reform

We seek to ensure that abusive detention practices and trends receive international attention; that national policies and laws respect international human rights principles; that global initiatives and agendas respond to on-the-ground needs; and that international human rights mechanisms have domestic impact.



### Supporting Local Voices

We work with local NGOs around the world to develop evidence and strengthen their campaigns to improve the treatment of vulnerable migrants and asylum seekers. Our training workshops with NGO partners, partnered advocacy initiatives in Geneva, and public webinars help us to jointly harness the UN human rights system to challenge abusive and arbitrary migration-related detention in their countries.



### Protecting Vulnerable Groups

Immigration detention causes enduring harm, particularly for at-risk groups like children, the elderly, pregnant and nursing women, trafficking victims, and stateless persons. We campaign to ensure that groups like these are protected from detention by providing advice and input to global discussions and reports, collaborating with international partners to produce hard-hitting advocacy reports, and hosting training events.

## 2. LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND PRESIDENT

**In 2023, the GDP marked an important milestone: 18 years of operations—first as a student-led research project, launched in 2006 at Geneva’s Graduate Institute for International and Development Studies; and since 2014, as an independent non-profit association. A notable achievement, no doubt, but also a sobering one.**

During these nearly two decades, the GDP has documented the growth of detention systems around the globe, creating in the process the world’s unique global database and documentation centre devoted to this single, narrowly circumscribed arena of human suffering. Our motivation for doing this has, since day one, remained the same: reducing harms to one of the world’s more vulnerable populations—the millions of people crossing borders every year to escape hardship and trauma, and to find a better life.

**An important development during 2023 was that courts in some countries ruled that indefinite immigration detention was unlawful, a crucial advocacy achievement.**

This *raison d’être*, however, has at times seemed futile: even as we have made enormous advances in expanding the scope and depth of our data and putting these resources to use in promoting reforms, immigration detention has seemingly flourished everywhere. We have documented its deepening institutional entrenchment in

destination countries, as well as its spread—at the urging of the world’s wealthiest countries—to places where the rule of law and institutional safeguards are non-existent.

It is with these sobering considerations in mind that we rejoice in every victory—no matter how seemingly small—every new procedural limitation, legal ruling, policy proposal, or maturing human rights norm that may help constrain use of this measure and ultimately reduce the harms it causes.

Seen in this light, 2023 offered a handful of more important developments to celebrate than our 18-year milestone, many of which the GDP played some small role in helping encourage as you will read about in this Annual Report. Important among these has been a notable trend in limiting the length of detention in many jurisdictions, including ending indefinite detention.

In November, Australia’s High Court issued a landmark ruling that indefinite immigration detention is unlawful. For decades, Australian civil society and human rights actors across the globe have denounced Australia’s exceptionally punitive practices. The GDP’s work has helped provide comparative context for these policies, including in particular our widely-quoted 2022 profile on the country, which began: “Australia’s migration-related detention system is uniquely severe, arbitrary, and punitive. And that is precisely the message that Australia’s political establishment—with significant public support—appears committed to communicating to the rest of the world.”

In March, South Korea’s Constitutional Court ruled that the country’s policy of indefinite detention of refugees and asylum seekers is unconstitutional. The ruling came after a multiyear civil society campaign during which numerous Korean NGOs and legal groups tirelessly campaigned for reforms both nationally and at the international level. The GDP participated in brainstorming sessions with Korean NGOs aimed at shaping effective



*In March 2023, the Republic of Korea's Constitutional Court found that the country's policy of indefinitely detaining migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers without due process guarantees is unconstitutional*  
 © Korea Refugee Rights Network

advocacy messages for the campaign. In December, we had a chance to toast this victory—and to take stock of the many challenges ahead for its effective implementation—with many of our Korean partners at our office in Geneva. They and several other partners from across East Asia, who were all in town for the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, met with GDP staff to discuss new initiatives for raising awareness of detention concerns in the region, including developing ideas for launching a new East Asia Regional Immigration Detention Observatory.

The GDP also played a key role building awareness of harmful detention practices, which have bolstered numerous reform proposals. In May, for example, the Norwegian Ministry of Justice's immigration detention supervisory body—inspired by the GDP's 2018 report, "Harm Reduction in Immigration Detention: A Comparative Study of Detention Centres in France, Germany, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland"—made an

official visit to the Frambois detention centre in Geneva with a view to proposing reforms at the Trandum detention centre near Oslo. The GDP helped organise the visit with the assistance of Geneva's immigration authorities. After the visit, the supervisory board recommended a host of reforms, including inter alia reducing penal aspects at Trandum, stopping use of isolation cells, and providing detainees access to remunerative work, food preparation, and the internet.

As we look ahead to 2024, we are eager to deepen our civil society collaborations, including with the more than a dozen NGOs and individual experts working with us on our Global Observatory project (see page 17). As immigration detention continues its seemingly intractable spread, we must remain poised, energised, engaged, and prepared to challenge its logic and prevent its harms. And we hope to be able to count on you to support these efforts.

**Michael Flynn**  
 Executive Director



**Sahar Okhovat**  
 President of the Board



### 3. IMPACT AROUND THE WORLD

We joined an open letter with 39 Canadian and international organisations calling on **Canadian** authorities to cease using provincial jails for immigration detention purposes. As of December 2023, 8 out of 10 provinces had blocked the Canadian Border Services Agency from using such facilities for migration-related detention.



In May, we assisted an official delegation from **Norway's** Ministry of Justice in visiting the Frambois Detention Centre in Geneva, Switzerland, so that they could document key practices that would serve as a basis for reforms at Norway's Trandum Detention Centre (p. 14).



Detainees in **Mexico** face many abuses—degrading and inhumane treatment, paltry detention conditions, extortion, physical violence, to name a few. We worked extensively with our partner Fray Matias de Cordova Human Rights Centre to ensure that these concerns were brought to the attention of the UN Committees on Migrant Rights and Child Rights, and the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.

Immigration detention policies and practices are a serious human rights concern in much of **the Caribbean**. In 2023, we established a new partnership with the Dominican Republic-based Centre for Migration Observation and Social Development in the Caribbean (OBMICA), helping to expand the Global Immigration Detention Observatory's coverage to this important region. Many of the recommendations we advanced in a joint submission for the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention in preparation for their visit to **the Bahamas** in late 2023 were reiterated by the working group in their post-visit report (p.18).

Committed to ensuring that information regarding detention practices and polices **worldwide** reach global audiences, we regularly supported journalists covering critical detention issues. We documented more than 230 academic, media, and advocacy sources citing our work during the course of the year (p.25).

Recommendations we advocated for in a joint submission with our partner Lawyers for Human Rights to the Universal Periodic Review of **South Africa** were reflected in the UPR Working Group's conclusions and recommendations, released in January 2023, including our call to decriminalise immigration infractions, improve detention conditions, and combat growing xenophobia.





Having closely monitored negotiations regarding the **European Pact on Migration**, we immediately identified some of its key failings, specifically: permitting the detention of children in lengthy border procedures and further externalising migration controls. Together with Brussels-based PICUM, we alerted UN rights agencies about these concerns, prompting several UN experts to issue an urgent letter calling for respect for fundamental human rights (p.17).

When a catastrophic earthquake struck southeastern **Türkiye** in February, we immediately worked with our Turkish partner, the International Refugee Rights Association, to document its impact upon refugees and migrants locked in detention centres—and to demand that they were protected and assisted in the earthquake response (p.12).

In 2023, **Pakistani** authorities stepped up their crackdown against undocumented Afghans and ordered them to leave the country or face deportation. Thousands were arrested and detained in facilities like Karachi's Landhi Jail. We documented this on our blog, the Immigration Detention Monitor (p.23).

Ahead of the Universal Periodic Review's 45th session, we teamed up with the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network to highlight our shared concerns regarding detention practices in **Hong Kong SAR**—our first submission concerning the territory. Concerns include arbitrary detention without established time limits, prolonged detention of children, and abusive treatment in detention centres.

Many countries in Asia have adopted an increasingly hostile attitude towards Rohingya refugees, including by pursuing aggressive detention campaigns. We have continuously monitored their treatment, and in 2023 highlighted rights abuses against the group in countries including **India, Sri Lanka, and Malaysia**.

We issued an urgent appeal with Migrant-Rights.org about thousands of Afghan refugees arbitrarily confined in a de-facto detention facility in Abu Dhabi (**United Arab Emirates**). In our call to UAE authorities and international actors, we demanded detainees' right to a full judicial review of their detention decision, and their right to appeal. The international press, including CNN, subsequently covered the plight of these refugees left in "limbo" after escaping the Taliban (p.19).

In 2023, advocates in **Australia** and **South Korea** celebrated landmark rulings ending indefinite immigration detention, which the GDP had supported in numerous publications and in consultations with partners over the years (p.6).



# 4. INVESTIGATING DETENTION

Investigative research and rigorous data development lie at the heart of the Global Detention Project. Since our establishment in 2006, we have tirelessly investigated where, in what conditions, and on what scale migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers are detained for migration-related reasons. This information is recorded in our database, the world's leading source of immigration detention documentation, and displayed on our free-to-access website, creating a vital public record and helping to nurture greater understanding of detention practices and policies amongst diverse audiences worldwide.

	2022	2023
NEW DATA ENTRIES IN THE DATABASE	5,198	5,613
NEW DATA ENTRIES BY GDP PARTNERS	3,846	4,861
COUNTRIES UPDATED	143	198
DETENTION CENTRES UPDATED	450	728
TOTAL NUMBER OF DETENTION CENTRES DOCUMENTED TO DATE	2,308	2,593

Throughout 2023, we logged more than **5,600** data entries covering **198** countries and **728** detention centres, and recorded an additional **285** detention centres within our database. With almost **2,600** detention centres recorded in our database since 2006 and detention policies and practices documented for almost every country on earth, our database is one-of-a-kind and provides an unparalleled level of detail.

Much of this data is provided by partner organisations (our "Observatory partners") who provide vital on-the-ground observations and updates, helping to us to create a shared body of knowledge that can be used to push for change locally and internationally. Partners provided more than **4,800** data updates in 2023, covering key detaining countries like Saudi Arabia, India, Lebanon, the Dominican Republic, and Lithuania. To support them in this work, we regularly ran training sessions to help maximise their understanding of the database and raised funds earmarked for their work with us.

## IMPROVING OUR ABILITY TO DOCUMENT

To aid our documentation efforts, in 2023 we completed our database overhaul, which we had launched in 2022 following input from users including academics, journalists, migrant rights advocates, and lawyers from countries around the world, and building on our recent work with the World Health Organisation to build evidence on the health impacts of detention. We introduced a host of new fields and options, enabling us to record a greater level of detail and ensuring that field options better transcend local and regional variations. Key upgrades include the inclusion of new transparency and detention monitoring fields, and fields for capturing health-related data.

## IMMIGRATION DETENTION DURING EMERGENCIES

A recent focus of our work has been raising awareness of the implications of emergency situations and natural disasters for migrants and asylum seekers locked inside detention centres. This critical aspect of immigration detention—largely overlooked to date—has taken on increasing importance for us since our efforts to spur the international community to assist immigration detainees trapped inside detention centres in Ukraine after Russia’s invasion of the country in 2022. In 2023 this included documenting the impact of the Türkiye/Syria earthquake and the challenges authorities faced ensuring the safety of those locked inside potentially unstable detention facilities (see In Focus: Documenting the Impact of the Türkiye/Syria Earthquake on Immigration Detainees), and investigating Greece’s detention of migrants who survived the Pylos shipwreck tragedy.

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**On 14 June, hundreds of refugees and migrants lost their lives in the Mediterranean’s deadliest shipwreck in nearly a decade. As many as 750 individuals are believed to have been in the boat when it capsized, but just 104 were found alive. Taken ashore, survivors were met not with protection and sanctuary, but detention in prison-like conditions.**

*GDP, August 2023*



*A group of men attempt to speak with survivors of the Pylos shipwreck at the entrance to Malakasa Reception and Identification Centre outside Athens, June 2023 © Alamy*



## **IN FOCUS:** Documenting the Impact of the Türkiye/Syria Earthquake on Immigration Detainees

On 6 February, a devastating earthquake hit southeastern Türkiye and neighbouring Syria. In Türkiye, more than 50,000 people were killed, and some 4 million buildings were affected. The scale of the disaster prompted an outpouring of humanitarian support from across the globe, but within the response only limited attention was given to the large population of refugees within the earthquake zone—and even less to those locked inside the region’s detention centres.

Recognising this, the GDP and our Türkiye-based partner (the International Refugee Rights Association [IRRA]) immediately investigated the earthquake’s impact on immigration detainees. Amongst our findings:

- **Hatay Removal Centre** was heavily damaged, and all detained migrants and refugees, apart from those classified as “Foreign Terrorist Fighters,” were released—although we were unable to determine what assistance they received upon release.
- Following repeated aftershocks, migrants and refugees detained in **Malatya Beydağı Detention Centre** and **Malatya Removal Centre** were transferred out of the earthquake zone and into detention centres in other provinces, primarily Kayseri and Van.
- In **Adana** and **Gaaziantep**, removal centres continued to detain non-nationals, but the GDP and IRRA were unable to confirm whether authorities conducted appropriate structural assessments to determine buildings’ safety and stability. The availability of drinking water, food, heating, and medicines was also unclear.
- In **Şanlıurfa**, local residents took shelter in the centre alongside migrant detainees.

Based on this information, we called on the Turkish government and key humanitarian actors to ensure that all persons detained in immigration detention facilities who were not free to move and seek shelter elsewhere were protected and assisted in the earthquake response. In a public statement, we urged authorities and relief agencies to assess the structural safety of all immigration detention facilities, and where necessary, to find alternative, safe accommodation for detainees.

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**The situation for refugees in Türkiye has become increasingly dire over the past months and according to the Global Detention Project (GDP) further worsened after the devastating earthquakes. The organisation and its partner, the International Refugee Rights Association (IRRA) points to a "less well acknowledged" impact "on the large population of refugees in the earthquake zone and in particular, those who are locked inside detention centres".**

*European Council on Refugees and Exiles,  
3 March 2023*

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**Turkish authorities should carefully re-assess the necessity to detain individuals in immigration detention facilities where their lives and safety could be endangered as a result of earthquake damage and the lack of humanitarian assistance. Wherever possible authorities should consider releasing detainees, as was done in Hatay.**

*GDP and IRRA Statement,  
February 2023*



Destroyed buildings in Türkiye, 2023 © Alamy

# IN FOCUS: Working to Reduce Harmful Detention Practices, from Geneva to Oslo

In May, the GDP assisted an official delegation from Norway's Ministry of Justice in visiting the Frambois Detention Centre in Geneva, Switzerland, in order to develop recommendations for ending harmful immigration detention practices in Norway.

The delegation—comprised of members of the Norwegian Supervisory Board for Forced Deportations and Immigration Detention, which monitors operations at the Trandum Immigration Detention Centre near Oslo—was interested in visiting Frambois to observe detention practices first hand following observations made by the GDP in our 2018 report, *Harm Reduction in Immigration Detention: A Comparative Study of Detention Centres in France, Germany, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland*.

A key point of interest for the Supervisory Board was the report's comparison of Frambois's relatively humane detention regime to the highly securitised Trandum facility, which has been the focus of intense scrutiny in Norway due to its management by a special police unit and numerous incidents of violence. Although operations at Frambois have been criticised, including the sometimes lengthy periods of time that people can remain detained there, the facility is well known in Switzerland for having less harsh and punitive practices than other facilities in the country.

To enable the Supervisory Board to observe the centre's practices, the GDP arranged a visit to Frambois by the Supervisory Board and GDP staff, as well as meetings with the local NGO that monitors Frambois (La Ligue Suisse des Droits de l'Homme) so that the delegation could be sensitised to key civil society concerns regarding the treatment of detainees in Geneva and elsewhere in Switzerland.

Although the GDP has consistently argued that it is impossible to promote "best practices" in an area of public policy like immigration detention if it is inherently harmful, the Supervisory Board nevertheless concluded that for their purposes, the visit provided important ideas for how to improve the treatment of detainees in Norway. These included:

- Modifying the appearance of guards and staff to appear less aggressive;
- Broadening detainee access to the internet;
- Enabling detainees to prepare their own meals;
- Encouraging interactions between staff and detainees, including sharing meals together, and in general improving the rapport between them;
- Limiting the use of security cells;
- Separating deportation authorities from detention centre management;
- Providing meaningful and ongoing activities for detainees, like remunerative work.



Frambois Detention Centre, Switzerland © Vol Spécial

## **IN FOCUS:** Putting Immigration Detention on the WHO Agenda

In October, the World Health Organisation launched its first ever *Global Research Agenda on Health, Migration and Displacement*. In addition to producing a case study on immigration detention, which is featured in the research agenda, the GDP worked to ensure that during all phases of the development of the agenda—which extended across multiple consultations held between September 2022 and September 2023—that detention was recognised as a critical subject area at the intersection of migration and public health.

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**There is an urgent need to expand evidence concerning the impact of detention on physical health outcomes, the level of health care provided in detention centres and on the rapidly growing population of detention centres located in countries that are not main destination countries but which are under pressure today to detain migrants during their journeys.**

*GDP in: World Health Organisation, "Global Research Agenda on Health, Migration and Displacement," 2023*



# 5. HUMAN RIGHTS: MAKING AN IMPACT LOCALLY AND GLOBALLY

A key strategic focus is building connections between local realities and global processes, which is an underlying rationale for our Global Immigration Detention Observatory partnership initiative. Working with civil society organisations and individual experts from around the world, we seek to ensure that abusive detention practices receive international attention; that national policies and laws respect international human rights principles; that global initiatives and agendas respond to on-the-ground needs; and that international human rights mechanisms have domestic impact. These partnerships enable us to ground our work in an intimate understanding of the plight of detainees and to jointly work to ensure that international monitoring bodies direct attention to this critical area of human rights.

## INFLUENCING INTERNATIONAL RIGHTS MECHANISMS

We worked closely with our partners during the year to develop impactful submissions and appeals to numerous human rights monitoring bodies. The submissions covered issues including statutory amendments in Hong Kong heightening the risk of disproportionate force in

immigration detention facilities, inhumane detention conditions in Malaysia, Türkiye's failure to prohibit the detention of children, and Lithuania's legal provisions allowing for mass automatic long-term detention of non-citizens.

In total, we shared **16 submissions and appeals covering 8 countries to 11 rights mechanisms**. Amongst the mechanisms addressed were the Working



Japanese activists hold a protest against the amendment bill to the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act (ICRRA), February 2023 © Alamy



Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD), Universal Periodic Review, UN Committee against Torture, and UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. We also facilitated partners' participation in review processes so that they could speak directly to committee members and re-emphasise our concerns and recommendations. As a result of our targeted advocacy efforts, we regularly observed our and our partners' recommendations being repeated in rights mechanisms' final reports. (See IN FOCUS: Reviewing the Bahamas' Detention Practices.)

## OUR PARTNERS

Our partners are important actors in their countries and regions promoting the rights of refugees, asylum seekers, and vulnerable migrants. In 2023, we worked with numerous institutional partners as well as several individual experts who covered specific regional contexts or thematic areas:

### Observatory Individual Experts

- Chloe Fung (East Asia)
- Abdul Aziz Muhamat (East and Horn of Africa)
- Anne-Rachelle Boulanger (Global review of detention laws and practices)

### Observatory Partner Organisations

- Access Centre for Human Rights (Lebanon)
- Association for Legal Intervention (Poland)
- Caribbean Migration Observatory/OBMICA (Dominican Republic, the Caribbean)
- Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Matias de Cordova A.C (Mexico)
- Human Rights Monitoring Institute (Lithuania)
- International Refugee Rights Association (Türkiye)
- Lawyers for Human Rights (South Africa and southern Africa)
- Migrant-Rights.org (Bahrain, the Gulf)
- Undisclosed partner (India)
- Undisclosed partner (Egypt)

### Additional Partners

- Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APPRN)
- Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL)
- Advocates for Public Interest Law Korea (APIL)
- Forum for Refugees Japan
- Taiwan Association for Human Rights
- Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM)
- La Strada International

## IN FOCUS: The European Pact on Migration

The GDP has closely monitored developments and negotiations surrounding the European Pact on Migration and Asylum—a set of reforms designed to create a “fairer, efficient, and more sustainable migration and asylum process for the European Union.”

In December, shortly before the European Council and European Parliament announced that they had reached an agreement on the pact, the GDP and partners identified some key concerns, including the likelihood that it will likely lead to the detention of children in lengthy border procedures, further externalise migration controls, and limit asylum seeker access to safeguards. Together with Brussels-based PICUM, we worked to alert UN rights agencies about these concerns. In a subsequent letter issued shortly after our outreach, UN experts including the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants and the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention urged EU members to ensure that the pact respects fundamental human rights norms, including prohibiting the detention of children.

## New Pact on Migration and Asylum



# IN FOCUS: Reviewing the Bahamas' Detention Practices

The Bahamas is both a destination and transit territory for asylum seekers and migrants, mainly from Cuba and Haiti as well as increasingly from African countries like Nigeria. Its immigration provisions, contained in the 1967 Immigration Act, are notably strict—providing criminal penalties, including for infractions such as unauthorised entry and stay on its territory. “Mandatory” administrative measures are also imposed for several reasons, including pre-trial detention for criminal immigration cases, detention for people under “repatriation” orders, and breaches related to invalid permits.

Together with the Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL) and the Centre for Migration Observation and Social Development in the Caribbean (OBMICA), we submitted information to the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention ahead of its visit to the Bahamas in an effort to draw its attention to the country's arbitrary and punitive detention practices. In its preliminary findings, the Working Group echoed many of our key observations and recommendations—including concerns regarding the country's criminalisation of irregular migration.

## Recommendations vs Findings

GDP, CEJIL, and OBMICA Recommendation	WGAD Preliminary Finding
<p><b>Recommendation 2:</b> “Stop the arbitrary criminalisation of immigration infractions by amending the law to remove punitive measures like prison sentences for irregular entry and stay in the country.”</p>	<p>“International standards, including those contained in the Working Group’s Revised Deliberation no.5 concerning deprivation of liberty of migrants, hold that the irregular entry and stay in a country by migrants should not be treated as a criminal offence, and the criminalization of irregular migration will therefore always exceed the legitimate interests of States in protecting their territories and regularising irregular migration flows.”</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 3:</b> “Ensure that detainees are able to challenge the grounds of their detention before a court or other competent, independent, and impartial authority. As part of this, detainees should be provided with access to legal aid.”</p>	<p>“While migrants are entitled to a writ of habeas corpus, lack of access to counsel and lack of procedural knowledge appear to effectively deny such access.”</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 8:</b> “Ensure the eradication of racial profiling and other potential discriminatory practices in migration control activities.”</p>	<p>“The Working Group is concerned about the use of profiling and other potential discriminatory practices in migration control activities, based on how certain ethnic groups or nationalities are targeted for enforcement actions, which increases their vulnerability to detention.”</p>

## **IN FOCUS: Demanding Justice for Afghans Arbitrarily and Indefinitely Detained in the UAE**

**"We are in a jail. It doesn't matter if we are safe. Psychologically, physically, mentally, medically, we will die. This is a slow death."**

When Kabul fell in August 2021, the US State Department assisted the evacuation of thousands of Afghans fleeing the Taliban, in some cases authorising privately chartered flights. Many were evacuated to the UAE—a temporary measure so that processing procedures could be completed before long-term resettlement in the US. A year and a half later, however, some 2,500 Afghan refugees remained stranded in a compound in Abu Dhabi called the Emirates Humanitarian City (EHC), where they were prevented from leaving, were under constant surveillance, were consistently denied visits from family and lawyers, and were denied access to appropriate or adequate health care.

Based on evidence collected by an independent lawyer investigating conditions inside the EHC which was shared with the GDP and Migrant-Rights.org and corroborated by Human Rights Watch, we immediately issued an urgent appeal demanding justice for Afghans arbitrarily and indefinitely detained in the facility. Addressing mechanisms including UNHCR, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, and the UN Working Group on the Use of Mercenaries, we called for the USA and UAE, as well as the international community, to find lasting solutions that respect the rights of all Afghans detained in the facility.

Among our recommendations:

UAE authorities should guarantee that Afghan refugees held in the EHC have the right to a full judicial review of the decision to detain, and the right to appeal.

UAE authorities must allow refugees to have regular in-person contact with family members, friends, NGOs, and international organisations.

Afghan refugees in the EHC should have full access to adequate health care, including appropriate medicines, maternal health care, dental care, and mental health support.

The UAE and US authorities should announce a clear timeline for the closure of the EHC as a transit facility and for durable solutions, including resettlement to the US, to be found for all Afghan refugees currently detained there.

2023

## Submissions



16

submissions to human rights mechanisms



11

rights mechanisms addressed



10

institutional observatory partners

COUNTRY	SUBJECT(S)
The Bahamas	Issues Related to Immigration Detention
China (Hong Kong SAR)	Concerning Migration-Related Detention in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China
Lithuania	Issues Related to the Immigration Detention of Children Follow-Up Report to the UN Committee against Torture – Issues Related with Migrants, Asylum Seekers and Immigration Detention
Malaysia	Concerning Immigration Detention
Mexico	Issues Related to Immigration Detention Issues Related to the Immigration Detention of Children Issues Related to Immigration Detention, to Assist the WGAD in its Upcoming Visit
Türkiye	Issues Related to the Immigration Detention of Children
Ukraine	Immigration Detention During the Current Conflict
United Arab Emirates (UAE)	Urgent Appeal: Prolonged and Arbitrary Detention of Afghans in the Emirates Humanitarian City
Global	Comments on “General Comment on Enforced Disappearances in the Context of Migration.”

TARGET(S)	PARTNER(S)
Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD)	Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL) and Centre for Migration Observation and Social Development in the Caribbean (OBMICA)
Universal Periodic Review (UPR)	Asia-Pacific Refugee Rights Network
UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) UN Committee against Torture (CAT)	Human Rights Monitoring Institute (HRMI)
Universal Periodic Review (UPR)	Asia-Pacific Refugee Rights Network
UN Committee on Migrant Workers (CMW) UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD)	Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Matías de Córdova (CDHFM)
UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC)	International Refugee Rights Association (IRRA)
UN Special Rapporteur on Torture	
UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention UN Working Group on the Use of Mercenaries UNHCR UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights	Migrant-Rights.org
UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances	

## 6. SHAPING THE CONVERSATION

Central to our efforts to end harmful immigration detention practices is our work building public understanding of the policies and conditions that migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers face—and of the urgent need to ensure their fundamental rights worldwide. This is why our website, blog, social media channels, newsletters, and events are critical elements of our work.



**It is impossible to know with any precision how many people are detained across the world because of their immigration status. Still, research conducted by the Global Detention Project offers instructive insights. Its database lists immigration detention centres in the Africa, Americas, Asia-Pacific, Europe and Middle East regions and notes that such facilities hold tens of thousands asylum seekers, undocumented migrants, refugees, trafficking victims, torture survivors and stateless persons, including children.**

*Mixed Migration Centre  
December 2023*

### THE GDP WEBSITE

Providing an unparalleled repository of research, data, and analysis concerning detention practices and policies in every country on earth, the GDP website has become a world-leading resource for a wide variety of users. During 2023, we recorded more than 1.3 million visits from users in almost every country on earth—amongst them advocates, officials, people personally affected by immigration detention, journalists, and human rights monitors. In reviewing the impact of our web traffic, we documented **more than 230 academic, media, and advocacy sources citing our work** (see IN FOCUS: GDP in the Press).



Migrants are held in Porto Empedocle, Sicily, after being transferred from Lampedusa, August 2023 © Alamy

## HIGHLIGHTING CRITICAL YET UNDERREPORTED DETENTION ISSUES

Since launching “The Immigration Detention Monitor” in 2022, our blog has become the second most visited area of our website. Highlighting critical yet underreported detention issues from around the world, we published **40 blogposts covering 40 different countries** in 2023. Issues highlighted included Sri Lanka’s detention of Rohingya refugees rescued at sea; calls for the release of 49 Uyghur asylum seekers detained in Thailand for nine years; rulings from the Republic of Korea’s Constitutional Court regarding indefinite detention; the targeting of immigration detainees for military recruitment in Russia; and Djibouti’s crackdown against irregular migrants. Regularly shared on social media and republished by NGOs and news agencies around the world, articles on this platform have been instrumental in broadening our readership and cementing our reputation as a go-to destination for immigration detention-related news and analysis.

Most Viewed Detention Centres	
<b>Africa</b>	Sale Prison (Morocco)
<b>Americas</b>	Ciudad Juarez Estacion Migratoria (Mexico)
<b>Asia-Pacific</b>	Yongah Hill Immigration Detention Centre (Australia)
<b>Europe</b>	Lampedusa Hotspot (Italy)
<b>Middle East</b>	Dubai Central Jail for Men (United Arab Emirates)

Most Viewed Country Pages	
1. Mexico	6. Malaysia
2. United Arab Emirates	7. Saudi Arabia
3. Türkiye	8. Qatar
4. Libya	9. Italy
5. Canada	10. Japan

**1.3 million+** website views

**3,000+** newsletter subscribers

**230+** academic, media & advocacy citations

**13,000+** social media followers

**40** blogs

**360+** webinar attendees

Users’ Top Countries of Origin	
1. United States	6. Malaysia
2. Canada	7. Australia
3. Mexico	8. France
4. Italy	9. United Arab Emirates
5. United Kingdom	10. India



## **IN FOCUS:** Webinar on Protecting Victims of Trafficking from Immigration Detention

**Participants:** 360+

**Speakers:**

**Siobhán Mullally** (UN Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children)

**Ambassador Yuyun Wahyuningrum** (Chair and Representative of Indonesia to the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights)

**Catherine Meredith** (Barrister, Doughty Street Chambers, UK)

**Tiphonie Crittin** (Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Section, UNODC)

**Michael Flynn** (Executive Director, Global Detention Project)

**Moderator:** **Suzanne Hoff** (International Coordinator, La Strada International)

The GDP's interactive webinar series, launched in 2022, is aimed at briefing grassroots activists on how to harness the UN human rights system to challenge abusive and arbitrary migration-related detention practices in their country—and to initiate conversations surrounding pressing detention concerns with practitioners working around the world.

In April we hosted our largest webinar to-date. Welcoming more than 360 participants, we heard from four global experts on human trafficking about how the principle of non-punishment can be used to protect victims of trafficking who are detained for migration-related offences. Speakers discussed the legal framework for the non-punishment principle and its incompatibility with immigration detention, as well as regional and national perspectives of the principle's application—such as how countries have incorporated it into their national legislation, and the challenges faced in applying it.

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**There can be no doubt that when you place a trafficking victim behind bars or in a locked room or in a secure border camp because they do not have the appropriate papers to be in the country, you are punishing that person, likely in ways that are indelible, causing a harm that will never go away.**

*Michael Flynn, GDP*



## IN FOCUS: GDP in the Press

In 2023, we recorded more than 230 media, advocacy, and academic articles citing our work. Often, authors independently consulted our website and utilised our materials—but we also regularly assisted those who contacted us requesting research assistance.

**Problematic detention practices exist in many countries, but the Global Detention Project describes Australia's immigration detention policies as 'uniquely severe, arbitrary, and punitive'.**

M. Gleeson, *The Saturday Paper*, 2 December 2023

**A 2021 report by the immigration research center Global Detention Project extensively documented how the conditions and practices of Mexico's immigration centers had led to widespread protest by detained migrants.**

R. Aldana, *The Conversation*, 1 April 2023

### Headline News

*"Antalet fängslade migranter växer runt om i världen," Syre, January 2023*

*"Miracle Survivor: Afghan Refugee Escapes from Collapsed Turkish Prison - and Italian Migrant Boat Tragedy," The Telegraph, March 2023*

*"Editorial: Migrant Deaths at Mexican Detention Center Symbolize Failed Immigration Policies," LA Times, March 2023*

*"La Grecia rafforza i controlli nella zona del fiume Evros. I rapporti delle organizzazioni internazionali denunciano l'aumento di abusi e violazioni," La Repubblica, March 2023*

*"How the EU has Used the War in Ukraine to Expand its Border Regime," Transnational Institute, June 2023*

*"Statistics and Studies: Where is the Data?" Global Investigative Journalism Network, October 2023*

*"Indefinite Detention: How a Human Rights Triumph Became a Battle Over Australia's Borders," South China Morning Post, December 2023*

# 7. THE GDP TEAM AND GOVERNANCE

## Staff

### Michael Flynn

#### Executive Director

Michael founded the Global Detention Project in 2006 while a student at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva, where he received his PhD in International Relations. He previously was a project director at the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, D.C.; a coordinator at the Graduate Institute's Programme for the Study of Global Migration; and an editor at the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists in Chicago. He is co-author of *Immigration Detention in the European Union: In the Wake of the "Crisis"* (Springer 2020) and co-editor of *Challenging Immigration Detention: Academics, Activists, and Policy-Makers* (Edward Elgar 2017).

### Rachael Reilly

#### Senior Advocacy Coordinator

Rachael served as the GDP's advocacy coordinator during 2021-2023, during which time she played a key role organising the GDP's partner visits to Geneva as part of the Global Immigration Detention Observatory Project and broadening the scope of the GDP's advocacy work. She was the founding Refugee Policy Director at Human Rights Watch; served as Geneva Representative for the Women's Refugee Commission; and was a regional advocacy director for Oxfam International.

### Katie Welsford

#### Communications Officer

Katie has a background in non-profit communications and journalism specialising in conflict and displacement. She worked for the AMAR International Charitable Foundation, overseeing digital communications and campaigns, and as a coordinator for Reach All Women in War. As a freelance journalist, she has published in The Guardian, Daily Beast, and Le Monde Diplomatique. She holds an MSc in Political Science from the University of London's Birkbeck College and a BA in Social Geography from Durham University.

### Chloe Fung

#### Research Fellow

Chloe is a researcher with experience in data analysis and visualisation aimed at advancing rights protection and transparency. She was part of a pioneering project on immigration detention in Hong Kong (2020-2023) at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, where she spearheaded data development and built an online data repository. With an extensive background in refugee and asylum research in East Asia, Chloe leads the GDP's work on East Asian countries within the framework of the Global Immigration Detention Observatory,

### Abdul Aziz Muhamat

#### Research & Advocacy Fellow

Aziz is a refugee rights advocate who began his advocacy work as a detainee on Australia's offshore detention centre on Manus Island (Papua New Guinea). The 2019 Laureate of Geneva's Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders, Aziz advocates for the rights of refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants in detention, community detention, and post resettlement. He is leading the GDP's research and advocacy on countries in East Africa.

### Anne-Rachelle Boulanger

#### Research Fellow

Anne-Rachelle is a Toronto-based lawyer specialising in forced migration and international human rights. She holds an LLM from the University of Cambridge, a JD and MA from the University of Toronto, and a BA in International Development from McGill University. She is a long-time advocate for the rights of refugees and migrants, including with the Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers, and is leading a project at the GDP surveying detention laws and practices globally.

## Governance

A non-profit association under Swiss law, the Global Detention Project (GDP) has two main governance bodies: the General Assembly of association members, whose responsibilities include appointing the association's Executive Committee, which is responsible for managing the association, approving budgets, and authorising grants, among other activities. Executive Committee members, who participate on a voluntary basis, may appoint a Board that is intended to interact more closely with the Executive Director and provide assistance on short notice for a range of activities, including banking and finances, drafting contracts, addressing legal questions, and generally serving as an easily accessible advisory body to the Executive Director. Board members include the President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer of the Executive Committee.

The Board is directly involved in financial oversight of the association and has direct access to all of its financial information. Copies of banking and financial records are sent directly by the association's bank to the Treasurer. The association also has appointed a nonbinding Academic Advisory Council, which is made up of prominent academics and scholars working on issues central to the GDP's mandate. The academic council is intended to serve in a consultative capacity to the Executive Director, helping to ensure that the GDP's outputs meet the highest standards, providing advice on research, suggesting areas to focus GDP efforts, and collaborating with staff on producing materials published by the association.

## Executive Committee and Board Members

### Sahar Okhovat

(NSW Inspector of Custodial Services)

**GDP Chair/President of the Board**

### George Kourous

(UN Food and Agriculture Organization)

**Vice President of the Board**

### Yves Klein

(Monfrini Bitton Klein)

**Secretary of the Board**

### Pierre-Eric Simon

(Processus Immobilier SA)

**Treasurer of the Board**

### Roberta Cecchetti

(Independent Consultant/Chair Emeritus)

**Member of the Board**

### Meghna Abraham

(Independent Consultant/Founding Chair)

### Megan Day Paterson-Brown

(Webster University)

### Alexandra Dufresne

(Cornell University)

### Seta Hadesian

(Middle East Council of Churches)

### Kirsten Sandberg

(University of Oslo)

### Michaela Told

(HumanImpact5/HI5)

## Academic Advisory Council

**François Crépeau** (McGill University)

**Jeff Crisp** (Refugee Studies Centre, Oxford)

**Matthew Flynn** (Georgia Southern University)

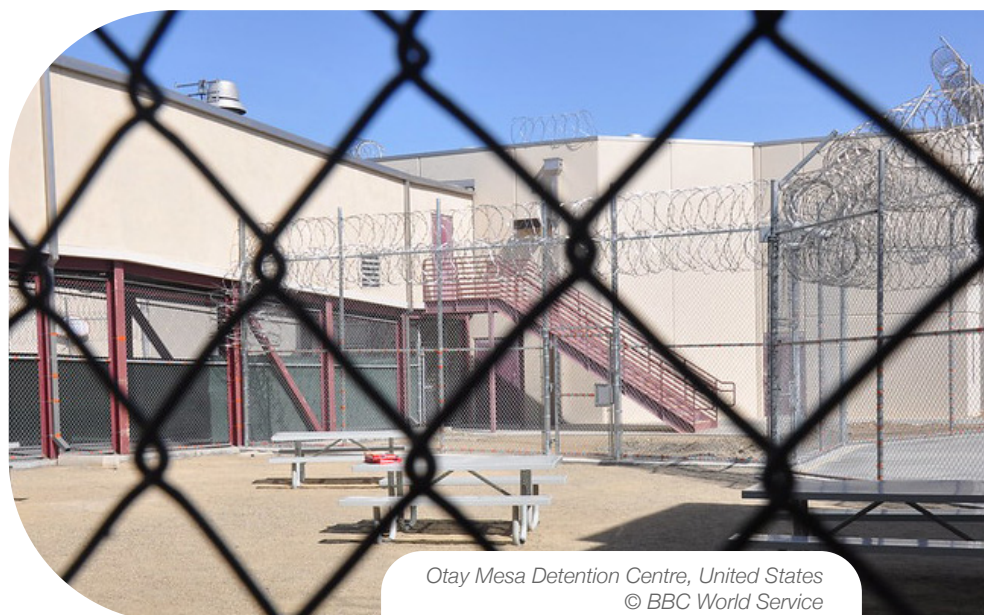
**Niels Frenzen** (University of Southern California)

**Elsbeth Guild** (Radboud University)

**Jussi Hanhimäki** (Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies)

**Donald Kerwin** (Journal on Migration and Human Security)

**Daniel Wilsher** (City University London)

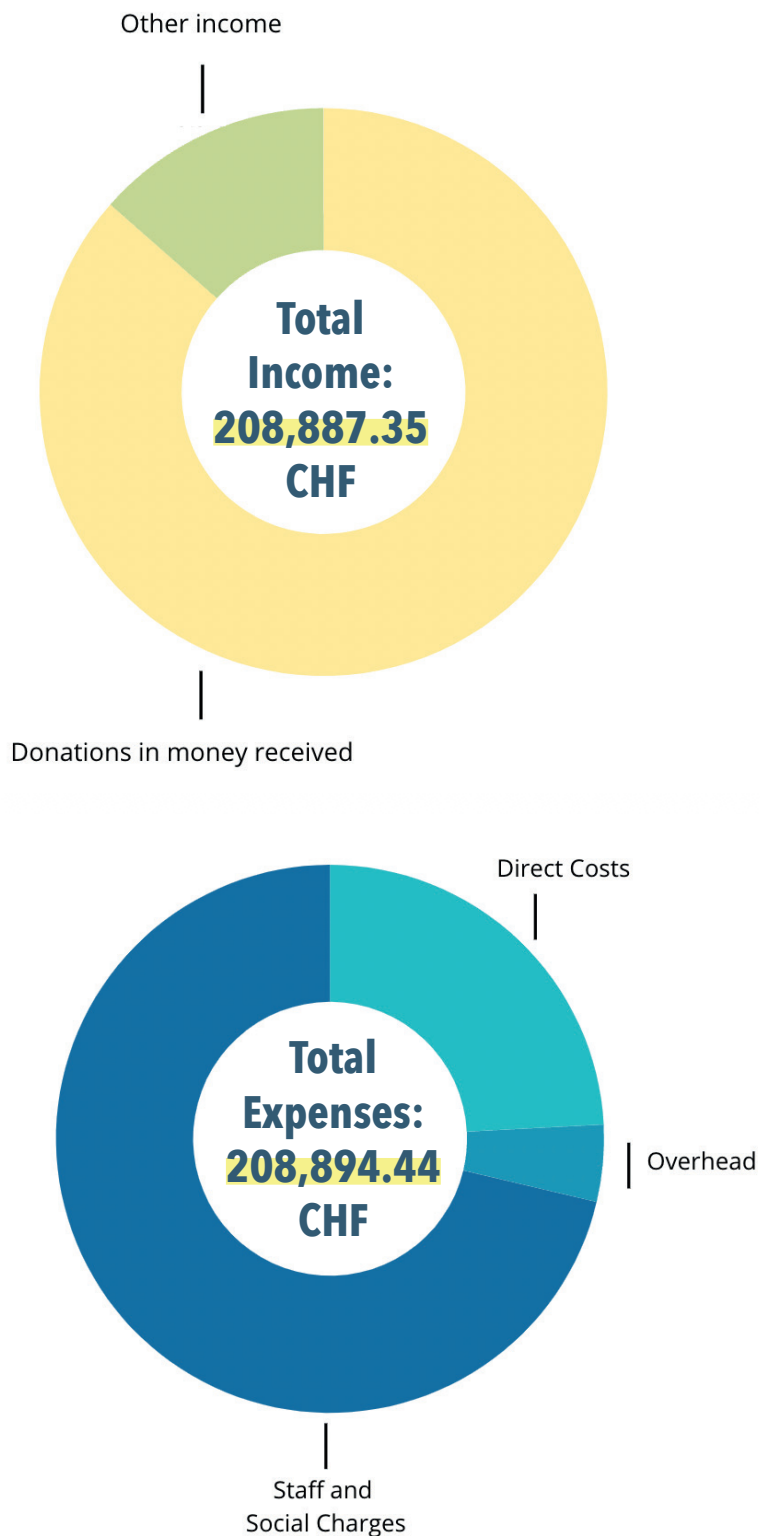


Otay Mesa Detention Centre, United States  
© BBC World Service

# 8. FINANCES

This is an extract of the Global Detention Project's financial statements for the year ending 31 December 2023. To request a copy of the full audit, please email [admin@globaldetentionproject.org](mailto:admin@globaldetentionproject.org)

## 2023 - Income and Expenses



## 9. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank our numerous financial supporters—including the Oak Foundation, the State and City of Geneva, and the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs—for their support of our work, as well as the many individuals who over the past year responded generously to our first-ever individual fundraising campaign. It goes without saying: Your support has made our work possible.

We would also like to thank our partners and numerous immigration and human rights experts around the world who collaborated with us during the year, including: Access Centre for Human Rights, ADC Memorial, Ambassador Yuyun Wahyuningrum, Association for Legal Intervention, Association for Public Interest Law, Catherine Meredith, Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Matias de Cordova A.C, Center for Justice and International Law, Centre for Migration Observation and Social Development in the Caribbean, Collective Aid, EuroMed Rights, Forum for Refugees Japan, Greg Constantine,

Hotline for Refugees and Migrants, Human Rights Monitoring Institute, Human Rights Watch, International Refugee Rights Association, Justice Centre Hong Kong, Lawyers for Human Rights, Level73, Migrant-Rights.org, Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, PICUM, Refugee Support Aegean, Ruki Fernando, Siobhán Mullally, Steven Caruana, Suzanne Hoff, Taiwan Association for Human Rights, Tiphonie Crittin, and the World Health Organisation, as well as various individuals and organisations who prefer to remain anonymous for security reasons.

We are extremely grateful to the students, research fellows, and interns who generously gave their time and energy to the GDP throughout the year. In particular, we would like to thank Silvana Maeder (University of Geneva) and Anne-Rachelle Boulanger (LLM, University of Cambridge), whose contributions to the GDP were invaluable.



REPUBLIC  
AND STATE  
OF GENEVA

POST TENEBRAS LUX



V I L L E D E  
G E N È V E



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
Confederazione Svizzera  
Confederaziun svizra



# GLOBALDETENTIONPROJECT

Global Detention Project  
3 rue de Varembé  
1202 Geneva, Switzerland  
[admin@globaldetentionproject.org](mailto:admin@globaldetentionproject.org)  
[www.globaldetentionproject.org](http://www.globaldetentionproject.org)