

Input for the Thematic Report of the Special Rapporteur on Torture on Current Issues and Good Practices in Prison Management

**Submission for the 55th Session of the
Human Rights Council**

**Joint Submission by Mobile Info Team and
Border Violence Monitoring Network**

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Border Violence Monitoring Network

◆ Reporting organisations

Mobile Info Team (MIT) is a Greece-based organisation that provides advice and assistance throughout all stages of the asylum procedure. MIT raises awareness and advocates for changes to the asylum system in Greece and works to end pushbacks as part of the Border Violence Monitoring Network.

Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN) [1] is a coalition of organisations working to document illegal pushbacks, collective expulsions, and police violence along the EU's external borders in the Western Balkans and Greece. The collection of data on illegal pushbacks and police violence is done by a consortium of independent field experts who are part of or cooperate with humanitarian support groups united through the Border Violence Monitoring Network.

◆ Pre-Removal Detention Centres in Greece

Between April and November 2022, MIT conducted research into the practical realities of the asylum procedure and the conditions within Pre-Removal Detention Centres (PRDCs) in Greece [2]. The findings emphasise BVMN's concern that PRDCs are a significant and ongoing challenge in preventing and responding to the torture and inhuman treatment of asylum seekers and third-country nationals in Greece.

BVMN's assessment that PRDCs in Greece are contributing to the torture or inhuman treatment of asylum seekers or third-country nationals is based on the in-depth research carried out by MIT, which included interviews with 50 respondents - including 46 who were held in PRDCs including people from Afghanistan, Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Kurdistan, Morocco, Pakistan, Syria and Turkey, between the ages of 16 and 51 years old. This assessment is further supported by BVMN's database which documents violence within state borders and contains testimonies taken from persons who have been subjected to detention within PRDCs in Greece.

BVMN affirms that the extended periods of detention and the prison-like conditions within PRDCs demonstrate why they should be viewed as a significant and ongoing challenge in preventing and responding to the torture and inhuman treatment of asylum seekers and third-country nationals in Greece. As such, we assert that PRDCs should be recognised as an emerging priority for the Special Rapporteur.

Furthermore, we also assert that PRDCs should be considered as a significant challenge in preventing and responding to the torture and inhuman treatment of asylum seekers and third-country nationals in Greece due to evidence of systematic violence in these facilities including the infliction of physical violence on detained third country nationals, deprivation of adequate food and drinking water, denial of access to healthcare including in emergency situations, and poor conditions of detention, in addition to the lack of independent monitoring of conditions within PRDCs.

➤ (A) Length of Detention

Although statutory limits permit asylum seekers to be detained in Greece for 18 months, the detention period for those held with the purpose of removal may be extended by an additional 18 months [3]. BVMN affirms that a legislative framework that allows asylum seekers to be held in detention for up to three years could significantly increase the risk of harm in detention and thus pose a significant barrier to preventing and responding to torture or inhuman treatment.

Additionally for third-country nationals, Greek law [4] sets the maximum time frame for detention at six months, but can be extended for an additional 12 months if a) the third-country national refuses to cooperate or b) the receipt of the necessary documents from third countries is delayed.

Research carried out by MIT has shown that despite statutory limits on detention duration, 45% of interviewed detainees were held for longer than six months [5]. Further highlighting our concern with the length of detention, MIT identified individuals who were held beyond the 18-months limit, and some who were repeatedly detained and released amounting to detention periods of up to 33 months. One interview respondent [6] detained at Amygdaleza PRDC explained: “There is one person who has been in detention for 22 months. So when new people arrive in the jail [PRDC], they ask how much time are you here? When we tell them that one person has been in the [PRDC] for 22 months, they have so much fear, tension and depression.”

(B) Carceral Environment

The research conducted by MIT uncovered a prevailing sentiment among detainees across Greece who viewed PRDCs as embodying a prison-like atmosphere. Notably, 50% of interviewees explicitly likened the PRDC they were held in to a prison. Additionally, over 20% of participants described feeling treated as criminals, and four individuals reported being treated like animals. This comparison between the PRDC as a prison was unanimous among detainees at the Fylakio PRDC [7].

In addition to detainees personally likening the conditions of PRDCs to that of prisons, BVMN asserts that the physical environment of these detention centres significantly reinforces such perceptions. BVMN reaffirms MIT’s findings that features of PRDCs including the presence of authorities carrying weapons, the use of CCTV cameras, the accommodation structures surrounded by barbed wire fences, double-fenced perimeters, metal cages or barred cells constitute a carceral landscape.

Furthermore, research carried out by MIT also uncovered that persons detained in PRDCs were often identified by their detention numbers rather than their names. They were additionally frequently subjected to handcuffing and faced unprovoked verbal insults and racist remarks from the authorities [8]. BVMN affirms that not only does such treatment visibly impact the mental wellbeing of detainees, but again further affirms that PRDCs are a significant and ongoing challenge in preventing and responding to the torture and inhuman treatment of asylum seekers and third-country nationals in Greece.

Areas of Concern

(A) Routine and Systematic Violence Against Third-Country Nationals

BVMN affirms that across the Greek immigration detention system, including in PRDCs, there is a continued and systematic pattern of violence that we affirm would amount to widespread human rights violations and incidents of torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.

Testimonies collected by BVMN's field-based partner organisations in 2022 show that 65% of respondents reported that they had been subjected to violence by authorities or witnessed violence by the authorities in formal detention facilities [9]. BVMN is concerned that such patterns of violence are endemic across PRDCs, but due to the lack of independent monitoring of PRDCs, such violations are going significantly underreported.

➤ (B) Lack of Access to Legal Counselling, Information and Translation and Legal Services

We assert that there is a widespread and systematic lack of access to legal counselling, information and translation and legal services within PRDCs on the mainland, which leaves people unable to complete their asylum procedure or appeal rejection decisions, thus endangering their access to human rights and fundamental freedoms, and appropriate protection and assistance [10].

➤ (C) Inadequate Food or Water

MIT's investigations revealed that across PRDCs the quality of food was consistently described as extremely poor. More than 80% of respondents interviewed raised complaints related to the food provided. Respondents felt that there was enough food provided, usually 2-3 meals a day, yet the terrible quality resulted in the majority of people not eating it, preferring to buy dry food items from the markets where possible instead.

According to interviews conducted by MIT, individuals described the food as not fresh, often spoiled, and even mouldy, rendering it inedible. Some highlighted the minimal variety, with the same food served daily. Notably in Corinth PRDC multiple respondents complained about only being served potatoes every day. One respondent stated: "It's not fresh, sometimes some meals are left for 3 days, you cannot eat them, they don't care about that. And then sometimes they bring you one meal for the whole day. If it is patat [potatoes], the same morning afternoon for the whole week. The same food for the whole week."

Further to the significant concerns related to inadequate provisions of food, MIT uncovered that whilst most respondents had free access to tap water one individual reported that unless you paid for bottled water, there was only access to dirty water from the bathroom. This resulted in stomach problems and skin infections.

➤ (D) Inhuman Conditions of Detention

MIT's research also identified that the general conditions inside PRDCs was consistently reported to be poor. Interview respondents reported that not only are the physical buildings and furniture broken, dilapidated and bare, but basic facilities such as washing machines, beds, lighting, toilets and showers were also dysfunctional. Based on the research carried out by MIT, BVMN identified the following issues to be a significant challenge in preventing and responding to the torture and inhuman treatment of asylum seekers and third-country nationals in Greece:

Inadequate State of Repair and Cleanliness in PRDCs

PRDCs have been evaluated and found to fall short of expected standards in terms of repair and cleanliness. Reports indicate a general lack of cleanliness, with instances of mould and infestations of rodents and insects.

In interviews conducted by MIT, seven respondents specifically highlighted the cleanliness issues in PRDCs.

While detainees are responsible for maintaining cleanliness in the spaces themselves, they are not provided with cleaning products for their rooms, bodies, or clothes. Essential items like toilet paper, towels, or sanitary products are also not supplied but can be purchased from certain PRDC markets.

Additionally, MIT discovered a disparity in access to functional facilities, such as working showers or air conditioning, in Amygdaleza PRDC. This has heightened tensions among detainees, and respondents reported on the suffering of some detainees consequently.

Denial of a Means of Rest or the Provision of Clean Bedding

MIT's research shows that the cleanliness levels, availability of essential items like bedding, and the size of space allocated to detainees do not meet expected standards. Out of the 46 interviewees in PRDC, six respondents specifically mentioned a shortage of mattresses for all detainees in a cell. Only 12 individuals indicated that everyone was provided with a mattress [11].

Inadequate Access to Toilet Facilities

Multiple respondents highlighted that the number of individuals sharing a single toilet was unreasonably high, with many toilets either in need of repair or extremely dirty. For instance, in Xanthi PRDC, 50 people were reported to be sharing one toilet, while in Corinth PRDC, it was shared among 48 individuals.

◆ (E) Deprivation of Access to Healthcare

Finally, a case analysis by MIT of over 150 enquiries made by individuals who were detained in PRDCs highlighted that people consistently reported that medical access in detention facilities was the most challenging issue that they faced, resulting in reported incidents of self-harm [12]. This is supplemented by reports which detail the limited or total lack of medical personnel present in PRDCs in 2023 (in particular, in Amygdaleza, Corinth and Xanthi where there are no doctors at all, for the some 1,794 detainees who were being held in these PRDCs as at the end of April 2023) confirming that conditions do not ensure adequate standards for long-term detention [13].

References

[1] Border Violence Monitoring Network. n.d. About Us. Available [here](#).

[2] Mobile Info Team. 2023. ““Prison for Papers”: Last Resort Measures as Standard Procedure.” Available [here](#).

[3] See AIDA Country Report: Greece, 2021 Update, available [here](#).

[4] See Article 15(6) of the Directive 2008/115/EC and Article 30 of Hellenic Republic Law No. 3907/2011.

[5] Mobile Info Team. 2023. ““Prison for Papers”: Last Resort Measures as Standard Procedure.” Available [here](#).

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

[9] BVMN. 2023. “Dark Rooms, Degrading Treatment, and Denial: The Use of Violence in Greece’s Pre-Removal Detention Centres.” Available [here](#).

[10] MIT. 2023. ““Prison for Papers”: Last Resort Measures as Standard Procedure.” Available [here](#).

[11] Mobile Info Team. 2023. “Prison for papers”: Last Resort Measures Used as Standard Procedure. Available [here](#).

[12] Ibid.

[13] Refugee Support Aegean and Pro-ASYL. 2023. The state of the Greek asylum system, twelve years since M.S.S. Available [here](#).