

Mobile Info Team has published a report based on research carried out over the past year. The research focused on over 50 testimonies with people who were detained in one of six pre-removal detention centres on mainland Greece including Paranesti (Drama), Xanthi, Amygdaleza (Menidi), Corinth (Corinthos), Tavros (Petrou Ralli) or Fylakio (Orestiada). We spoke with people from Afghanistan, Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Kurdistan, Morocco, Pakistan, Syria and Türkiye, between the ages of 16 and 51 years old. Our questions were based on access to asylum, legal counselling, information, translation, hygiene conditions, basic facilities, medical and psychological care, access to education or recreational activities, and the practice of protests.

- **Third country nationals**, who do not have the legal right to stay in Greece and are not going through the asylum procedure or have received a rejection, can be detained in pre-removal detention centres while they are waiting to be deported.
- **Asylum seekers** can be detained in pre-removal detention centres for specific reasons, including on public order grounds which means that they are considered a danger to society.

## KEY FINDINGS

### 1. Regarding procedure & access to rights

- According to EU law, detention should only be used as a **last resort**. However, our research highlights that in recent years, particularly since the changes in legislation after the Nea Demokratia government was elected in 2019, the detention of third country nationals has become systematic by Greek law, and normalised for asylum seekers in practice. Most of the people we spoke to were arrested by the police, checked for documents, and detained in a police station before being transferred to a pre-removal detention centre for long periods of time.
- **45% of our interviewees were held for longer than six months.** Respondents reported the repeat cycles of detention and release, sometimes leading to people being detained for a total of 33 months. This is due to the lack of formal readmissions taking place from Greece to countries such as Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, due to administrative delays.
- Our research also highlighted that there is a critical **lack of information** and understanding regarding detainees' rights in detention, their general situation or the asylum procedure. **More than 90%** of the people we interviewed said they had not received any information regarding their status, the reason for their detention or how to proceed. Further analysis of Mobile Info Team's records revealed significant confusion among our clients held in detention centres, worsened by the lack of translation services. **40% of respondents were not provided with translation** and relied on support from fellow detainees and at least 30% were forced to sign documents in a language they did not understand.
- The Greek law states that free legal assistance should be offered to applicants to challenge their detention order. But in practice, no free legal aid system has been set up to challenge detention; **over 80% of respondents** did not have access to free legal assistance, and many had to use a private lawyer paying fees of up to **2000 euros**.

## 2. Regarding conditions of detention

- The conditions within the PRDCs are extremely poor. **61% respondents** across PRDCs reported poor hygiene conditions, including reports that centres are dirty, harbouring **mould and infestations of rodents and insects**. The structures were described as dilapidated, unfit for animals and unhygienic, and more than 50% of respondents compared pre-removal detention centres to **prisons**. This has an evidently detrimental impact on the psychological wellbeing of detainees, who described being treated as criminals despite being applicants of international protection. This was amplified by the critical lack of access to functioning toilets, showers, beds, mattresses, clothing and recreational activities, which are non-existent. For example in Xanthi and Corinth, **one toilet was reportedly shared by around 50 people**.
- **Medical care**, including both physical and psychological health care, was extremely limited across detention centres in Greece, and only accessible for urgent cases. This was reported in **80% of the interviews**, and raised as one of the most challenging issues Mobile Info Team's clients face in detention. During certain periods, there have been no doctors present. Detainees reported waiting several months to get an appointment, for example in Corinth, detainees reported waiting up to **five months**.
- Where access was provided translation was rarely provided with medical care, forcing patients to request support from fellow detainees breaching patient confidentiality.
- As a result of the conditions of detention, the mental health of detainees deteriorated considerably; **nearly a quarter of respondents** referenced the prevalence of severely deteriorating mental health in detention including **depression, suicidal thoughts and practices of self harm**.

We conclude our report with recommendations for the Greek state to comply with European law and its own law in relation to:

- use of detention (which should be an exceptional measure of last resort, not used if there is no prospect of removal);
- access to information in detention and asylum procedures;
- access to translations and translator;
- detention of minors;
- detention and conditions of detention in police stations;
- detention conditions in pre-removal detention centres and access to hygiene products;
- access of non-governmental organisations to detention centres;
- access to medical care, including psychological care;
- access to recreational facilities in detention centres.

We also ask the **European Commission** not to allocate funds to the Greek state until an investigation, which must be independent, is carried out. The results of the investigation should be public. We would like to see proceedings against Greece opened at European level and measures taken to ensure that the Greek state complies with European law. We also ask for a visit of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment to all pre-removal detention centres.