

MONTHLY REPORT | MAY 2025

ILLEGAL PUSHBACKS AND BORDER VIOLENCE REPORTS

Thematic report: **Detention**

BVMN is a network of watchdog organisations active in the Balkans, Greece, Turkey, Poland and France including Rigardu, Mobile Info Team, Collective Aid, Blindspots, Pushback Alarm Austria, I Have Rights, Center for Legal Aid, Mission Wings, InfoPark, Legal Centre Lesvos, We Are Monitoring and Human Rights Observers.

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**Border Violence
Monitoring Network**

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Thematic report: **Detention**

This is the first of a series of thematic reports, where we will look into overarching themes affecting people on the move across Europe.

This report looks into the detention conditions and practices faced by people on the move in multiple countries in Europe, in the context of increasing externalisation and securitisation of borders by the EU and its member states.

While these practices are examined in relation to existing national and international legislations in order to highlight the states' lack of accountability, BVMN is against the use of immigration detention in all circumstances.



Methodology and Terminology

REPORTING NETWORK

BVMN [1] is a collaborative project between multiple grassroots organisations and NGOs working along the Western Balkan Route and Greece, documenting violations at borders directed towards people on the move. The partners have a common website database, used as a platform to collate testimonies of illegal pushbacks which are gathered through interviews.

METHODOLOGY

The methodological process for these interviews leverages the close social contact that we have as independent volunteers with refugees and migrants to monitor pushbacks at multiple borders. When individuals return with significant injuries or stories of abuse, one of our violence reporting volunteers will sit down with them to collect their testimony. Although the testimony collection itself is typically with a group no larger than five persons, the pushback groups which they represent can exceed 50 persons. We have a standardised framework for our interview structure which blends the collection of hard data (dates, geo-locations, officer descriptions, photos of injuries/medical reports, etc.) with open narratives of the abuse.

TERMINOLOGY

The term pushback is a key component of the situation that unfolded along the EU borders (Hungary and Croatia) with Serbia in 2016, after the closure of the Balkan Route. Pushback describes the informal expulsion (without due process) of an individual or group to another country. This lies in contrast to the term “deportation”, which is conducted in a legal framework. Pushbacks have become an important, if unofficial, part of the migration regime of EU countries and elsewhere.

ABBREVIATIONS

BiH – Bosnia and Herzegovina
HRV – Croatia
SRB – Serbia
SLO – Slovenia
ROM – Romania
HUN – Hungary

AUT – Austria
MNK – North Macedonia
GRC – Greece
BGR – Bulgaria
TUR – Turkey
EU – European Union

[1] BVMN is a network of watchdog organisations active in the Balkans, Greece, Turkey, Poland and France, including Rigardu, Mobile Info Team, Collective Aid, Blindspots, Pushback Alarm Austria, I Have Rights, Center for Legal Aid, Mission Wings, Legal Centre Lesvos, We Are Monitoring, InfoPark, Human Rights Observers and Calais Food Collective



The New Pact and the expansion of detention

Objective 13 of the 2018 Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration explicitly states that detention should only be applied when it is strictly necessary. The Compact, endorsed by 152 countries, including 19 EU Member States, reaffirms the commitment of these governments to uphold international human rights, humanitarian, and labour law. Objective 13 also requires that detention, when used, must not be arbitrary: it must be lawful, necessary, reasonable, and proportionate in each individual case, assessed on its own merits.

Detention has increasingly become a central pillar of EU migration policy. What was initially framed as a last resort is now deployed routinely, expanded and normalised. The New Pact on Migration and Asylum expected to be implemented in June 2026 — alongside proposals such as the new Return Regulation— codifies this shift, expanding both the scope and duration of immigration detention and embedding it within a broader architecture of containment. From legal fictions to surveillance, this introduction traces how EU policy is normalising detention solely for migration control purposes. As detailed throughout this report, the harm inflicted by detention is already playing out daily in ways that profoundly violate people's rights, safety, and dignity.

Detention features prominently in key components of the New Pact, including the Screening Regulation, the Asylum Procedure Regulation and Return Border Procedures.

Screening Regulation: *de facto* detention

The Screening Regulation (2024/1356) establishes pre-entry screening that precede border procedures. It applies to third-country nationals (TCNs) who arrive “irregularly” at the EU’s external borders, are disembarked from Search and Rescue Operations or are apprehended within EU territory without having undergone border checks. There



Introduction: The New Pact and the expansion of detention

are structural flaws in how EU policies frame irregular entry primarily as a security concern, ignoring the root causes of movement and the fact that such entry often remains one of the few accessible options for people in forced migration, including those seeking international protection and asylum. Moreover, these policies consistently fail to acknowledge Europe's historical and ongoing responsibilities – stemming from colonial legacies and the continued extraction of resources by Western companies from many of the countries people are forced to flee.

The screening process allows for detention of up to seven days, extendable to ten. The stated aim is to verify identity, assess security risks, and conduct health checks. Many CSOs have already denounced that the screening and border procedures (see below) will result in an increasing number of people –including children and families– being held in prison-like facilities. These facilities are modelled on the Closed Controlled Access Centres (CCACs) already operating in Greece, which are equipped with motion sensors, biometric controls, constant surveillance, and fingerprint-access systems, embodying a digital infrastructure of containment.

One of the most concerning aspects of the Screening Regulation (2024/1356) is the formalisation of the legal fiction of non-entry. People would be required to stay within closed or restricted zones where they are monitored and subjected to controls. This legal fiction allows states to assert that a third-country national's arrival is only officially recognized once it has been legally approved, regardless of their actual physical presence within the territory. Therefore, member States might not be required to grant people the full range of rights typically owed under EU law. In effect, this has a very real and concerning risk of creating a legal vacuum in which basic safeguards are suspended.

Asylum Procedure Regulation: expanding detention through border procedures

The Asylum Procedure Regulation (APR 2024/1348) deepens the detention paradigm by institutionalizing de facto detention. This essentially entails all international protection applicants being subject to a deprivation of liberty upon application, and the fast-tracking of procedures that results in little space for effective remedy and appeal. In the asylum border procedures, people can be detained for up to 12 weeks. If the asylum application is rejected people will be channeled to the Return Border Procedure, during which they will remain detained for a maximum of another 12 weeks.



Introduction: The New Pact and the expansion of detention

Criticism has been raised on how the APR's new mandatory border procedures are set to lower protections and safeguards for many groups of applicants. Moreover, The New Pact's approach to vulnerability is criticized for lacking clear definitions and consistent application across its instruments, resulting in arbitrary identification and protection measures. The model risks undermining binding international human rights standards and reinforces the punitive and exclusionary dynamics seen in the EU's long-standing hotspot approach —which, for nearly a decade, has led to overcrowded, prison-like environments, with delayed or non-existent vulnerability screening and support [2]. Despite claims that detention should be used only as a “last resort,” the Pact anticipates a widespread increase in detention throughout Europe.

Return Regulation : escalating detention through deportation policy

On March 11th 2025, the European Commission published a new draft proposal aimed at intensifying and accelerating the deportations of undocumented people across the EU. Returns have often been described as the “missing piece” of the New Pact. The proposed Return Regulation —which could more accurately be described as a *Deportation Regulation*— represents a significant expansion of the EU's reliance on immigration detention. The Regulation proposes to increase the maximum duration of detention for the scope of returns from 18 to 24 months. Detention can be extended further when individuals are deemed to pose a threat to public security. This marks a concerning escalation in the use of detention over the past decade, reflecting an increasingly broader shift from exceptional use to a quasi-systematic enforcement tool within migration governance.

The Regulation introduces exceedingly broad criteria for justifying detention, particularly through the presumption of a “risk of absconding”. Factors used to assess this risk —such as a lack of legal residence, or previous non-compliance— are often structural in nature and beyond the individual's control. For instance, even people experiencing homelessness could be affected by the Regulation, raising serious concerns of social discrimination and disproportionate impact on marginalized groups. Moreover, the Regulation does not exclude children and families from detention, despite longstanding international commitments —to end immigration detention of children in all circumstances. Furthermore, there is the risk of arbitrary detention

[2] Initially introduced as part of the EU's Agenda on Migration, hotspots were meant to facilitate identification, registration, and fingerprinting of new arrivals. In practice, however, they have evolved into de facto detention centres, marked by systemic overcrowding, prolonged stays in inhumane conditions, and structural failures in vulnerability screening and access to protection.



Introduction: The New Pact and the expansion of detention

compounded by the possibility of detaining people solely for the purpose of identifying or verifying their nationality, without sufficient procedural safeguards. This is particularly problematic for stateless persons or those unable to obtain identity documents due to conflict, state collapse, or persecution.

A dangerous normalisation

Even though the stated intent of immigration detention is to prevent unauthorized entry or hold people while awaiting deportation –already a significant restriction on people’s freedom of movement and agency–, this cannot be read solely as a matter of migration control. Detention must also be understood as serving punitive, stigmatising, and dehumanising functions, in the broader context of increasingly aggressive national and EU-level policies targeting people on the move, and founded on racial discrimination.

Thus, detention periods have been steadily extended with each new policy proposal. The time when administrative detention lasted only a few days or weeks is long past. It is now being proposed that such detention be extended to up to 24 months—and even beyond, when vague security concerns are invoked. It is worth recalling that this detention is solely based on immigration status, governed by rules that are, at their core, political preferences made in a context where regular or safe pathways are being systematically eroded.

Additionally, albeit not officially “prisons”, these detention facilities look like prisons, function like prisons, and in many cases, are worse than prisons. Even if governments do not call it *de jure* detention, if someone is confined, monitored, or pressured in a way that limits their liberty, it’s considered *de facto* detention.

In the end, stripped of narrative spin and political propaganda, we are left with a profound erosion of the right to freedom of movement. Moreover, beyond the policy framework outlined in this introduction, in practice, arbitrary and *de facto* detention is already widespread –causing enormous harm to people on the move and happening not only in official detention facilities, but also in unofficial facilities such as police stations and airports, where even the most basic needs and rights are unmet. These are places where violence –physical, psychological, emotional– is commonplace, where the dignity of individuals disappears into the shadows. The Pact and the newly proposed Return Regulation do not simply permit this cruelty, they legitimise it. As we advocate for a society based on care and freedom for everyone, it is our duty, as civil society, to recognise that in these times of punitive migration policy, this is the wrong solution to the wrong issue.



Introduction: The New Pact and the expansion of detention

Terms:

- **Arbitrary detention** is the deprivation of liberty without a valid legal basis, or in a manner that is unjust, unpredictable, disproportionate, or discriminatory, and often lacking essential procedural safeguards such as access to legal counsel or judicial review. (see: [UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention](#))
- **De facto detention** occurs when a person is effectively deprived of their liberty in practice —such as in transit zones, reception centers, or border camps— even if no formal detention order has been issued or recognized by law. De facto detention can be understood as a measure which in practice amounts to deprivation of liberty but which states do not formally qualify as such. *De facto* opposes to *de jure*, i.e. the legal concept that refers to what happens according to the law, in contrast to what happens in practice or in reality (see: [ECRE, Boundaries of Liberty: Asylum and de Facto Detention in Europe](#), 2018, [Picum, Immigration Detention, What Does the Law Say?, 2022](#)).
- **Administrative detention** refers to the confinement of individuals based on administrative measure rather than a criminal conviction (see [Melting Pot Europa- General Assembly on Administrative Detention, 2023](#))

UPDATE ON THE SITUATION



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Since 2015, the European Union has allocated over €200 million to Serbia alone to strengthen migration and border management as part of its broader strategy of externalizing migration control to its periphery. Of this, €130 million has been directed specifically toward managing migration and preventing irregularized crossings, while €30 million has supported enhanced border security and surveillance. Additional EU funds have covered humanitarian assistance, including shelter, food, healthcare, and education, but always within a framework that prioritizes control of people narrated as dangerous.

These funds have been channelled through instruments such as the EU Trust Fund for Africa, the European Refugee Fund, and the Internal Security Fund (ISF); and their implementation is carried out through operational partnerships with IOM, UNHCR, and local NGOs. Such partnerships embed the EU's border control agenda into the Western Balkans, effectively outsourcing detention, pushbacks, and surveillance to non-EU states.

In practice, the EU uses Serbia and other Western Balkan countries as buffer zones to stop people on the move from reaching EU territory. By leveraging promises of EU accession and the lure of continued financial support, the EU pressures these states to carry out its restrictive migration policies, often involving arbitrary detention and poor conditions that violate basic rights. This approach illustrates how the EU's externalization of border control shifts the burden and the human cost of Fortress Europe onto neighbouring states and the people trapped within their borders. Expectedly, despite the EU's collaboration with local partners and massive funding, access to official facilities remains highly restricted, contributing to a lack of transparency and independent oversight. This lack of transparency is especially present around detention centers in Serbia. Information about their operations, conditions, and the rights of detainees is limited, making independent assessment of the situation difficult, almost impossible to monitor abuses or hold authorities accountable. Associations like Collective Aid and Infopark do not have access to detention centers. This secrecy is not incidental, rather a key part of the externalization system in which the EU exempts itself from any responsibility as the violations happen somewhere else – out of sight, out of mind.

This lack of transparency in the detention system also reflects a broader trend in Serbia, where opaque governance and limited public oversight are systemic issues. The country has faced repeated criticism for secrecy and lack of accountability in various sectors, for example, recent student blockades demanded transparency



around the collapse of the train station roof in Novi Sad, highlighting how information on public safety and governance is routinely withheld. This culture of opacity creates fertile ground for impunity when it comes to human rights violations at borders and within detention centres.

In many EU and non-EU countries, immigration detention is routinely used. Instead of being a measure of last resort, as international law requires, it has become the default response to irregularized migration, used strategically to deter people from entering or staying. Serbia is no exception to this trend.

The deprivation of liberty of people on the move in Serbia reveals serious legal inconsistencies and widespread human rights concerns, mirroring patterns seen across Europe. Detention is often arbitrary, prolonged, and poorly monitored. This section outlines the conditions in several detention facilities, as well as other forms of informal or *de facto* detention that people on the move frequently face in Serbia.

Overview of the detention/deportation facilities

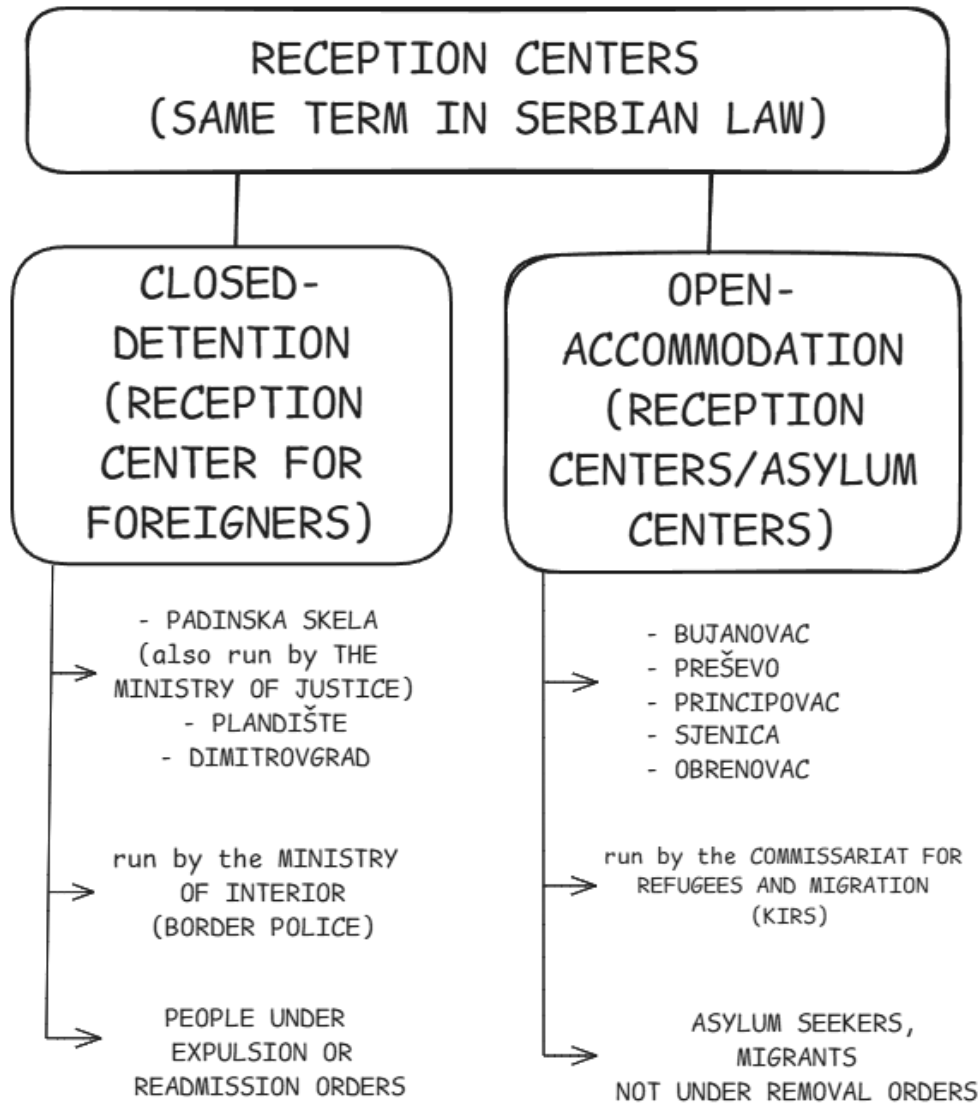
In Serbia, there are multiple facilities often called detention centers but, legally, they all fall under a single category: the Reception Center for Foreigners (Prihvatni centar za strance). All of them operate under the same framework in the Law on Foreigners and are run by the Ministry of Interior. The terminology can be confusing because the term “Reception Center” is used for two very different things: closed detention (officially Reception Centers for Foreigners) and open accommodation (colloquially called migrant camps, refugee camps, etc., but legally referred to as Reception Centers or Reception Centers for Migrants — Prihvatni centri / Prihvatni centri za migrante).

Under Serbian law, closed detention facilities like Padinska Skela, Plandište, or Dimitrovgrad are officially classified as Reception Centers for Foreigners, but in practice they are places where people are held in detention under expulsion or readmission orders. The ambiguity of language often causes confusion as it blurs the line between detention and accommodation. For clarity, in the following text these facilities will be referred to as detention centers (DC), to better reflect their true function.

In addition to these official immigration detention centers run by the Ministry of Interior, foreigners who are apprehended for irregular border crossing are frequently prosecuted for misdemeanors and may serve short custodial sentences in ordinary prisons or local jails managed by the Prison Administration under the Ministry of



Justice. This means that, in practice, detention for immigration-related reasons takes place both in detention centers and in the wider prison system -without clear coordination between the two, which can result in limited access to asylum procedures and legal aid.



There are three official detention centers in Serbia and one detention facility in the Nikola Tesla Airport, in Belgrade. Two of these are strategically located near EU borders.



1. The Padinska Skela facility: situated northeast of Belgrade, in the municipality of Palilula, the Padinska Skela Detention Centre is located adjacent to the well-known Padinska Skela correctional facility. The entire facility operates under the Ministry of Justice as part of a larger correctional complex, its dedicated unit for foreigners functions as a detention center within the meaning of the Law on Foreigners, placing it under the Ministry of Interior's operational framework for expulsion and readmission. This overlapping responsibility, one site managed by two ministries for different purposes, contributes to confusion about its status and oversight.

With a capacity of 110 places following renovation works completed in 2022, it is the largest of Serbia's three official detention centres. Serbian NPM [3] visited Padinska Skela in 2023 and reported poor conditions of sanitary facilities in dormitories and common areas. The beds are equipped with mattresses and sheets, which are reportedly washed once a week. Still, NPM described the presence of bed bugs. Others highlighted the lack of proper medical care in detention centers in Serbia generally, including Padinska Skela. There is no health care screening nor vulnerability assessment upon admission.

2. Plandište Detention Centre: Situated near the Romanian border, it was opened in 2022 with support from the EU and has a capacity of 100. Even though it is used for the administrative detention of migrants who have received expulsion orders, to date, no deportations have reportedly taken place from this facility. Most detainees are released upon reaching the maximum 180-day detention limit, in accordance with Serbian law. Hence, the centre reflects broader regional trends of prolonged administrative detention without effective return procedures.

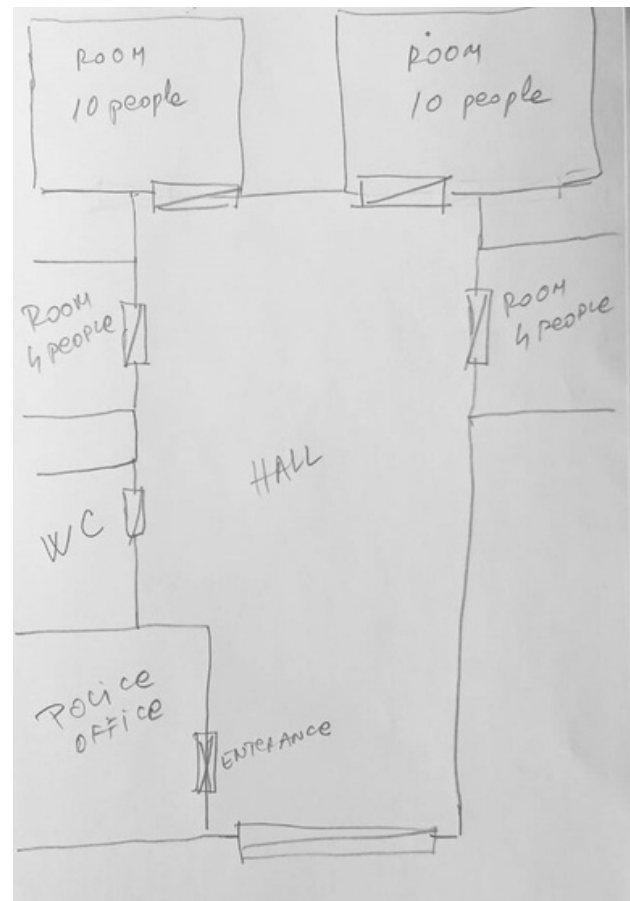
IOM has access to all detention centers within the framework of the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme. However, the transparency of the decision-making process regarding participation in AVRR remains limited. Testimonies indicate that people on the move often lack clear, translated information and legal counsel before agreeing to return. The implementation of Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programs within detention facilities raises serious concerns about whether returns are truly voluntary. Many people on the move in the region who chose to participate in AVRR have testified that they did so out of exhaustion and sheer despair, seeing "voluntary" return to their country of origin as the only way to escape the inhumane and degrading conditions of detention.

[3] National Preventive Mechanism established under the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT). This mechanism is tasked with monitoring places of detention in Serbia to prevent torture and ill-treatment.



3. Dimitrovgrad Detention Centre: Located in eastern Serbia –near the border with Bulgaria. It has a capacity of approximately 100 people and is primarily used to detain people on the move apprehended near the Bulgarian border. Similarly to Plandište, this Detention Center is meant to be used for expulsions and readmissions, however information from the field says that most people are released after 180 days. The centre consists of 24 basic dormitories equipped with bunk beds and minimal storage space. Each dormitory has large windows with metal bars. The common area is around 60m² and also serves as a dining room. The outdoor area is around 50m², made of concrete walls and fenced off. This area is completely unequipped. Conditions have been frequently described as austere and inadequate by human rights observers.

4. Nikola Tesla Airport: People who are detained at the airport are placed in premises located in the transit zone, at the far end of the gate corridor. It is not possible to assess the capacity of these premises, as they have never been designed as detention facilities. People who want to seek asylum are required to do it at the airport, but their right to do so is often ignored. While they are supposed to be able to access free legal aid, even when they are not allowed to apply for asylum, there is no information about this in the premises where they are detained. Free legal aid is provided by the Belgrade Center for Human Rights, IDEAS and APC. However, detained potential asylum seekers must contact these organisations directly, they cannot do so through intermediaries, which makes this essential counsel and information even less accessible. Even though access to the Nikola Tesla detention facility is extremely limited, a BVMN member organization was able to obtain a description of the premises, and based on that, we created a schematic drawing of what the facility looks like. According to it, the Nikola Tesla detention facility would be equipped to hold up to 28 people.



Layout of Detention Facility at Nikola Tesla Airport.
Source: BVMN



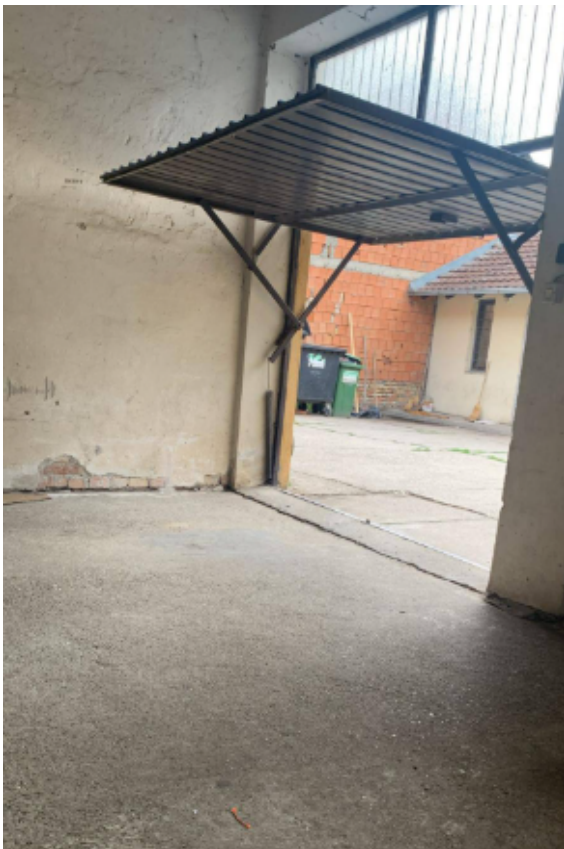
Following information gathered in the field, there is a doctor who visits occasionally to provide basic primary health care. For any other medical needs, detainees must be taken to a hospital upon the doctor's recommendation. The space itself has a number of toilets and food is brought in because people are not allowed to go out. The number of meals and types are unknown. Additionally, the *modus operandi* is that people are detained until there is a next available flight to the country they arrived from, regardless of whether or not this is their country of origin.

Informal detention

Detention practices in Serbia extend beyond official facilities. People on the move apprehended by Hungarian police and returned to Serbia are, according to multiple testimonies, often held by Serbian authorities in abandoned houses in the vicinity of Kanjiža. These facilities are not part of the official reception or detention infrastructure and lack basic living conditions, including heating, sanitation, and electricity. People on the move reported being detained there for one to four days without access to legal aid, hygiene, food, or the ability to contact their families. Such *de facto* detention

occurs without a formal legal basis, violating Article 27 of the Serbian Law on Foreigners ("Zakon o strancima", Sl. glasnik RS, br. 24/2018 i 31/2019), which requires any restriction on liberty to be based on law, time-limited, and subject to appeal.

According to testimonies gathered by the BVMN member organisation Infopark, people on the move, including women and children, apprehended while crossing from Serbia into Hungary are pushed back and then detained in Kanjiža, a small town in northern Serbia's Vojvodina region. They are reportedly held in a police station garage – a space entirely unfit for detention. One person described the garage as containing only a single bench, a table, and two chairs, with no toilet or shower facilities. Food is provided only if detainees have cash for police officers to buy it for them. Some people are held there for several days



Garage in Kanjiža Used for Migrant Detention.
Source: Anonymous



before being transferred to the Reception Center in Bujanovac or Preševo which are located on the opposite end of the country, near the borders with Kosovo and North Macedonia. The removal of people on the move from the borders of the EU, not only through pushbacks but also through violence within the state's borders, such as inhumane and degrading detention and forced removals, is a pattern we have been documenting in Serbia for some time.



POM detained in Kanjiža. Source: Anonymous



Conditions in Kanjiža. Source: Anonymous



Additionally, people on the move reported being kept for several hours inside police vans (commonly referred to as 'marice'), sometimes without access to water or toilets. This was confirmed through a conversation with a man who was initially detained in a police van for six hours before being transferred to a detention centre, stated:

"we needed food and drink, but they did not give us anything to eat or drink for a day."

Such temporary detentions are not formally recorded or legally regulated, raising serious concerns under Article 25 of the Constitution of Serbia and Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which prohibit inhuman or degrading treatment. People on the move described being held in these vehicles for up to eight hours, sometimes in extreme weather conditions, without explanation or legal documentation.

Moreover, multiple testimonies report that police officers frequently target people on the move outside formal detention settings. In one account shared with Collective Aid, police were seen patrolling around an information center regularly visited by Collective Aid. Officers reportedly stopped individuals and demanded bribes, often around €100, in exchange for their release.

Conditions in Detention Centers

The following sections are based on insights gathered through conversations that field teams from BVMN member organisations have had with people on the move who have directly experienced detention. This information is also supported by additional desk research to provide a broader context and deeper understanding of the issues described.

Deteriorated living conditions

Detention centers in Serbia –Padinska Skela, Plandište, and Dimitrovgrad– exhibit deteriorated living conditions and serious human rights concerns. Many detainees live in overcrowded rooms (for example, five people in 21m² at Padinska Skela) with poor sanitation, broken showers, and reports of bed bugs. Shared bathrooms are often



unhygienic, with broken taps and insufficient maintenance. We need to note that the last visit to these centers took place in 2023, so we are unsure if there were any improvements made in the meantime.

However, following conversations with people on the move, Collective Aid reports on inadequate access to showers and hygiene products. Respondents (1) and (2) recounted that they were only allowed to leave their cell once a week to shower, and they were not given any soap or shampoo. Consequently, they cleaned themselves with 'freezing' water from the toilet sink. A fifth respondent further attested to these conditions, reporting that he could only leave his cell once a week to shower. Moreover, respondent (4) described his cell as 'small' and 'dirty', claiming:

"a real person would not stay there."

All respondents who gave testimonies on detention conditions in Serbia expressed limited and inadequate provisions of food and water. When in detention, respondent (3) also said that he was fed pork 'many times', despite telling staff he did not eat pork due to religious reasons. Respondents (1) and (2) also said that they lacked access to sufficient food, receiving just two meals a day and no clean drinking water - forcing them to drink directly from the bathroom sink.

All respondents noted in their testimonies that they were denied access to outdoor time for the entirety of their detention sentence. Respondents (1) and (2) reported that they were not even permitted to walk for 10 minutes a day in the corridor. When they questioned this extreme level of confinement, they were told:

"you are Arabs, that's why you guys aren't allowed out, you cause problems."

Violence

Testimonies on detention conditions in Serbia often detail instances of excessive and consistent use of violence by officers. Two respondents, one from Iraq (respondent 1)



and one from Algeria (respondent 2), were held together in Padinska Skela Reception Centre for Foreigners for 50 days. They recalled being hit, kicked and slapped repeatedly, with beatings occurring if they did not immediately stand when an officer entered their cell. Reportedly, one senior officer entered silently on purpose, suggesting an intentional effort by staff to manufacture a situation in which violence, in their eyes, could be justified. They further recalled that when respondent (1) was unable to stand due to severe illness, the police *'slapped him really hard'*. All violence towards detainees was said to have taken place inside the cell, out of view of the cameras in the hallway, and therefore shielded from any form of documentation or accountability.

The account of a third respondent testifies that this form of violent treatment is not random, but systemic. He recalled that on one occasion, when the police entered his cell early in the morning while he was sleeping, he did not stand up immediately when asked. Consequently, he was slapped across the face. Additionally, a man from Afghanistan (respondent 4) reports that in the centre where he was held, detainees were frequently subject to violence –if someone said anything to an officer, they were beaten. It is not known whether Respondents 3 and 4 were detained in a correctional institution or an immigration detention center; however, reports and field observations indicate that arbitrary violence can occur in both settings.

Lack of medical care

Inadequate or nonexistent access to medical care in detention centres was also reported by multiple respondents. Respondent (4) detailed that when his group was found by Serbian police, they beat him with batons all over his body, including his face. He described being *'black'* with bruises, and suspected his wrist had been broken as a result. On requesting medical attention, he said that the doctor denied him any form of treatment, only taking photos of his injuries and then telling him to leave.

The testimony given by respondents (1) and (2) further attests to this level of healthcare provided to detainees whilst in detention. They reported that any requests for medical care were either responded to with a single painkiller (which did not help), or ignored. On one occasion, two men in the cell became *'really sick with stomach issues'*, and rather than providing care, they described the doctor to be *'laughing and mocking them'*.

This failure to provide detainees with necessary medical attention constitutes a clear denial of basic human rights, and reflects a detention system that falls significantly short of international humanitarian standards.



Lack of access to procedural rights

Similarly to medical care, some respondents reported being consistently denied access to translation services for the entirety of their detention. In particular, respondents (1) and (2) recounted that on requesting a translator during a court proceeding –probably a misdemeanor court proceeding where people are taken to after illegalized entry into the territory of Serbia–, they were ‘hit on the head from behind’. Later, they were forced to sign untranslated documents –most likely after they were unable to pay the fine imposed by the judge–, and told that they would be taken to a camp and not to jail. However, they were subsequently detained. On questioning their detention, they were simply told *‘you are here because it’s the law’* and *‘because you are illegal immigrants’*. This lack of information on their detention led to both respondents going on a three-day hunger strike.

Respondent (4) recounted that he was consistently denied access to a translator and was also forced to sign papers which he did not understand. He questioned that, without a common language, *‘how can someone explain their innocence’* – suggesting again that the system failed to give any adequate explanation as to why he had been detained.

Detainees often lack full access to their rights, including asylum information. Upon arrival, they receive documents outlining criminal suspects’ rights, but not their rights as immigration detainees. Detention is often arbitrary: many are held based on vague national security claims without realistic prospects of deportation. In some cases, detention exceeds legal limits.

Mental health and acts of resistance

Abuse, mistreatment, and deteriorating living conditions within detention centers have severe and long-lasting impacts on the lives of people on the move. Detention is consistently linked to depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The uncertainty of detention, lack of access to procedural rights, overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, abuse by authorities, and isolation from the community create extreme psychological stress, particularly for those who have already experienced trauma and violence. Most people on the move in the Western Balkans have already faced significant trauma, often connected to pushbacks and abuse by authorities. More recently, this violence and mistreatment has expanded to include smuggling networks, a direct consequence of the lack of safe passage, a situation perpetuated by EU funding and border policies.



Respondent (4) noted the detrimental impacts that these forms of degrading treatment have had on his mental health, stating:

"I am really tired, I mean really tired of life."

Respondents (1) and (2) also gave voice to this, stating that their time in detention was *'mentally draining and tiring'*, and left them feeling 'very depressed'.

Even in the face of abusive and degrading conditions inside detention centers, people on the move continue to resist. Hunger strikes are a common form of peaceful protest in general, and have been used by detainees across countries as an attempt to reclaim some control over their lives amid total uncertainty and humiliating treatment. These acts of resistance are powerful expressions of agency and a refusal to accept the violence and injustice imposed on them. We do not have a recent overview of these practices, however, in February 2023, Ecevit Piroğlu, a Kurdish political activist from Turkey, began a [hunger strike](#) at the Padinska Skela detention centre to protest his prolonged detention and the threat of deportation to Turkey. Despite a court ruling prohibiting his extradition, he remained in custody, and his health deteriorated rapidly due to a lack of adequate medical care.



Lukavica Detention Centre

Lukavica Detention Centre, located on the outskirts of Sarajevo, is the only dedicated immigration detention centre in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Managed by the Service for Foreigners' Affairs (SFA), it began operating in 2009 and can accommodate up to 120 individuals. According to the SFA, the centre has 80 beds in the men's unit, 12 beds in the women's unit, and two family apartments –which means that the country continues to permit the detention of children, despite a growing global consensus that immigration detention is inherently harmful to children and therefore always breaches the best interests of the child principle, as underlined by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in General Comment No. 23/No. 4 (2017). The SFA has publicly stated that over 100 minors were detained in the facility from its opening until mid-2016, suggesting that the current number may be significantly higher.

Publicly available information on immigration detention in the country remains limited, and the scarce data that does exist points to a system that has consistently fallen short of international human rights standards. As such, the UNHCR in Bosnia-Herzegovina has raised concerns around transparency and accountability in detention with the country's Ombudsman's office, underscoring the urgent need for an official report detailing conditions and treatment within the centre.

During a two-week visit to Bosnia-Herzegovina in April 2025, Human Rights Watch (HRW) conducted a visit to Lukavica Detention Centre under the supervision of facility staff. Their initial observations, shared with BVMN member organisation Collective Aid, suggest a system that has failed to implement clear and consistent protocols in a number of areas.

Lack of access to procedural rights

A lack of transparency surrounding decisions to place individuals in Lukavica Detention Centre is one example of this. Rather than following a standardised protocol, detention appears to be applied arbitrarily, and is mainly based on the likelihood of successful readmission to Serbia, or return to the individual's country of origin. When expulsion from Bosnia-Herzegovina seems unlikely, individuals are typically not detained.

For example, a man from Morocco who had been detained in the centre for two months, expressed to HRW representatives that he was unsure of the reason why he had been detained after readmission from Croatia, when the rest of his group had not. Those working at the centre were also unable to give a clear reasoning on the grounds



for his detention, instead mentioning several differing factors that played a role in the decision to detain. Additionally, detention staff also communicated that individuals are detained based on reports of criminality that they received from other security agencies. However, they do not disclose the specific sources of that information, the charges, or the procedural protocols applied in the arrests, again raising serious concerns about arbitrary detention and rights breaches.

On admission to Lukavica Detention Centre, individuals are legally entitled to make three phone calls –one to a lawyer, one to a family member, and one to their embassy. However, the experience from Vasa Prava –a non-governmental organisation that provides free legal aid to people in detention– suggests that there is no consistency when applying this policy. For example, the phone in the detention centre was allegedly broken for a month, which meant that detainees were left without the option to request free legal aid for days. Furthermore, throughout their sentence, individuals' access to phones for contacting family members also appears to be left to the discretion of staff, resulting in irregular and limited communication with the outside world.

Further concerns have been raised by HRW regarding the complete absence of mental health support, limited access to outdoor time, and the lack of permanent translation services available in the detention centre.

Following persistent efforts, Vasa Prava's contact details are now displayed in the common areas of the detention centre. However, it remains unclear how many detainees understand that they are entitled to free legal assistance, and whether they are aware that they can contest their detention order. HRW has therefore expressed doubts that this opaque process of informing individuals on their right to legal aid is governed by any formal protocol, questioning detainees' actual access to information and their ability to make informed decisions regarding their rights.

Return Hubs

Following their visit to Lukavica Detention Centre, HRW has also criticised the proposals of both the UK and the European Commission to establish so-called 'return hubs' in the Balkan region for individuals whose asylum claims have been rejected and all appeals exhausted. Questioning the viability of implementing 'return hubs' in Bosnia-Herzegovina, a country where return procedures are already massively delayed, they cautioned that the scheme could 'exacerbate existing problems and [...] abuses'. For example, prolonged detention of rejected asylum seekers and those held on national security and criminal grounds, has, in some cases, lasted up to 18 months.



Arbitrary detention and forced return: a case from BIH

Intergreat Center, an organisation collaborating with BVMN, shared a stark example of how the migration regime operates in practice. A person on the move from Afghanistan –who had previously worked for the US army and was in clear need of international protection – was pushed back from Croatia to Bosnia-Herzegovina, arrested and detained in Lukavica. For over two weeks, his family received no official information about his whereabouts. He was unreachable, and they feared for his safety. Only after Intergreat Center’s lawyer intervened, did the family learn that he was allegedly being held as “a threat to national security”, a vague and unsubstantiated claim often used to justify arbitrary detention. Despite requesting asylum, his claim was ignored.

After further pressure, the lawyer finally received a decision stating that the man had been issued an order for “voluntary departure” from the country. While in detention, he reported being under severe psychological pressure and was told that if he refused to sign the departure agreement and insisted on applying for asylum, he could remain detained for months. Out of fear, with no access to adequate interpretation or a clear understanding of his rights, he signed the document.

In the end, the final decision made no mention of any security threat; instead, it cited a “lack of valid documents” as the reason for deportation –a claim that did not reflect reality. He was deported to Montenegro under a readmission agreement, on the grounds that he had reportedly entered Bosnia and Herzegovina from there. This case is emblematic of the dangerous practices people on the move face in the Western Balkans. Despite clear grounds for international protection, he was detained without due process, pressured into “voluntary” deportation, and ultimately expelled by a country that should have offered him safety. On top of procedural rights violations and psychological pressure, he was even issued a bill of 4,440 Bosnian marks (around 2270 Euros) to cover the costs of his detention and deportation to Montenegro.

OBRAČUN TROŠKOVA VRAĆANJA I STAVLJANJA STRANCA POD NADZOR	
Lični podaci stranca korisnika	
1. Ime i prezime	
2. Datum, mjesto i država rođenja	
3. Državljanstvo	
4. Putna isprava ili drugi ID	Bez ID
Podaci o prijemu i boravku u Centru	
1. Datum i vrijeme prijema u Centar	
2. Datum i vrijeme odlaska	
3. Broj smještajnih dana	
Obracun troškova	
1. Država, mjesto i vrsta prevoza za vraćanje	Pratnja službenim vozilom do GP Hum-Štepan Polje
2. Troškovi smještaja (broj dana x 60,00 KM)	4.440,00 KM
3. Cijena povratne karte u jednom pravcu	-
4. Cijena povratne karte pratilaca	-
5. Ostali troškovi (priložiti specifikaciju)	4.440,00 KM
6. UKUPNO TROŠKOVI	8880,00 KM
7. Naplaćeno od stranca	4.440,00 KM - Služba
8. Ostaje za plaćanje	4.440,00 KM

POM detained in Kanjiža. Source: Anonymous



Detention in Lipa Temporary Reception Center (TRC)

The EU granted the Vienna-based International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) a mandate to build a detention unit at the Lipa TRC in Bihać, northwestern Bosnia, an initiative publicly announced in March 2022, after construction was already underway. The European Commission and Austria financed the construction of the main Lipa camp with €1.1 million, while EU accession funds covered the cost of the detention unit with €500,000.

In January 2023, the Global Detention Project reported that field observers had seen containers installed and separated from the rest of the Lipa camp. According to SOS Balkanroute, the detention area was surrounded by a high fence, equipped with surveillance cameras at every corner, barred windows, and cells with almost no natural light.

However, after months of pressure from SOS Balkanroute, other civil society groups, and journalists, the plan to operate the detention unit was halted. The turning point came when ICMPD failed to provide a valid building permit or documentation on the company awarded the construction contract, as reported in February 2023. Local authorities in Bihać and the Una Sana Canton also stated they were never informed about the detention unit and criticized the lack of transparency from the government. In a further attempt to defend its actions, ICMPD sued SOS Balkanroute's founder Pero Rosandić, but lost the case in an Austrian court, which confirmed that ICMPD neither had a valid construction permit from local authorities nor a legal basis to detain migrants there. After this, the city of Bihać issued a decision to demolish the detention unit. However, field reporters and people on the move say otherwise. The unit still exists: a cluster of container units enclosed by a high fence and separated from the rest of the Lipa camp. People on the move have shared that although the unit is not officially operational as a detention facility, it is often used for punishment and isolation when people are deemed to be causing “disturbances” in the camp. Thus, the Lipa TRC would indeed have an unofficial detention area, used much like isolation units in carceral systems.

This area remains opaque and virtually inaccessible to independent observers, with little to no external oversight. Although Lipa is not officially designated as a closed camp, its remote and isolated location severely limits practical freedom of movement for those staying there. As a result, many people find themselves effectively trapped, with few options to leave or access services elsewhere. The overall lack of transparency makes it extremely difficult to monitor conditions or address rights violations within the camp.



An ongoing case of migration externalisation

May marks the second month of full-scale and continuous operation for the Italian Pre-Removal Centres (CPRs) established on Albanian territory. These centres were originally set up to process asylum requests from people rescued at sea, particularly those from countries deemed 'safe' by the Italian government. However, their role was redefined by a decree-law adopted on March 28th. The new provisions allow Italy to transfer individuals currently held in pre-removal centres within its national territory, whose applications for international protection have been rejected and who are subject to expulsion orders.

These centres were established under a bilateral agreement signed on November 6th 2023 between Italy and Albania "to strengthen cooperation on migration issues" (Law No. 14/2024). The agreement entails the granting by Albania to Italy of two state-owned areas in the port of Shëngjin and in the former military base of Gjadër for the construction of a hotspot for asylum seekers coming from so-called 'safe countries' and subject to 'accelerated procedures'. The Italian authorities have since built a pre-removal centre and a mini-prison in those two areas. On October 14th 2024, the first sixteen people rescued in international waters by Italian authorities departed towards Albania. However, the specialized immigration section of the Rome Court did not validate any of the detentions, including those involving a second group of individuals transferred in November.



Gjadër center. Source: Klodiana Millona; license: CC BY 2.0.



With the 'Decreto Flussi', the Italian authorities proposed structural changes to the judicial system, transferring decisions from specialized judges to ordinary appellate courts. Despite this, even the third attempt to transfer people to the facilities in Albanian territory led to the non-validation of all 43 people who arrived in Shëngjin in January 2025.

Following the approval of the decree-law mentioned above, at the end of March, on April 11th 2025, the first ship carrying people from various CPRs across Italy arrived at the port of Shëngjin. The people were immediately transferred to the Gjadër CPR.

In May, more people from Italian CPRs were brought to the Albanian centres; however, the authorities' complete lack of transparency hinders adequate monitoring of the trajectory of these individuals caught in the net of administrative detention. Thus, it is rarely known where people have been transferred or whether they have been deported or released (in both cases, they must return to Italy). The systematic lack of accountability is worsened by the private management of the facility (which follows the pattern from all other CPRs in Italy) by the cooperative Medihospes.

Multiple inspections by Members of the European Parliament, including Rachele Scarpa and Cecilia Strada, led to the drafting of a report submitted to the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) of the Council of Europe. The document raises serious concerns regarding the risks to the health and lives of those detained in the CPR in Albania, as evidenced by numerous entries in the critical incident log. The very method of transferring the people involved –who are treated like criminals, handcuffed and moved from one country to another without receiving any information about their transfers– highlights the criminalizing nature of the management of irregularity. The isolation of the facility itself undermines the right to defense as well as the possibility of maintaining any form of contact with loved ones.

The critical issues of the Albania project, even in its new form, continue to emerge through ongoing legal challenges that reveal the violations of rights. In fact, the latest attempt by the Italian government is also facing setbacks from the judiciary. On May 29th, the Court of Cassation referred two cases to the European Court of Justice, expressing doubts about whether the CPR in Albania complies with EU law: in both cases, the crucial issue is territoriality.

The so-called 'Albanian Model' has constantly changed its form since its first implementation, attempting to adapt and circumvent the rulings received from Italian



courts. It has operated as an externalisation experiment in line with the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, which provides for the introduction of systematic detention at borders and accelerated procedures for examining applications for international protection. Over the past months, the Meloni government has repeatedly reiterated its intention to collaborate with EU partners to implement so-called 'innovative solutions' in migration management, becoming a true model, as evident from the Commission's provisions in its proposed Return Regulation.

Italian rulings have brought sensitive issues at the European level to the forefront, such as the designation of 'safe countries' and the application of accelerated border procedures. Although the ruling of the European Court of Justice on safe countries is still pending, on April 16th 2025, the European Commission proposed to advance the implementation of certain points of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, including the establishment of a common list of safe countries and the application of accelerated procedures. These positions at the European level effectively expressed support for the Italian project, contributing to a worrying trend across Europe.



**Content warning: the following section include references to self-harm and suicide*

At the moment, Austria operates four main migration detention facilities: the Vordernberg Migration Detention Centre in Styria and three Police Detention Centres (Polizeianhaltezentren, PAZ) – Vienna Roßauer Lände, Vienna Hernalser Gürtel, and the Vienna-based Family Migration Detention Facility Zinnergasse. In addition, 11 other PAZ facilities are used for short-term detention all over the country, not exceeding seven days. The combined capacity of Vordernberg, PAZ Hernalser Gürtel, and PAZ Roßauer Lände is 667 places, all specifically designated for pre-removal administrative detention. It is not possible to estimate the total detention capacity, as the other facilities are also used for various other measures. However, according to government data, in 2024, a total of 3,566 people were held in migration detention in Austria.

Legal framework of migration detention

Even though it involves the deprivation of liberty, migration detention in Austria is regulated under administrative rather than criminal law. This distinction is crucial: it is primarily governed by the Aliens Police Act (Fremdenpolizeigesetz) and administered by the Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum (Bundesamt für Fremdenwesen und Asyl, BFA). As a result, detainees are denied many of the procedural safeguards guaranteed under criminal law, including access to legal counsel, meaningful judicial oversight, and due process protections.

The law foresees three different grounds for detention: While § 76 Abs 1 and 2 FPG are applied in cases where detention is deemed necessary to secure the asylum and return decision proceedings in cases of threats to public security (Abs 1) or to secure return decision proceedings or deportation (Abs 2), § 76 Abs 3 foresees detention in Dublin cases when the conditions of Art 28 (1) and (2) of the Dublin Directive are met.

Detention can begin at the first contact with the police after undocumented entry. There is no standardised procedure beyond notifying the BFA if a person's legal status is unclear. Procedures vary widely, including language interpretation, information recording, and case handling. In cases where the Federal Office determines that a person has no right to stay in Austria and the person does not put down an asylum claim, the BFA imposes detention pending deportation.



Deportation from Austria requires a legally valid return decision. If issued, individuals are given 14 days to leave voluntarily. If not, deportation proceeds only once travel documents are secured from their country of origin – a process often prolonged by opaque and inconsistent foreign bureaucracies.

Non-Austrian citizens can have their personal freedom restricted for various reasons by being placed in detention pending deportation. In theory, any such restriction must be preceded by an examination of the legal requirements, the risk of absconding, and the principle of proportionality. In particular, it must be assessed whether a less severe measure could achieve the same objective as detention. The law foresees a maximum length of six months of detention which can be prolonged to up to eighteen months.

If the Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum (BFA) concludes that detention pending deportation is proportionate, it issues a so-called mandate decision. Unlike a regular administrative decision, which follows a preliminary investigation, a mandate decision can be issued –among other reasons– in cases of "imminent delay." For clarification: if the competent authority suspects that a building is at risk of collapsing, it may order an emergency evacuation. Only after the evacuation is carried out does a proper investigation follow.

According to the same logic, detention pending deportation is defined by law as a measure to avert imminent danger, allowing the BFA to impose it without a prior investigation. Unlike detention in criminal or administrative proceedings – where the duration is determined by a court – the length of detention pending deportation is not specified at the time it is imposed. As a result, individuals accused only of unlawful residence may find themselves in a more precarious position than those convicted under criminal or administrative law.

Even though a basic assessment must still be conducted, the approach varies between BFA field and regional offices: some carry out written interrogations, while others merely refer to the procedural file in general terms. The purpose of the detention and the information on legal remedies included in the emergency administrative decision must be translated into a language the person can understand. However, the reasons for detention and the legal basis are stated only in the official language, German.

The BFA informs the current legal counselling service, the Federal Agency for Care and Support Services (BBU), about the issuance of a mandate decision. The BBU is responsible for providing legal counselling as soon as possible and informing the



person concerned about the option to lodge an appeal. Such an appeal can be filed at any time during detention and up to six weeks after release. If the complaint is rejected, the person faces a cost risk of approximately €400 to €800. If the individual wishes to appeal, the BBU is required to draft the complaint, submit it, and represent the individual at a hearing before the administrative court. If the individual chooses not to appeal, the BBU's mandate ends, and it will not provide further visits or advice unless a new procedural order is issued.

All our interviewees described the legal counselling as inadequate and reported a lack of trust in the BBU. Five respondents stated that the BBU only informed them about the option of voluntary return and their impending deportation; three explicitly said they were not informed about their rights or possible legal remedies. Four interviewees said they had unsuccessfully tried to contact the BBU.

Once a detention order is imposed via a mandate decision, the necessity of continued detention is reviewed by the BFA itself every four weeks – without due process. Only after four months is there an *ex officio* detention review by a second instance, the Federal Administrative Court (BVwG).

Under certain conditions, detention can be extended from six to up to eighteen months. Whether these conditions are met is examined by the BFA only shortly before the six-month period expires. A commonly cited reason for extended detention is the need to obtain a travel document (Heimreisezertifikat, HRZ). However, access to the case file for the purpose of securing a HRZ is not included in statutory legal counselling and is often denied to independent legal representatives. Restrictions on file access for both the BBU and independent counsel make it difficult to effectively challenge the BFA's decisions in court. The same applies to arrests made prior to the issuance of a detention order.

The low procedural and detention order standards, the financial risk of appealing, the limited legal framework for counselling, the lack of access to case files, and the four-month delay before the first independent detention review collectively demonstrate that the legal framework undermines the rights of those affected, particularly their right to legal certainty and effective legal representation.

At the beginning of 2025, Push-Back Alarm Austria together with the Deserteurs- und Flüchtlingsberatung (Counseling service for deserters and refugees) published [a study](#) that shows Austria's migration detention system through the lens of Vordernberg, a high-security facility operating under the guise of humane design. It reveals how legal



ambiguity, institutional opacity, and systemic neglect converge to erode basic human rights and dignity of migrants. All respondents featured in the study were imprisoned in Vordernberg in the last three years. The interviewees report on detention conditions that erode or eliminate the detainees' will to live and their control over their own lives; these conditions, taken as a whole, meet the United Nations' legal definition of torture ('torturing environment'). The study cannot claim to be representative, but the multiple descriptions of the situation in Vordernberg largely coincide and thus allow the conclusion that they reflect truthful and generalisable experiences –even though a verification of the information is not possible due to the restrictive access and information policy of detention centres in Austria in general, and Vordernberg in particular.

A case study of Vordernberg: isolation by design

After more than four months in custody at the Hernalser Gürtel police detention centre, T. was transferred to the Vordernberg migration detention centre in Styria in the south of Austria. His first glimpse of the building reminded him of the former US high-security prison on Alcatraz. "It was like something out of a film," he said in an interview with Push-Back Alarm Austria in a Viennese coffee house. "The place was far from everything, only wilderness all around; it was very strict and brutal."

The idea of building a migration detention centre in Vordernberg was developed in 2001, after years of criticism of the Austrian practice of migration detention by the CPT and the then Human Rights Advisory Council of the Federal Ministry of the Interior. This proposal was then taken up by the SPÖ and ÖVP coalition government in its 2008-2013 programme. 250 places for measures of temporary stay were to be created.

After initial criticism due to low occupancy rates and a disapproving report by the Austrian Court of Audit in 2019, things went quiet around Vordernberg. The location, far from metropolitan areas, poor connection to public transport and time restrictions on entry not only make it difficult for visitors, organisations, independent legal advice services and lawyers to access the centre, but also further isolate detainees from the outside world. The main actors in the detention centre are police officers, employees of a private security company (G4S) and employees of the state-funded legal and return counselling services. Publicly available reports are written by official or state institutions and do not reflect the experiences of people in migration detention.



Personal experiences of detainees

The special –and, in this form, unique– migration detention facility in Vordernberg was a particularly drastic experience for the interviewees. The legal uncertainty and the undefined duration of the detention order had especially severe psychological impact on the detainees.

“When the police took me, they told me I am going to an open camp and then we arrived at Vordernberg and I was shocked to see that it was not an open camp, it was a prison or a detention centre. The first time I got there I saw a lot of police, a lot of security, a lot of barbed wires, a lot of CCTV cameras.”

Vordernberg is described by all respondents as a prison. The geographical situation presents an additional problem, as it makes visits difficult or impossible.

“Building such a place in the middle of mountains actually explains what is inside. It’s a place that is far off, to hold people without any charges, to hide it from society.”

The detainees' right to self-determination is extremely limited; two respondents described that personal property is locked away, meaning that every time you want a cigarette or need toothpaste, you have to ask someone from G4S for it.

According to all interviewees, everyday life in Vordernberg is characterised by arbitrariness and assaults by the staff –both the police and G4S.

“They think we don’t have dignity. We are not human. A lot of them think we are animals.”



In an interview, it was reported that some of the staff have far-right tattoos and that swastikas were repeatedly drawn on the wall of our conversation partner's cell, and were not removed throughout his entire stay despite numerous complaints. It was also stated that the graffiti 'Kill all Muslims' was written on cell walls.

Punishment

According to the respondents, neither the rights, obligations and options for lodging complaints under the detention order, nor the rules at the migration detention centre in Vordernberg are explained. At the same time, however, alleged (even trivial) rule violations are severely punished, often with solitary confinement. One interviewee reported that he was placed in solitary confinement after unintentionally breaking the card on which the credit for purchases and phone calls was booked. Another person described that he was placed in solitary confinement after attempting suicide by hanging; this was confirmed by a second respondent. Two other interviewees report that they were denied medical care in solitary confinement.

According to the testimonies collected, there are several cells that are used for isolation. Furthermore, a type of padded cell for one person is described. This cell is green and windowless. The hygiene conditions are described as catastrophic: according to one person, they spent five days in isolation without the opportunity to shower and without any clothes to change; another stated that they went a whole month without fresh clothes and only showered once in that month in solitary confinement.

Health care

All respondents described the health care in Vordernberg as inadequate and problematic. According to one interview, there is no medical emergency service and, despite serious health problems, transport to a hospital often does not take place. Several people reported that they received the wrong medication; others that they did not receive adequate dental treatment and insufficient painkillers.

One interviewee described that health care was inadequate even after suicide attempts. Another person said that he went on a hunger strike for 12 days and was not medically examined during that time. Another reported that a hunger striker went 15 days without medical attention or care.

Five respondents said that tranquilizers are administered very frequently. One interviewee mentioned that there is no professional psychological or psychiatric care.



Suicide attempts

Suicide attempts appear to be common in Vordernberg. One of the respondents had attempted suicide by hanging. Another interviewee stated that seven people he had known personally had attempted suicide, and he had heard of even more cases. In two of the cases he reported, people drank shampoo, one broke a razor blade into several pieces and swallowed them, two tried to hang themselves, two cut their wrists. A third person reported that inmates collect sedatives to kill themselves with an overdose. Another interview reports an attempted suicide in which the person concerned swallowed a lighter.

Escape attempts

The inhumane situation in Vordernberg is shown particularly dramatic in two reports of an escape attempt by about 15-20 people. According to our information, most of them were stopped at the first fence with electric shockers and pepper spray, beaten by the police and taken to the isolation cells. The injuries inflicted by the police were not treated.

Another interviewee involved in the escape said that he spent two and a half hours on the second fence. During this time, police officers stood inside and outside the fence with firearms, stun guns and pepper sprays. No interpreter was called.

The respondent cut himself on the barbed wire, then gave up and came down. He further reported that the police beat him and used stun guns and pepper spray multiple times, when he was already lying on the ground, unable to move. He was then taken to a padded cell, where he spent 18 days. During this time, he was not given medical attention despite his serious injuries and significant pain. When he screamed for help, he was once again beaten by two police officers.

"There are no laws. They are the law"

Most people detained in Vordernberg are imprisoned for long periods of time. Based on the testimonies, it is clear that they experience the prison as a lawless space where the police guards and G4S personnel enforce power and control and where racist and physical assaults are daily routine. The interviewees consistently reported significant human rights violations in Vordernberg, which drove them and their fellow detainees to self-harming behaviour or suicide attempts.

In summary, it can be said that ten years after the opening of the migration detention centre in Vordernberg the vision of a detention centre that complies with human rights



by the Federal Ministry of the Interior has failed. On the contrary torture-like conditions are reported by its prisoners. The slogan 'Rooms instead of Cells' by the executing architectural firm, Franz&Sue, turned out to be a mockery for all those who were imprisoned in Vordernberg for a certain period of their lives. Or as one of the interviewees put it:

"I spent nearly a year in prison, and I felt like they had stolen a year of my life. This is very unfair, and it was extremely unjust. It's very painful to think about the fact that I had to spend one year in prison without doing anything to deserve it."

The inhumane conditions in Vordernberg make the closure of this place indispensable and require an immediate and independent inspection by human rights organisations. These must be granted unrestricted and unsupervised access to the building and to the detainees. Furthermore, the legal provisions for dealing with people without a regular residence status and the implementation of these provisions must be critically reviewed. Vordernberg is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to Austria's deportation policy, which is characterised by legal uncertainty for those affected, considerable legal leeway for the authorities and inadequate legal advice and violence.



In Greece, authorities also continue to rely extensively and systematically on administrative detention, both during asylum and return procedures. Whether detained in Closed Controlled Access Centres (CCACs), police stations or Pre-Removal Detention Centers (PRDCs), people on the move face widespread arbitrariness, appalling conditions, police violence – sometimes with fatal consequences. Human rights monitoring bodies have repeatedly raised concerns and issued recommendations to improve detention conditions and practices, but the Greek authorities largely disregard these findings and systematically refuse to provide official data on deaths occurring in police detention.

Police stations: prolonged and illegal use

A recent report titled “No Beds, No Light, No Rights: New Findings on Greece’s Illegal Use of Police Stations to Detain Migrants” –published in April 2025 by Mobile Info Team, Border Criminologies, and the Border Violence Monitoring Network— provides extensive evidence of Greece’s continued and unlawful use of police stations for prolonged immigration detention. Drawing on 31 interviews conducted between 2020 and 2025, the report highlights systemic violations of both national and international legal standards.

Greek law stipulates that police stations should be used for short-term detention only in exceptional circumstances. However, as the report makes clear, “the Greek state continues to rely on police facilities for prolonged detention of foreign nationals,” with detainees held for an average of 29 days, and some up to four months – well beyond the legal limit. These prolonged detentions occur in opaque conditions, absent judicial oversight and without adequate access to legal representation or interpreters.

The conditions described are profoundly degrading. Interviewees reported detention in dark, unsanitary cells, often overcrowded, lacking beds, heating, or outdoor access. One detainee recalled: “One day felt like one week because you have nothing to play with or lose time with. One hour feels like three.” Another reported police retaliation for not speaking Greek: “He got angry because I didn’t know anything about the Greek language... I would get beaten.” Violence was systemic –88% of those asked reported experiencing abuse:

“One of the police officers came and stood close to my eyes. Then he pushed my head with one hand and I fell. When I stood up, all the police started attacking me [...] When I came home, for 10 days I could not walk because of the pain. It hurt me a lot. Alongside the physical problems, I have mental problems.”



Furthermore, access to healthcare was also negligible; detainees with serious conditions were reportedly offered only basic painkillers: *“For example, if I have cancer, they give me Depon. That is crazy.”* The report also details how detainees were denied even basic communication: 100% of respondents reported having no access to mobile phones; 100% had no access to information about their rights; 85% lacked translation support. Particularly egregious were practices in two facilities: the Thessaloniki General Police Directorate and the Special Holding Facility of the Thessaloniki Aliens Police Directorate. Despite prior critical observations by the CPT, there is *“a lack of meaningful improvements,”* indicating deep institutional inertia and the failure of accountability mechanisms.

The findings expose a profound gap between legal standards and daily practices in Greek detention policy. Despite repeated commitments to end the use of police stations for immigration detention, Greek authorities continue to operate in contravention of both domestic law and human rights norms. The report calls for urgent scrutiny and oversight, particularly by EU monitoring bodies, and concludes with a clear ethical and legal imperative: end the use of police stations for immigration detention. Full report available [here](#).

Pre-Removal Detention Centres (PRDCs)

Civil society organisations have long denounced the arbitrary nature of detention in PRDCs while awaiting deportation, as well as the disregard of the authorities for their duty to carry out individual assessments. While, in theory, administrative detention should only last for the time necessary for deportation, returns are in fact largely impeded if not impossible[4], and people are detained for months. In addition, reports and testimonies on the inhuman conditions in which third country nationals (TCNs) are detained in PRDCs abound. In July 2024, the CPT published a report gathering its findings from a visit to several PRDCs in Greece, carried out in November 2023. The CPT found that material conditions in most of the visited PRDCs, especially Petrou Ralli, Kos and Corinth, were poor and not adequate nor aligned with EU standards. The Committee explicitly called on the Greek authorities to take action to *“reform their immigration detention system and ensure that foreign nationals deprived of their liberty under immigration legislation are held in suitable premises, offering material conditions and a regime appropriate to their legal situation and staffed by suitably qualified personnel.”*

[4] According to Eurostat data, 1,555 people were effectively returned from Greece in the fourth quarter of 2024, of the 11,405 who were ordered to return, namely 13,6%.



However, as shown in follow-up NGO submissions to the CPT and to the Committee of Ministers, Greece fails to follow the CPT's recommendations and respect human rights standards. These reports particularly highlight very limited access to healthcare characterised by long waiting times before medical consultations, lack of appropriate follow-up treatment and apparent unwillingness from the authorities to transfer detainees to hospitals, despite some facilities being reportedly subjected to staff shortages and regularly devoid of doctors during several months. The limited access to legal assistance and information in detention is an ongoing issue as well, with detainees being left in distress and unable to understand their situation. This is compounded by the systemic lack of or inadequate access to interpretation services in detention. Finally, lengthy periods of administrative detention and poor material conditions are also described as factors exacerbating detainees' psychological distress.

In line with these concerning accounts, BVMN reported in March 2025 on deaths and protests in PRDCs on the Greek mainland.

Mainland Greece

Recent testimonies collected by BVMN field reporters from people detained in Paranesti and Petrou Ralli PRDCs further evidence the lack of reaction from the Greek government. For both facilities, dehumanising detention conditions were reported. Respondents described the highly poor quality of the food provided to detainees, causing swellings on *"all of our body"* (851749). In Paranesti, quantities were also reported as insufficient: *"they bring us a small amount for everyone. Just to stay alive"* (305739). While some items are sold to detainees through a market in Paranesti, one respondent suspected that only products that were not bought from the public outside were sold inside the centre, with the authorities restricting yet more the types of items being allowed in. Prices were also reported to be up to four times higher than those in regular outside markets (703773).

Additionally, conditions in which detainees in Paranesti are able to access healthcare were described as appalling and rushed: *"they took us to the doctor like sheeps [...], like criminals"* (305739). In Petrou Ralli, detainees were reportedly not allowed to reach outdoor spaces and even access the bathroom and toilets, located outside of cells, was described as restricted, obliging them to urinate at times in police officers' empty bottles or coffee cups -an especially humiliating experience. The lack of air conditioning in Petrou Ralli was also described as hardly tolerable, forcing the respondent to sleep on the cold floor for respite from the heat. Instances of police violence, verbal and physical, were reported for both facilities (305739; 851749).



"I lost four or five kilos. That was before Ramadan. Now even more. [...] I'm thinking to hang myself here. To kill myself. So at least they can send my body to my family." (305739).

Finally, and importantly, the experience of one of the respondents interviewed by the BVMN field team, detained for a total of nearly three years over six spent in Greece, illustrates the endless cycle of detention TCNs are subjected to in Greece, due to the lack of options for regularisation and extensive use of detention by the authorities for undocumented people (703773).

Currently, the conditions for detention of TCNs subject to return procedures are governed by Articles 30 to 32 of Law No. 3907 of 2011. While the maximum detention period in PRDCs is 18 months, this might change in the coming months, as Mr. Makis Voridis, the Greek Minister of Migration and Asylum, announced in early May 2025 the submission of a bill aimed at tightening the legal framework against undocumented people, and making the return system effective. At the time of writing, the draft law has not been made public yet. However, the Ministry already claimed that the bill will include an increase of the maximum detention period to 24 months in PRDCs and an "augmentation of the crime for illegal entry". Along with other highly concerning measures reported by other sources – such as the impossibility to suspend detention except in case of voluntary return – the draft law risks further violating TCN's rights in Greece and reinforcing the imprisonment cycle they are already subjected to.

Kos

Kos is the only Aegean island that hosts a facility used for detaining individuals awaiting deportation. As of May 2025, around 30 individuals were held in Kos' PRDC. Reports from Equal Rights Beyond Borders, a legal aid organisation supporting people on the move, sheds light on the ongoing mistreatment and neglect within this facility.

The worsening conditions are clearly underlined in the recent report by Equal Rights. This includes:

- Lack of access to healthcare leading to deteriorating physical and mental health among detainees.



- ill-treatment by police officers, characterised by verbal and physical abuse, including sexual harassment. An example of the ill-treatment is the arbitrary use of handcuffs even during transfers to medical appointments.
- Bad food quality and poor sanitation.
- Access to legal remedies continue to be inconsistent and mostly ineffective.

CCACs: *de facto* detention

The development of the CCACs in many islands in the Aegean reflects the shift in European migration policy toward a detention-based infrastructure. Originally intended to streamline procedures and improve conditions, the CCACs have instead led to increased securitisation and reduced rights protections. Despite official framing that describes them as modern and secure reception facilities, evidence suggests that CCACs function as *de facto* detention centres, with significant restrictions on movement, limited access to services, and conditions inconsistent with international refugee and human rights law.

The defining feature of CCACs is their closed and highly controlled nature. Unlike traditional open reception facilities, CCACs are built with perimeter fencing, surveillance infrastructure, and tightly regulated access policies. Moreover, entry to these facilities is often regulated by biometric scanning, 24/7 heavy surveillance, and security checkpoints – systems more typical of carceral than humanitarian settings. According to a 2024 legal analysis by the [Refugee Support Aegean \(RSA\)](#), individuals within these centres experience restrictions on movement and access to outside services, including legal aid, particularly during the initial stages of registration and asylum processing. While framed as ‘temporary’, these restrictions can last weeks or even months, functioning effectively as detention without judicial oversight or individualised review.

The UNHCR has previously warned against measures that result in the *de facto* detention of asylum seekers without adequate legal safeguards. As repeated throughout this report, under international and European human rights law, including Article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights and the 1951 Refugee Convention, detention must be lawful, necessary, and proportionate. In the case of CCACs, this threshold appears increasingly difficult to justify given the lack of procedural guarantees and the limited legal remedy available to those held in the centres.



Moreover, there are increasing difficulties for civil society organisations in accessing these facilities, including bureaucratic restrictions, permit denials, and limitations on legal aid provision. Such difficulties and restrictions inhibit independent monitoring and create conditions where rights violations are harder to detect, document, or remedy.

Notably, the European Union has played a central role in financing the construction and operation of the CCAC system, allocating hundreds of millions of euros to new infrastructure on the Aegean islands. A 2025 report by [Bridge EU](#) and a coalition of NGOs documented that over €1 billion in EU structural and migration funds have been used in ways that contribute to exclusion, segregation, or rights violations. These findings raise questions about the oversight mechanisms in place and the alignment of funding practices with the EU's legal obligations under the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Here we provide an update and overview from the CCAC's on Lesbos, Samos and Kos, which exemplify the concerns and violations described above. As CCACs become the new standard for refugee reception in the Aegean, the EU's dual role as funder and policy driver must be subject to greater scrutiny. Transparency, independent monitoring, and compliance with international legal norms are urgently needed to prevent further erosion of asylum protections and to ensure that Europe's migration system aligns with its foundational human rights commitments.

Vastria CCAC

Though not yet in use, built with EU funding, Vastria, on Lesbos, exemplifies the broader system of CCACs across the Aegean islands – one that replaces open reception with securitised containment.

The Vastria facility is located approximately 30 kilometres from the island's capital of Mytilene, home to the island's only hospital, access to legal services, and consistent NGO presence. With uncertain and undefined public transport links, asylum seekers housed at Vastria will face significant practical barriers to accessing critical services. The camp's remote siting appears to align with a broader trend in European migration policy toward isolating refugee populations from public and civil society visibility, as seen in the Austrian case.

In addition to geographic isolation, Vastria is situated in a high fire risk zone. The region's dry, pine-forested environment has already experienced devastating fires in past years, and the presence of only a single access road raises logistical concerns



about evacuation capacity and emergency response times. Despite repeated warnings from civil society and environmental experts, construction has proceeded without a publicly available fire safety or evacuation plan.

Samos CCAC

In May 2025, people on the move continued to report being automatically and unlawfully de facto detained upon their arrival to the Samos CCAC in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions. One client of I Have Rights reported being de facto detained for 22 days following their arrival at the Samos CCAC in December 2024. During this period, they were held in three different locations, each marked by overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, and a lack of access to basic necessities. During the first ten days, they were required to sleep on cardboard on the floor, sharing one blanket among 14 people.

Another client, a survivor of human trafficking, reported being de facto detained for eight days upon arrival to the Samos CCAC in May 2025. They described the conditions:

"I stayed in a small room with another family and one girl, totaling 3 people in one room. The room was really small, and no doctor examined or provided medical treatment for the pain. There was no doctor available."

Exacerbating these extremely undignified and concerning conditions, this month, on May 2nd, a fire broke out in the Samos CCAC, destroying at least six containers, and leaving people without documentation and personal belongings. As a result of the fire, people with lost documents faced further detention inside the Samos CCAC in addition to the automatic detention upon arrival to the Samos CCAC: One client of I Have Rights reported being unable to leave the CCAC for seven days and only being permitted to exit the CCAC on May 9th, after receiving a new asylum seeker's card. During this time they stayed in a friend's container and as of the 6th of May, they were still not allocated a new container.



Detention conditions in the so-called “Safe Zone” prompt judicial decisions

In May 2025, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) granted two interim measures for 46 unaccompanied children who have been subjected to unlawful detention in the so-called “Safe Zone” of the Samos CCAC. The applications were submitted by the Human Rights Legal Project (HRLP). On average, the children had been detained for 142 days under conditions that HRLP argued were incompatible with human dignity.

The detention conditions in the so-called “Safe Zone” have been described as undignified and inhumane, including:

- Deplorable hygienic conditions and lack of cleaning products
- Lack of appropriate clothing, bedding and sleeping accommodation
- Lack of medical care amidst a skin infection and scabies epidemic
- Lack of mental health care and psychological support
- Gross negligence of the competent authorities, failing to provide adequate support to the 180+ children residing in the so-called “Safe Zone”

The ECtHR accepted HRLP’s requests, ordering the Greek government to take immediate measures to ensure the protection and safety of all applicants and their speedy relocation to a safe and appropriate accommodation facility.

Kos CCAC

The current situation in Kos illustrates how detention conditions continue to fall short of international standards whilst also revealing the significant and systemic shortcomings and gaps embedded within Greece’s management of migration and asylum processes. Both the Pre-Removal Detention Centre, described further above, and the “Safe zones” in the CCAC serve as striking examples of the institutionalized confinement practices that undermine human rights under the guise of migration management and protection.



While the PRDC is formally designated as a detention facility, conditions akin to those of detention have increasingly permeated into Kos' CCAC, following the pattern outlined in other facilities of this kind. As is also the case on Samos, this dynamic is especially pronounced in the cases of unaccompanied and separated children (UACs), who are kept within the CCAC under conditions that mirror those of formal detention.

Another recent report by Equal Rights Beyond Borders, based on fieldwork and case documentation, underlines degrading and unlawful conditions faced by these minors. Despite being designated as "Safe Zones", these are closed and heavily securitized spaces where children are effectively deprived of any freedom of movement and subject to prolonged periods of confinement. These conditions raise concerns regarding children's rights, safety and overall well-being with psychological distress and suicide ideation being widespread.

Key concerns documented include:

- Extended confinement, with children detained for months at a time.
- Severe overcrowding.
- Unsanitary and inadequate living conditions ranging from poor sanitation facilities to pest infestations.
- Insufficient access to basic needs, such as food, clean drinking water or medical attention.
- Lack of access to education and recreational activities.
- Gender-specific vulnerabilities, including harassment of girls by some of the boys and a lack of access to menstrual hygiene products.
- Prolonged separation from family members, with very limited opportunities for contact with their relatives residing in other parts of the CCAC.

A decision by the Rhodes Administrative Court recognised that prolonged confinement of unaccompanied minors in the "Safe Zone" within the CCAC constitutes unlawful detention. This ruling is based on a case brought by Equal Rights concerning two minors who were held in detention for five and six months, respectively. The ruling directly challenges the state's narrative that these Safe Zones are designed to protect children. Instead, it exposes these spaces as sites of systematic rights violations. The court decision sets a key legal precedent which opens the door for further challenges to detention conditions in the country.



Overview of the detention situation

Official information about Turkey's detention system is not consistently provided, but according to the latest available data from the Presidency of Migration Management (PMM), there are currently at least 30 official removal centers (Geri Gönderme Merkezleri / GGMs) in operation in the country, which by 2023 had a capacity exceeding 20,500 people. These centers are legally designated for administrative detention pending deportation. Notably, the great majority of this detention infrastructure's construction and maintenance has been financed by the EU —€213 million according to a major Lighthouse Reports investigation from 2024. This is alongside a number of Temporary Accommodation Centers (Geçici Barınma Merkezleri / GBMs) —spaces originally meant for humanitarian shelter—, many of which, in recent times, have come to be known as de facto deportation centers under harsher and even less regulated conditions, especially near the Turkish-Syrian border.

In fact, the EU has been the main enabler of Turkey's repressive migration policies, investing nearly €10 billion from 2011 to 2023 to bolster Turkey's border controls, detention capacity, and deportation infrastructure. The 2016 EU-Turkey Deal incentivized Turkey to contain asylum-seekers and accept returns in exchange for financial aid, effectively outsourcing border control. EU-funded biometric systems, digital surveillance platforms like GöçNet, and removal center construction underpin Turkey's detention and deportation apparatus. Turkey's designation as a "safe third country" by European institutions legitimizes people being returned there from other countries, despite ample evidence of coercion, abuse, and violations of asylum rights —and crucially, the risk that they will be forcibly sent to their country of origin despite the dangers they may face there. EU-Turkey dynamics around migration provide many insights into the more general, hostile trajectory of EU policy on migration, now further consolidated with the EU's New Pact on Migration.



Artist rendering of the Çankırı Removal Center as shared by VD Mimarlik architectural firm. The European Union and Turkish flags alongside the Presidency of Migration Management symbols are clearly illustrated on the left upper container and external walls. Source: [VD Mimarlik](#)



Beyond the official centers, migrants are also routinely held in various other de facto detention sites, including gendarmerie and police stations, airport transit areas, and border crossing facilities, particularly following apprehension. These locations often lack formal detention standards, oversight, or access to legal counsel, exposing detainees to heightened risks of abuse, neglect, and indefinite holding without clear procedural safeguards. Such facilities serve as temporary holding points but frequently become prolonged detention zones. More recently, the new “GÖKSEM” (Irregular Migrant Preliminary Admission and Referral Centre) system has been implemented. This new system purportedly aims to fill the gap after apprehension and reduce indefinite detention—to take the pressure off the Turkish Coast Guard and Gendarmerie—through a more formalised and systematic process, and has involved the construction of new detention facilities. However, according to human rights lawyers that spoke to BVMN, it is resulting in transfers over large distances that often lead to more confusion and resource-heavy logistical challenges. Little has been published analysing how this new system is functioning.

The physical environment in many of these centers and *ad hoc* sites is severely inadequate: overcrowding, poor sanitation, insufficient heating or cooling, limited access to clean water, and inadequate medical care are widely reported. Access to essential services—such as healthcare, mental health support, education, and legal assistance—is often grossly insufficient or entirely absent. Vulnerable groups, including women, children (notably unaccompanied minors), elderly, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ individuals, face heightened risks of neglect, abuse, and exploitation within these facilities.

While some removal centers have been converted from former schools or barracks, others have been purpose-built over the last decade. Many are located at a great distance from urban centres—Istanbul’s Silivri (now closed), Çatalca, Arnavutköy, Binkiliç, and Tuzla Removal Centers are all in extremely remote locations poorly served by public transport, if at all—meaning they are especially challenging to visit for lawyers or relatives, while also being kept far from public consciousness. Despite a growing number of reports describing torture, mistreatment and lack of access to legal support, Turkey’s detention system is equally distant from the concerns of EU bodies; Turkey receives little international criticism and now even boasts of being a global leader in terms of its battle against “irregular migration”, citing the vast number of deportations it has conducted in recent years. Despite the EU also funding programs for alternatives to administrative detention in Turkey, the general emphasis on aggressive detention and deportation policies is ultimately in line with EU policies of externalisation of so-called migration management.



Since independent monitoring is minimal, many detention sites operate as legal black holes, shielded from effective oversight. Human rights organisations, activists and Bar Associations have constantly criticized these centers for systemic neglect, degrading conditions, and psychological and physical abuse and torture on the part of staff. TIHEK (Human Rights and Equality Institution of Turkey) is the only rights body permitted to conduct visits to Turkey's removal centres. TIHEK's official mandate is to protect human rights and combat discrimination, however it has been severely criticised for its lack of independence from the government's agenda and for being largely inaccessible and ineffective. Even so, it did finally investigate a claim of physical abuse in Istanbul Tuzla Removal Center in November 2024 and concluded that the prohibition of ill-treatment in removal centers had been violated. In that case, M.M., a Tunisian national, was reportedly beaten out of view from security cameras by six officers, resulting in trauma and broken bones in his hand and multiple wounds and marks on his body. TIHEK also concluded that Tuzla Removal Center later withheld or interfered with relevant documents pertaining to the incident and investigation.



Human rights activists at a protest outside Arnautköy Removal Center for June 26th, International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, hold placards reading “torture is absolutely forbidden”, “strip search is torture.” Source and full statement: [TIHV \(Human Rights Foundation of Turkey\)](#).



Legal framework and access to counsel

In Turkey, administrative detention of foreigners is governed by the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP), which has been enforced since 2014. Legally, detention applies to migrants deemed to be at risk of absconding, those violating border rules (such as entering or exiting the country illegally), using false documentation, overstaying their permitted time, or posing supposed threats to “public order,” “public morality,” or “national security.” In reality, even documented asylum seekers with legal status are arbitrarily detained, reflecting the system’s punitive and discretionary nature. Thus, many people who wish to apply for protection in Turkey avoid doing so as they are fearful of the risk of detention and deportation if they make themselves known to the PMM, the main body responsible for international protection.

Most of Turkey’s Syrian population —total 2,699,787 people as of June 2nd, 2025 down from 3,641,370 at the end of 2020, according to the latest government data— are registered under the Temporary Protection Regime (TPR). The TPR is intended as a form of international protection adapted to Turkey’s context of hosting a massive number of Syrian people over the past 12 years. Turkey is a signatory to the 1951 UN Convention on Status of Refugees, but maintains a geographical distinction whereby only those fleeing “events occurring in Europe” would be considered for refugee status in the country. The Temporary Protection program does not offer the same rights and protections that full refugee status would ensure, and Syrians are among the highest represented groups to have been through the ordeal of administrative detention and deportation in Turkey.

Detainees in removal centers theoretically have the right to legal counsel, contact with lawyers, and to appeal detention or deportation decisions. However, access to legal support is uneven and often severely limited due to bureaucratic barriers, lack of information, and language obstacles. This undermines meaningful access to justice. While a UNHCR-funded free legal aid program has been in place for many years and is intended to provide legal support to those who otherwise could not afford it, its budget regularly expires after a certain quota of cases. Other associations that provided some legal support have also been severely impacted by funding cuts in the past year. Also, various Bar Associations state that removal centers refuse to share their information or contact details, so that those detained are often left to reach out for legal support via word of mouth within the centers. Not only does this lead to people being uninformed about their right to legal representation, it also encourages economic competition for clients between private lawyers.



Those that are brought to a removal center have a 48-hour window once they have been registered there during which an assessment is supposed to be carried out by the administration at the center, who will decide whether the person is to be deported or not. In the vast majority of cases, a deportation order is issued. From that point on, the person has a seven-day window in which to appeal. This requires an appeal to be made against both the administrative detention decision and the deportation decision. In recent years, the cost of each appeal from a private lawyer in Turkey is generally \$1,000. Even if a person or their relatives or friends manage to locate, source and notify a lawyer and raise such fees, there is also the chance that the person can be moved without notice to another removal center –often to an entirely different part of the country–, without informing their family or lawyer.

Failures to protect vulnerable groups

Women, children, and LGBTQ+ migrants are particularly vulnerable within detention. Unaccompanied minors are frequently detained without adequate safeguards or guardianship, exposing them to potential psychological trauma, exploitation and pushbacks or refoulement. Reports indicate that removal centers lack gender-sensitive protections, and sexual violence or harassment against women and LGBTQ+ detainees are likely to go uninvestigated.

The failure to provide adequate medical, psychological, and social services compounds these vulnerabilities. At the same time, the prolonged detention of vulnerable groups under such conditions can exacerbate trauma and is a violation of international child protection and human rights standards that Turkey is party to. This takes place in a broader context of Turkey's 2021 withdrawal from "the Istanbul Convention" –which contains specific articles on women asylum-seekers and refugees– while also aggressively seeking to repress and criminalise LGBTQ+ communities in general.

Violence and coercion

Widespread reports also detail coercion and abuse inside removal centers and other holding sites. Migrants are routinely pressured or forced to sign "voluntary return" forms under duress –through threats of violence, family separation, or indefinite detention. Such practices blatantly violate the principle of voluntary consent and non-refoulement obligations. In many cases of detained Afghans, this has been reportedly conducted with the informal cooperation of the Afghan Consulate. In other cases, detainees might sign or give their thumbprint for return while not even understanding the document in front of them. Examples of such cases can be found in the sections below.



Physical violence, degrading treatment, and neglect are documented but have largely not led to greater accountability. Lawyers and activists state that they have seen a notable difference in the response from the authorities when public pressure is applied—either by civil society or via the few opposition MPs that raise such issues— helping lead to changes in some rare cases. On the other hand, the result of some protest actions have been mixed. Women detained at Çatalca Removal Center in Istanbul protested against forced labour, overcrowding, filthy conditions and reportedly drugged food. It was initially reported that they had achieved some demands of improved conditions, but immediately following this, reports stated that many of the women involved had been promptly transferred from the removal center to a different facility.



A still from CCTV footage at Izmir Harmandali Removal Center as shared by T24 news agency in a 2021 feature covering allegations of torture on the part of authorities. Source: [T24](#)

Increased politicisation of migration and Mobile Migration Units

Since the 2023 elections especially, the Turkish government has openly politicized migration enforcement, using publicized police raids, mass detentions, and deportations as tools of their political messaging. As the economic crisis has deepened in the past five years, with a failing currency and intense inflation, migrant communities have, in a familiar pattern, come to be scapegoated for many of the country's ills. This was something especially weaponized by much of the political opposition, which led the government to a position of having to show that it could step up and “control the migration situation” in the country. The denial of migrant and refugee rights in Turkey, however, precedes the 2023 elections.



A major element of the country's campaign to crack down on so-called irregular migration has been the launch of Mobile Migration Units, vehicles equipped to conduct biometric ID checks in public spaces with Migration Administration staff and police, facilitating large-scale apprehensions without adequate safeguards. Those who are profiled and controlled will have their data checked on the GöçNet database, the Migration Registration System that integrates migrants' personal and biometric data, collected during any application process for a visa, residence permit, or international protection. Both EU and UK government funding have supported the development of this surveillance infrastructure, with many of these vehicles even branded with logos emphasizing EU-Turkey partnership. The system is promoted as the ideal solution to controlling "irregularities" in public space, while not disturbing Turkey's 17.5 million tourists or those with legal permits.

In a statement from the PMM on April 16th, it was announced that since the launch of the Mobile Migration Units initiative in July 2023, 3,724,945 foreigners' on-the-spot identity checks had been carried out. Of these, 145,435 people were identified as having some irregularity in their status and 'deportation processes were initiated.' According to the same statement, between June 1st 2023 and April 11th, 2025, an approximate total 260,000 "irregular migrants" were deported from Turkey. These deportation figures exist in addition to the number of Syrians who reportedly returned voluntarily in recent years -76,346 in 2023, 163,292 in 2024 and 136,545 up to April 2025. As emphasized already, the "voluntary" nature of many returns is countered by multiple accounts of force and coercion. With its spectacle of aggressive enforcement, coupled now with the fall of the Assad regime and a very public campaign of "safe, legal, dignified and voluntary" returns to Syria, the AKP government has largely taken hold of the migration discourse and used it to frame a domestic and international success story.



A Mobile Migration Point vehicle conducting an identification with biometric data. Source: [IHA](#)



Turkmen dissidents face deportation despite huge risk of torture

Many Turkmen migrants, among them political dissidents, continue to face major obstacles from their government while living abroad, in that their consulate does not renew their passports, thus violating their right to freedom of movement. This leaves many subject to becoming undocumented, as they cannot apply to renew valid residence permits.

Turkmen activists Alisher Sakhatov and Abdulla Orusov maintained social media platforms critical of the Turkmenistan government and had applied for international protection in Turkey, but were facing complications with their applications. On April 28th, they were detained by migration administration authorities in Sinop and transferred almost 300 km away to Çankırı Removal Center, northeast of Ankara. International protection holders or applicants are supposed to be protected from deportation, but in practice, they can either be detained and face deportation through claims of threatening public security and order, or simply through more unlawful and opaque practices. On April 29th their lawyer reported that the deportation decision was based on the claim that they posed a threat to public order and public security in Turkey, but that no concrete evidence or explanation for this had been provided by the authorities. A petition on their behalf emphasised that their deportation would constitute a violation of international law, as they would face serious risks of persecution, torture, unfair trials, and enforced disappearance if returned to Turkmenistan. At the time of writing, they were still understood to be under detention in Çankırı Removal Center. The Center was last under focus after a massive fire broke out there in the summer of 2023, and the over-1200 people detained had to be evacuated. It was reported that the fire was started by people detained there by setting alight beds and blankets.



The Çankırı Governor and his team are shown around the Çankırı Removal Center in 2020.

Source: [Çankırı Governorate](#)



Uzbek opposition figure deported despite major risk of torture

Uzbek oppositional religious blogger Alisher Tursunov (Mübeşşir Ahmed) was deported from Turkey to Uzbekistan, an act deemed to be a violation of the principle of non-refoulement. According to his lawyer, Ibrahim Ergin of UMHD (International Refugee Rights Association), he was arrested at his home in Istanbul on May 8th, and was moved to Edirne Removal Center, from where his lawyers expected to see him released. For some days, however, his whereabouts were not known by his lawyer or family members. It later transpired that he had been transferred back to an Istanbul removal center and then deported to Uzbekistan on May 10th, as confirmed by statements from the Uzbekistan Ministry for Internal Affairs. The Ministry also stated that he had been on Interpol's international wanted persons list.

Tursunov founded the Islamic news platform Azon.uz in 2017, which faced criticism from the Uzbek government. It later became Azon Global in November 2023. Tursunov was reportedly detained by Turkish authorities in December 2023 and held in a removal center until February 2024. In February 2025, Uzbekistan issued an arrest warrant against him for allegedly creating and participating in banned organisations.

As was noted in the January Monthly Report, Turkey —especially during the era of the ruling Justice and Development Party— has been a destination for many fleeing the severe restrictions and persecution of religious expression in Uzbekistan. However, with the Turkish government's current aggressive detention and deportation efforts, many Uzbek nationals have been in an increasingly risky situation in Turkey. According to Human Rights Watch's 2024 Country Report, "impunity for torture and ill-treatment [...] remained the norm" in Uzbekistan.

Pregnant woman and toddler arbitrarily detained despite health risks

Another case involving reportedly severe mistreatment of a pregnant woman and her toddler emerged in May. The woman, a citizen of Dagestan, a republic of Russia, was urgently sent to a hospital after being detained at an Istanbul removal center since late March. According to her lawyer, Ibrahim Ergin of UMHD (as featured in the previous section above), on March 28th 2025, A.K., who has held a valid residence permit in Turkey for four years, was detained at the airport in Istanbul. Despite her legal status and no criminal record, she was declared a "foreign terrorist fighter" and transferred to Çatalca İnceğiz Removal Centre in Istanbul without a clear legal basis. At the time of detention, A.K. was 7.5 months pregnant and accompanied by her two-year-old child.



In detention, she experienced several medical emergencies related to her pregnancy and rather than receiving adequate care or being released, she was taken to health centres for brief checkups and returned to detention.

On May 13th 2025, following a severe medical episode, she was urgently sent to the obstetrics department of a private Istanbul hospital. Her toddler was reportedly separated from her and handed over to an unrelated adult, without proper legal procedure.

In a separate case in January reported by BVMN, another pregnant woman, Ozoda Dzhabbarova, of Uzbek origin, suffered a miscarriage during her period of detention at Çatalca İnceğiz Removal Centre. She attributed the cause of the miscarriage to the harsh conditions of her detention.



Çatalca İnceğiz Removal Centre. Source: Anonymous

Systemic failures and inhumane conditions persist in Harran Temporary Accommodation Centre

In our April Monthly Report, BVMN reported on the case of a Syrian woman (H.S.) and her four young children, who went missing following their apprehension by Turkish



authorities and transfer between detention sites. The family was eventually relocated to the Harran Temporary Accommodation Centre in Şanlıurfa after widespread public pressure. H.S.'s lawyer had not been notified of her transfer, and images he shared revealed serious reactions in the children due to bedbug infestations at the İzmir Harmandalı Removal Centre.

In a recent and closely related development, Emek Party MP Sevda Karaca brought forward the case of another Syrian family detained under similarly distressing conditions. R.E., her husband H.A., and their 1.5-year-old sick child Y.E. were reportedly taken from the city of Osmaniye in south-central Turkey and transferred to Harran Temporary Accommodation Centre. According to Karaca, the infant was denied basic needs, such as milk, and their condition deteriorated badly. She added that, due to struggles with their residency applications being systematically denied, they had not been able to receive proper medical care while she was pregnant.

Karaca submitted a detailed parliamentary question to Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya, highlighting systemic issues across removal and accommodation centers, including inadequate access to medicine, hygiene, food, and independent oversight. She further questioned the use of €213 million from EU funding, stating that conditions in these centres are “worse than prison,” with allegations of abuse and sexual violence previously raised in parliament.

In response, Turkey’s Presidency of Migration Management denied the allegations, claiming that the child received medical attention and that conditions at Harran meet standards in accordance with human rights principles. Independent verification of these claims remains impossible due to the lack of monitoring access.



Harran Temporary Accommodation Center, Şanlıurfa. Source: [Cumhuriyet](#)



Syrian activist Tahha al-Ghazi, arbitrarily detained, “voluntarily” returns to Syria

On May 19th, it was announced that Syrian human rights activist Taha al-Ghazi, who was taken from his home by the police on the evening of May 16th and was unlocatable for some time, was sent back to Syria with his wife. Al-Ghazi has been one of the most vocal defenders of migrant and refugee rights in Turkey.

Police had initially called to his home in Istanbul, but only his wife was there. They reportedly phoned him to say he needed to report to the police station to confirm his address. When he stated that he was not immediately available, they threatened to take his wife instead. Al-Ghazi arrived home soon after this phone conversation and was met by a number of officers who took him directly to Vatan Police Station in the Fatih District, from there to Istanbul Arnavutköy Removal Center, and then immediately to Aydın Removal Center, in Turkey's Aegean region. His wife was also soon detained and, by Monday, they had been sent back to Syria.

In a message he shared after having crossed the Öncüpınar Border Gate into Syria, al-Ghazi stated: “I signed the voluntary return documents, which was the most logical and did not want my wife to stay in GGMs. The report written against me based on the report from the Security Director is participation in provocateur actions. God willing, I will enter Türkiye legally again with my passport as soon as possible.”

According to the information al-Ghazi was able to obtain from the authorities, he had an administrative restriction code of “G-207”, meaning “participation in provocative actions” -activities deemed a threat to national security.

In June 2024, Turkish authorities revoked his citizenship. He was pursuing a legal challenge in order to have it restored.

A statement on the al-Ghazi's case issued by the Migrant and Refugees Solidarity Network on May 22nd relayed a lengthier account from him personally and provided an extensive list of the different rights violations his case involved: Non-refoulement; No right to appeal (due process); Arbitrary revocation of citizenship; Incommunicado detention; Coerced voluntary return; Lack of notification, Arbitrary procedure; Targeting for human rights advocacy; Violation of family life and health rights. The Network demanded the revocation of the unlawful decisions against Taha al-Ghazi and his wife, and that they be granted means to return securely to Turkey. Al-Ghazi's



own words shared in the statement focused more on the victimisation of human rights defenders, warning that the authorities are not complying with law and regulations and that this represents a great danger for Turkish citizens also.



An earlier picture of Taha al-Ghazi back in Turkey.
Source: [Evrensel](#) / [Taha al-Ghazi private archive](#)



CRAs: Towards a carceralisation of administrative detention

In France, the detention of people without the right papers began illegally and in secret. It was first imposed by police through administrative practices before it was gradually legalized. As early as 1964, in Marseille, a hangar in the port of Arenç was used to hold foreign nationals awaiting deportation, with no legal basis other than a police regulation dating from 1938, and without judicial review. For a long time, this facility was discreetly operated by the prefecture and remained invisible to the public and the courts, even though senior government officials were aware of its existence. It was only after the “Arenç affair” came to light in 1975 –thanks to the mobilisation of lawyers, journalists, and families of detainees– that the government attempted to retroactively provide a legal basis for this practice with a new law on October 29th 1981. With this law, the state legalized its own practice of detention and created the framework for systematized detention of non-French citizens.

Today, there are 26 Administrative Detention Centers (CRAs) in France, 21 of them are located in mainland France and 5 in the French overseas territories [5], with a total capacity of around 2,000 places. This capacity has been steadily increasing since 2017 (from 1,400 places in 2017 to 1,959 in 2024), in line with the government’s intention to expand the administrative detention system. The publicly stated aim is to reach 3,000 places by 2027, which would nearly double the national capacity in a decade. Despite this increase in the number of places, 2024 saw a decrease in the number of people actually detained over the year (40,592 detainees in 2024 compared with almost 46,955 in 2023).

According to the state’s new approach, CRAs are now primarily reserved for individuals considered to be a threat to public order. However, in administrative practice, even simple police custody may suffice to meet the criterion of a threat to public order, thus significantly broadening the range of people liable to be placed in administrative detention and increasing the risk of arbitrary interpretations of this concept. This can be considered part of an institutional attempt at creating legal pathways to codify the racist discourse constructing people on the move and migrants as a “threat to public order” into law, thus justifying prolonged detention.

[5] In 2024, the overseas CRAs, particularly in Mayotte, Guadeloupe, Guyana, Martinique and La Réunion, saw a very high number of placements, with over 22,000 people detained only in Mayotte. These territories account for a large proportion of administrative detention in France, but access to rights and detention conditions remain particularly difficult there, due to geographical remoteness and a lack of legal and community resources.



According to the report by the French Office of the Controller General of Places of Deprivation of Liberty, this policy contributes to the creation of an environment of mutual distrust which, in the context of detention, can lead to an atmosphere of fear and increased violence and tensions. This instruction has been approved by the Council of State after an appeal by human rights organisations. The Controller General characterises this development as a “carceralisation” of detention centres, where most measures of improvement taken by the state are changes for the betterment of the working conditions of civil servants employed in the facilities. The vast majority of these changes involve increased “security measures”. The report of the Controller General has also criticised the excessive use of solitary confinement on a weak legal basis, without judicial control, in circumstances outside the legal framework. The use of prolonged periods of confinement has been described, often for more than four consecutive days, and reaching up to 18 days, sometimes even with handcuffs tied to the bed. There are no legal remedies or possibilities for appeal against these measures and, usually, no doctor, legal support or even the immigration office are informed of their use.

With the goal of reaching the target of 3,000 places, several new centers are under construction or in consideration in various cities: Dijon, Oissel, Nantes, Béziers, Aix-en-Provence, Goussainville, Nice, Olivet, Mérignac, Mayotte, and Dunkirk. Notably, the Dunkirk CRA will be entirely financed by the United Kingdom through Sandhurst funds, as part of a bilateral partnership officially aimed at securing the Channel crossing, an agreement that is only making the crossing even more dangerous than it already is.

The state’s budget allocated to CRAs, other administrative holding facilities and waiting areas stands at 69 million € for 2025, covering the maintenance of existing structures and the creation of new places. A funding plan of 240 million has been committed for the period 2023–2027 to reach the state’s capacity target. This funding includes not only the costs of construction and renovation, but also staff expenses and ancillary costs related to the management and security of the centers.

While the construction of new CRAs is costing tens of millions of euros, other essential sectors –such as the reception of asylum seekers and the fight against precariousness– are suffering from a severe lack of resources and facing drastic budget cuts. The elimination of around 6,000 accommodation places for asylum seekers by 2025 demonstrates a controversial prioritization of public spending. The increase in funding for detention centers highlights a contradiction: the resources allocated to detention are being prioritized at the expense of reception and integration policies that address urgent social needs.



Increased detention without deportations

In 2024, the average length of administrative detention reached nearly 33 days, a significant increase from the previous year, with an average 28 days. This rise is part of a steady upward trend observed over several years, resulting from the tightening of the legal framework, particularly following the adoption of the Asylum and Immigration Act of January 26th 2024. This law abolished a number of safeguards against deportation and increased reliance on the concept of 'threat to public order' to justify detention and facilitate its extension, to the detriment of individualized case assessments.

In addition, a bill adopted by the Senate on March 18th, 2025 provides for a further extension of the maximum period of administrative detention to 210 days for certain individuals. Particularly those considered "especially dangerous" by the state, those convicted of an offense punishable by more than five years' imprisonment or those subject to a ban from French territory. However, the effectiveness of this extension to further the publicly stated objective of deportation has been strongly contested. While in 2024, 16,228 foreign nationals were detained in CRAs in mainland France, the actual deportation rate following detention increased only slightly, from 36% in 2023 to 39% in 2024 (i.e., 5,684 foreign nationals removed in 2024). This means that over 60% of those detained were not deported from the country. The situation highlights a persistent gap between the number of people detained and the number actually deported, illustrating the limits of this policy's effectiveness and the predominantly punitive impact of administrative detention on those concerned.

This imbalance is even more pronounced in overseas detention centers, where the number of people detained is, proportionally, extremely high (in 2024, 24,364 people were held in detention centers in those regions). For example, in Mayotte, a French overseas department by Madagascar, the policy of administrative detention is incredibly intense and fast compared to mainland France, partly due to the exceptional legislation in force there. In 2023, 29,516 people were detained in the Pamandzi CRA, representing almost 60% of all detainees held in all of France, and almost 25,000 people were deported, often in less than 24 hours after arrest. This 'industrial' approach to deportations, which mainly targets the Comorian population, is based on a derogatory legal regime allowing permanent identity checks and accelerated procedures, to the detriment of access to rights and fundamental protections. Children are particularly affected: more than 3,200 were detained in Mayotte's CRA in 2023, accounting for over 10% of all detainees. This policy, supported by large-scale operations such as 'Wuambushu' –a French military operation in Mayotte, made public in 2023 and aimed at deporting foreign country nationals



without residence permits–, takes place in a context of severe discrimination and legal exceptions, making Mayotte an ‘experimental laboratory’ for the most repressive migration policies in France.

Conditions inside the facilities

French law foresees the detention conditions in administrative detention centres to be hotel-like. However, in reality, they are very similar to prisons without any occupational offer during detention. In their 2023 annual report, the French Office of the Controller General of Places of Deprivation of Liberty described the conditions of detention as heavily infringing the dignity and the fundamental rights of the persons detained. The report emphasizes the degraded or dilapidated state of the facilities, described as undersized, poorly furnished and sometimes “anxiety-provoking”. It also criticises the layout of the premises, stating that it is not able to guarantee privacy during the use of bathrooms and showers.

Mounib [6], a person detained for several months in 2024 in the Coquelles detention centre, close to Calais, described his experience to the Collective Anti-CRA during a visit:

“The day doesn’t pass here. One day? It feels like a month. There is a small courtyard, but there is no space. It is maybe 30 square metres. We are 27, 28 inside. We can’t even walk. And the bins in the courtyard are too dirty. There are fungus in the shower, diseases. Hygiene in general: it stinks of shit. There is piss. For the cleaning: during the weekend there is none, the room is all dirty. On weekdays, it is done quickly, it is not cleaning at all. In addition, there are fleas, diseases.”

Another point of critique is a general atmosphere of tension and violence, to which police staff “sometimes give in or even contribute”, often leading to confinement measures in unsuitable premises, and, usually, under particularly unhygienic conditions. Isolation and restraint measures are often implemented outside of the legal framework of care without consent, defined by the Public Health Code. These measures are often practiced under especially undignified conditions.

The name was changed by the collective that took the testimony



Many detainees who met with the Committee of the Controller General during their visits reported not having seen a doctor, psychiatrist or psychologist since the start of their detention, but testified to mass distribution of medications, without prior medical assessment, leading to inappropriate medical treatment and to drug trafficking practices inside the detention centres. This is in addition to a lack of access to sufficient nutrition.

Mounib describes his experience:

"What can I say? When I first arrived, it was a hassle. A nightmare. There is nothing working well here. I have tooth pain, but there is no dentist. It is a pain in the ass to go to the doctor. You have to knock at the door, they don't come [the police]. You talk with the police, they tell you it is the doctor, you talk with the doctor, they tell you it is the police. The doctor only gives you pills to sleep. If you get sick starting after 4pm, there is nothing to do, they don't take you to the doctor. It's a hassle. If you get sick at night, you are going to die here. You can't see the therapist. If you ask to see the therapist, she isn't here. I have never seen her. I have asked several times and I have never got an appointment with her. [...] About the food: you only eat potatoes for two months. Lunch is at 11.30am and dinner at 5.30pm. You have maybe 20 minutes to eat and it's too hot in the room. After that, you can't take anything to your room. So from 5.30 pm until 8am you can't eat anything, you're starving."

Hunger strike as means of protest

There are regular reports on hunger strikes inside detention centers, mostly made public by collectives who organise in solidarity against the detention regime. The national and local press rarely reports on incidents taking place inside the detention facilities.

In February 2024, 65 detainees of the CRA in Vincennes started a hunger strike to denounce police violence, racism, and a systematic lack of access to rights. The hunger



strikers published their statement, directed to the state attorney, which emphasized the constant police violence, violation of human rights and racist prejudices. In October 2024, a group of people detained in the CRA of Marseille started a hunger strike after a French right-wing politician filmed detainees during a visit without informing them or asking for their consent. The people who appeared in the videos were informed about the existence of the recording by their relatives, who found it online. They not only asserted their right to control the use of their image but also sought to expose the truth about the deplorable conditions of their detention, including inadequate access to medical care, insufficient nutrition, and daily incidents of police violence. These are just two examples of the many hunger strikes and actions of resistance that break out every year inside French detention centers.

Moreover, four French associations which support people held in administrative detention centers denounced four deaths of detainees within the last three months of 2024, due to suicide, medical neglect, or hunger strike. These deaths highlight the authorities' neglect of their protection duties and their failure to consider detainees' physical and mental health, despite repeated warnings and rising cases of self-harm and suicide attempts.

Limited access to procedural rights and complaints mechanisms

Since 2008, the law provides that people held in administrative detention centres must be able to exercise their rights through 'legal entities' that sign agreements with the Ministry of the Interior. In practice, five associations operate in the various detention centres. These agreements are signed under the public contract procedure and are therefore entirely funded by the Ministry of the Interior.

The role of these associations is to provide legal and administrative support for people detained in these facilities. These entities are meant to be the State's humanitarian guarantors inside the detention centres. Despite their presence, however, neglectful judicial practices and increasingly restrictive laws only serve to reinforce a low cost-low safeguards justice system. Hearings are rushed, often using video-conferencing, the lawyer is regularly physically present with the judge, the interpreter does not always speak the detainee's mother tongue, arguments that could lead to the detainee's release are rarely examined, and judges are contemptuous.

Here is a testimony's extract from a court hearing observation:



"Throughout the hearing, and as is often the case at the Coquelles court, the judge and police officers, as well as the prefecture's lawyer, were very relaxed. Jokes and unpleasant remarks could be heard in the courtroom. The prefecture's lawyer didn't need to work too hard, as the judge put forward the arguments for him."

Recently, the Senate passed a bill –still needs to be voted by the National Assembly– to remove the legal and administrative assistance provided by associations and replace them with the OFII (French Office of Immigration and Integration, a body attached to the Ministry of the Interior), which would simply provide 'information on access to the law'. The Minister of the Interior supports this bill, claiming that the associations 'exceed their missions and actually turn them against the State by obstructing its action through pure militancy'.

The words of the Minister of the Interior are far from reality. Overall, access to rights in detention centers is extremely limited: the presence of associations is not permanent, access to their offices often depends on the goodwill of the police, meetings with lawyers are not always confidential, interpreting is often inappropriate and access to healthcare is difficult and insufficient.

Finally, while, in theory, it is possible to apply for asylum in a detention center, the application will systematically be examined under the accelerated procedure, and the interview will take place via videoconference. Applying for asylum can also backfire on the people detained. Another extract from the testimony mentioned above:

"During the hearing, the judge also raised the issue of an 'abusive' asylum application, the sole purpose of which would be to 'circumvent detention'. How can an asylum application be abusive? Everyone has the right to unconditional asylum, a right guaranteed by the Constitution."



Strictly speaking, there are no mechanisms to report incidents behind the walls of detention centres. Detainees can only contact the associations mandated by the State, which could help them file a complaint or refer the matter to the Controller General of Places of Deprivation of Liberty.

In addition, access to detention centres is severely limited and regulated: only judges and members of parliament may enter and visit the centres without prior authorisation. For any other member of civil society, it is not possible to enter the centre other than by visiting a detainee in the room provided for this purpose. Furthermore, the premises available for visits are not appropriate for the number of people being held. For example, at the Coquelles centre, there is only one room for 104 detainees. Moreover, the visiting rooms are equipped with cameras and visitors are not allowed to use their phones or carry a pen or paper.

Mounib, whose testimony you have read above, speaks about his lived experience of these conditions:

"Visits, it's shit. You can't bring anything in, you're not allowed anything. You can't bring drinks in, food. Only tobacco. Some people here don't smoke, so for them you can't bring anything. It's only at the last minute that they tell you there's a visitor for you. They don't even tell you who is coming to visit you. They give you 30 minutes, sometimes not even 30 minutes. A visit with the camera is shit. You can't relax with your visitor. The police don't respect visitors. They give them a hard time so that they never come back. There are four zones [in the Centre] and only one visiting room, that is often dirty. Some people come from far away just for that and can't get in. Some people wait two or three hours for a visit. And then, sometimes they only leave you for five or ten minutes."

The legal associations mandated to work in deportation centers rarely denounce the conditions of detention and do little to relay the testimonies of those detained. As a result, it is often 'Anti-Detention Center collectives' or support groups that work to gather testimonies and relay the voices of those locked up.



**Border Violence
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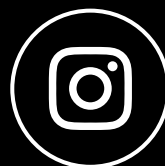
Network structure and contact

BVMN acts as an alliance of organisations in the Balkans and Greece. BVMN is based on the efforts of member organisations working in the field of documentation, media, advocacy and litigation.

We finance the work through charitable grants and foundations, and are not in receipt of funds from any political organisation. The expenditures cover transport subsidies, several part-time paid coordination positions and some costs incurred by member organisations for their contributions to our shared work.

To follow more from the Border Violence Monitoring Network, check out our website for the entire testimony archive, previous monthly reports and regular news pieces. To follow us on social media, find us on Twitter handle @Border_Violence and on Facebook.

For further information regarding this report or more on how to become involved, and for press and media requests please email us at mail@borderviolence.eu.



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