

KEY OBSERVATIONS

PRIORITY TOPICS

■ Prison

ILL-TREATMENT – Implement an effective strategy to address inter-prisoner violence and increase prisoner safety.

CONDITIONS OF DETENTION – Eliminate the severe overcrowding at Nicosia Central Prisons (NCP) through, *inter alia* increasing the use of alternatives to detention.

SPECIAL CARE OR UNITS – Swiftly transfer the children held at NCP to a more suitable facility for minors.

OTHER ISSUES – Improve the provision of healthcare through, *inter alia* guaranteeing medical confidentiality, ensuring injuries are properly recorded, and adopting robust policies for suicide and self-harm prevention and for tackling substance use.

■ Police

CONDITIONS OF DETENTION – Cease prolonged detention periods in police establishments.

INVESTIGATIONS AND IMPUNITY - Reinforce a zero-tolerance approach as regards ill-treatment and place a greater emphasis on the training of police officers in interviewing criminal suspects.

■ Immigration

FIRST-RECEPTION / DETENTION CENTRES- Any detention of asylum seekers must be as a measure of last resort and the detention should be legally prescribed, based on an individual detention order, and subject to the principles of necessity, proportionality, and the availability of an effective remedy.

FIRST-RECEPTION / DETENTION CENTRES - End the detention of vulnerable persons, including families with children and unaccompanied and separated children.

GOOD PRACTICES

FIRST-RECEPTION / DETENTION CENTRES - Interpretation services are regularly available at Pournara First Reception Centre, both in person and by phone.

THE CPT AND CYPRUS

Cyprus ratified the ECPT in 1989, and the Committee's first visit took place in 1992.

Since ratification, the CPT has carried out 10 country visits to Cyprus – 8 periodic and 2 ad hoc – including 103 visits to police establishments, 9 to prisons, 12 to psychiatric institutions, 11 social welfare and educational-correctional establishments, 2 to military detention facilities, and 16 to border and immigration detention facilities.

All the visit reports have been published. Cyprus did not accept the automatic publication of the visit reports.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The CPT's report on its ad hoc visit to Cyprus in April 2025 examines the treatment and conditions of detention of persons held in prison, law enforcement agencies and immigration detention. To this end, the CPT reviewed the measures taken by the Cypriot authorities to implement recommendations made by the Committee after its previous visits in 2013, 2017 and 2023. The CPT delegation examined the situation at Nicosia Central Prisons, the First Reception Centre of Pournara and the airport holding facility at Larnaca, as well as visiting several police establishments across the country.

Nicosia Central Prisons (NCP)

Overall, the CPT found that the situation for persons held in the prison had remained much the same as found in 2023. Most of the serious issues afflicting the establishment could be linked to continued overcrowding, which adversely impacted the conditions of detention and treatment of persons held in NCP.

As a positive improvement since 2023, the CPT received almost no allegations of physical ill-treatment by staff. Yet overall physical safety remained a concern. The situation regarding inter-prisoner violence and neglect by staff in their duty to protect and prevent such violence, had not just remained unchanged but had even, in some areas, deteriorated. The Committee found that the lack of front-line prison staff created a breeding ground for stronger groups of prisoners to develop. The CPT reiterates that allowing stronger groups to develop and impose informal punishments jeopardises prisoners' safety. This raises clear issues under Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the authorities' duty of care to all persons held in NCP. Swift action should be taken to urgently review NCP's violence prevention policy and to recruit and train more front-line prison staff to address these issues.

Turning to the living conditions, the CPT found severe overcrowding. In certain blocks, such as Block 10A, large numbers of prisoners slept on mattresses on the floor, with up to four prisoners crammed into cells of only 5.5m²; such cells should never accommodate more than one person. Further, ready access to toilets remained problematic with over half of NCP's blocks still did not having in-cell sanitary facilities. Consequently, at night, due to the lack of staff available to let prisoners out of their cells to use the block's toilets, prisoners had to resort to urinating in bottles or defecating in bags, in packed cells. The Committee considered this practice degrading.

As for the daily regime, it remains positive that prisoners are able to spend most of the day unlocked from their cells. Further, there has been a slight expansion in the range of activities and training on offer. Nevertheless, regular access to a range of purposeful activities, education and organised sport was not possible for large numbers of prisoners.

The Committee raised several concerns regarding the children and young adults held at NCP. Chief among these was that children remain incarcerated in poor and unsuitable conditions. Due to overcrowding, some children had to sleep on mattresses on the floor in mouldy, graffiti-ridden cells, which they shared with the young adults. Moreover, they lacked any form of tailored, child-oriented regime of purposeful or vocational activities or work, geared at their progress and eventual reintegration into the community. Many of the children complained of being cold, hungry and bored. The Committee underlined that NCP was an inappropriate place to hold children and encouraged the swift transfer of the children to a more suitable facility for minors as soon as possible.

The Committee also puts forward a series of measures to improve the situation of women prisoners, notably as regards developing a gender-specific approach and ensuring that their specific needs are met. Likewise, the treatment of foreign national prisoners held at NCP should be improved.

As for healthcare, with the exception of the recruitment of a psychiatrist, there had been no noticeable improvements since the 2023 visit. Medical confidentiality remained a problem, with officers still distributing medication instead of nurses and the recording of injuries was poor. Action is also needed to put in place a proper suicide and self-harm prevention policy and to develop the approach towards substance use.

The CPT also found that no action had been taken to amend the system of provisional disciplinary isolation and issues remained in the application of disciplinary procedures and the notable lack of due process safeguards. Concerted action is required to change the current approach and to ensure that any offence is investigated, adjudicated and carried out promptly.

The CPT also found that an effective complaints system was lacking. As noted in 2023, many prisoners stated that their complaints never received a response. The internal complaints system did not adhere to the principles of confidentiality, effectiveness and traceability.

Police establishments

The Committee's long-standing recommendations that persons should not be detained in police custody for prolonged periods of time remained unimplemented. While lengths of stay varied greatly depending on the nature of the grounds for detention, some individuals met by the delegation had been held in police stations for many months, in inadequate conditions.

Most persons with whom the delegation spoke said that they had been treated correctly by the police. However, the delegation did receive a few allegations of physical ill-treatment and verbal abuse by police officers. The CPT reiterates the need to reinforce a zero-tolerance approach as regards ill-treatment.

Immigration establishments

At the time of the visit, 290 foreign nationals were deprived of their liberty in the First Reception Centre of Pournara, a marked decrease from the figures seen in 2023. Persons, all of whom had claimed asylum, could leave the Centre once i) asylum registration and other tests results were completed and ii) they provided a proof of future address to the Asylum Service. Certain tests results, including age assessments and DNA tests, were taking many months. Additionally, finding accommodation outside of the centre was challenging for asylum seekers.

The CPT reiterates its long-standing view that asylum seekers should only be deprived of their liberty as an exceptional measure. Further, the CPT reiterates that the Cypriot authorities transfer vulnerable groups to more suitable accommodation and that steps be taken to end the detention of children and unaccompanied and separated children (UASC).

The living conditions in the facility had improved since 2023. In most parts of the facility, tents had been replaced with prefabricated units and the general state of hygiene had markedly improved. Yet, although the facility was operating well under capacity, the CPT found persons accommodated in overcrowded and run-down conditions; this was notably the case in the section for unaccompanied boys.

The lack of regular regime of structured or purposeful activities meant that persons had nothing to do to structure their day. It remained particularly deplorable that, other than the opportunity for each child to attend one Greek class a week, no activities were on offer for children.

The CPT found that healthcare staffing levels had improved, however, access to mental healthcare services remained underdeveloped. Vulnerability assessments were only performed when persons were flagged as potentially vulnerable during registration procedures. Furthermore, once identified as vulnerable, other than being placed in "safe zones", very few protective safeguards were afforded.

As asylum seekers may be held at Pournara for an undefined period ranging from a couple of weeks to several months, it is essential that each person be provided with an individualised detention order that clearly spells out the reasons for detention and the safeguards surrounding such detention, including avenues for appeal and complaint.