

KEY OBSERVATIONS

PRIORITY AND LONG-STANDING ISSUES

■ Prison

CONDITIONS OF DETENTION

- Eliminate overcrowding in prisons inter alia through a review of criminal policy and legislation and sentencing practices, with an emphasis on applying the full range of non-custodial sanctions and measures.
- Take measures to improve the daily life of all prisoners, by ensuring that prisons are maintained in a decent state of repair and hygiene and by expanding the range of purposeful activities on offer.

PRISON STAFF – Take proactive steps to remedy the severe shortages of prison staff, especially at Korydallos I Men’s Prison and Chania Prison, along with a comprehensive plan for providing all staff with proper initial and ongoing training and support.

ILL-TREATMENT – Implement an effective national strategy to prevent inter-prisoner violence and intimidation, which must include staff regaining control of prison wings, separating stronger groups of prisoners, and significantly increasing staffing levels.

SPECIAL CARE – Provide the necessary support for indigent and other categories of prisoners in a vulnerable situation, including women, persons with disabilities and older prisoners, to ensure that their specific needs are met.

HEALTHCARE – Address the structural deficiencies in healthcare provision, including mental healthcare, notably as concerns the severe shortages of healthcare staff and the absence of integrated healthcare management.

■ Police

ILL-TREATMENT (PREVENTION) – Pursue effective action to foster a professional police culture, through ongoing training and promoting the application of investigative interviewing techniques, the systematic electronic recording of all police interviews, and greater police accountability.

THE CPT AND GREECE

Greece ratified the ECPT in 1991, and the Committee’s first visit took place in 1993.

Since ratification, the CPT has carried out 21 country visits to Greece – 8 periodic and 13 ad hoc – including 178 visits to police establishments, 81 to prisons, 17 to psychiatric institutions, 5 port authorities, 2 to military detention facilities, and 123 to border and immigration detention facilities.

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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During its January 2025 periodic visit to Greece, the CPT examined the treatment and conditions of detention of persons deprived of their liberty in Greek prisons and by the Hellenic Police. The delegation visited nine prison establishments, including both women's prisons, and several police establishments across various regions. The visit aimed to assess progress on recommendations made following the CPT's previous visits in 2019 and 2021.

Cooperation in terms of facilitating the visit was generally excellent. Nevertheless, the CPT found that long-standing systemic and structural problems, already identified in its 2011 public statement on Greece and in the five subsequent visit reports focussed on prison matters, continue to undermine the effective functioning of the Greek prison system. The findings of the 2025 visit confirm once again that the chronic issues of overcrowding and severe staff shortages persist, compounded by other deficiencies in the prisons visited. While acknowledging some steps taken under the third Strategic Plan for prison policy (2024-2026), these measures appear largely piecemeal and reactive. The reform and recovery of the Greek prison system require a much more strategic approach with decisive action and substantial investment, including a review of the criminal policy and legislation and sentencing practices.

In light of the on-going procedure under Article 10, paragraph 2, of the CPT Convention – which remains open – and given that far too many prisoners in Greece continue to be held in conditions which represent an affront to human dignity, the CPT held high-level talks at the Prime Ministers' Office on 19 June 2025, prior to the adoption of this report. During the meeting, the Greek authorities acknowledged the long-standing structural problems afflicting the prison system as identified by the CPT. Moreover, in referencing the Committee's key role in the reform process, the Greek authorities presented a fully costed, multi-sector, five-year reform program for the recovery of the prison system under the coordination and oversight of the Office of the Prime Minister. This new Action Plan will run from 2025 to 2030. In the CPT's view, this new plan represents a significant and promising step forward in both cooperation and strategic planning to tackle the chronic crisis in prisons. Its effective implementation, alongside urgent measures to improve daily prison life, must be vigorously pursued as a long-term national priority.

Prison establishments

As of January 2025, Greece held 11 527 prisoners for a capacity of 10 763 places, with 24 of 35 prison facilities overcrowded and 16 operating at or above 130% occupancy. By July 2025, the prison population had risen to 12 449 and was set to increase further. Overcrowding has been a constant feature of the Greek prison system for many years and requires a coherent strategy to reduce occupancy rates, covering both admissions to and release from prison, to ensure that imprisonment really is a measure of last resort. Greater use should be made of non-custodial measures before sentencing (including alternatives to pre-trial detention), as well as alternatives to imprisonment at the sentencing and post-sentencing stages (including suspended sentences and conditional release). The policy of very long sentences and their impact on overcrowding in prisons should also be reviewed. Judges and prosecutors should be provided with appropriate training on the application of non-custodial measures.

The central pillar of the Greek authorities' strategy to resolve overcrowding and to improve material conditions in prisons continues to be the building of new establishments, with a €268 million programme to build eight new prisons and expand two existing ones, with the aim of increasing the capacity of the prison system by almost 4 000 places by 2030. The CPT requests further details on the staffing levels envisaged for these facilities.

The situation of adult men in prison

Almost no complaints of physical ill-treatment by staff were received during the visit. This was hardly surprising as, in all establishments visited, staff were not circulating in the wings and therefore had little contact with prisoners. Exceptions were Nafplio Prison, where the delegation received a few allegations of physical ill-treatment, and Chalkida Prison, where a couple of incidents reported to the delegation indicated that staff lacked training to de-escalate challenging situations. Staff should be clearly instructed that physical ill-treatment and excessive use of force against inmates are unlawful and be properly trained in de-escalation techniques and managing challenging prisoners.

Inter-prisoner violence remains a serious issue, notably driven by overcrowding, chronic understaffing and the influence exerted by stronger groups of prisoners. This was notably evident in the prisons of Chania, Korydallos I, Malandrino and Nafplio. An effective national strategy to prevent inter-prisoner violence and intimidation is required, which should include staff regaining control of prison wings, separating stronger groups of prisoners, and significantly increasing staffing levels.

Conditions of detention continue to fall far short of the provisions of the Greek Penitentiary Code, which are simply no longer adhered to. In far too many instances, persons in prison are left to fester in overcrowded and totally inappropriate conditions which may be considered as amounting to inhuman and degrading treatment. Urgent steps are needed to improve the living conditions by significantly reducing the number of persons held in each cell or dormitory in Greek prisons, so that all types of multiple-occupancy accommodation offer at least 4 m² of living space per person. More generally, significant investment is required to maintain the cells and common areas in a decent state of repair and cleanliness, improve hygiene, and provide adequate and nutritious food. All prisoners must be provided with a minimum standard of living.

In terms of regime, despite some educational and vocational programmes, purposeful activities and work remain wholly insufficient for the number of prisoners and should be substantially expanded.

None of the prisons addressed the specific needs of prisoners with disabilities and older persons, nor were they appropriately designed or equipped to accommodate them. At Nafplio and Patras Prisons, several persons with physical disabilities were entirely dependent on other prisoners, including for their personal hygiene and care or mobility. Structural adaptations are required to improve accessibility, access to reasonable accommodation, and support or assistance to meet their specific needs.

Segregation units were mainly used for “operational reasons” such as accommodating vulnerable prisoners or persons in medical isolation, on hunger strike, or those self-harming or being intimidated in the ordinary wings. They were rarely used for the disciplinary punishment of solitary confinement. All prisoners placed in segregation or isolation, for whatever reason, should be offered at least one hour of outdoor exercise every day. All cells should be equipped with call bells and all units containing segregation or isolation cells should always be supervised by custodial staff when occupied. Further, every placement of prisoners in segregation or isolation should immediately be brought to the attention of the healthcare service. All decisions to separate prisoners for their own protection or for “operational” reasons should be properly reasoned and their placement be documented in a special register and regularly reviewed.

Staffing levels were inadequate in all the prisons visited and they were dangerously and unprofessionally low at Korydallos I and Chania Prisons. This allowed stronger groups of prisoners to operate with impunity. Further, low staffing levels make it nearly impossible to provide an acceptable regime for prisoners. Specialist staff such as social workers, psychologists, occupational therapists and teachers were also lacking. The authorities should continue their efforts in recruiting prison staff across all categories, including security personnel, with the aim of improving the staff-prisoner ratio. The working conditions of prison staff in Greece should also be improved, notably by phasing out the widespread recourse to double shifts and unpaid overtime. Moreover, a comprehensive plan for staff training should be developed, from the outset of the employment, including on intercultural communication, to enhance staff performance and motivation.

Structural deficiencies in healthcare within Greek prisons remained evident across all establishments visited, particularly at Chania Prison. These include severe shortages of healthcare staff and the continued absence of integrated healthcare management. These systemic deficiencies exacerbate many of the other longstanding shortcomings observed by the delegation, including limited access to a doctor, inadequate provision of healthcare services, unsafe preparing and dispensing of medication, inadequate medical screening upon admission, failure to properly record injuries, insufficient mental healthcare, and a high prevalence of untreated substance dependence. Addressing these challenges will require fundamental, systemic reform and substantial investment, notably in healthcare staff. An external assessment of healthcare needs and a review of prison healthcare services should be carried out, the findings and conclusions of which should guide a comprehensive reform of prison healthcare provision.

The CPT also makes recommendations on prisoners' contact with the outside world, disciplinary measures, information on rights, and complaints procedures.

The situation of adult women in prison

The CPT considers that non-custodial alternatives to imprisonment and community-based responses for women who do not present a high risk remain underused. A targeted strategy, including legislative reform, should be put in place to reduce the number of detained women, especially for those in pre-trial detention, for non-violent offences or non-payment of fines, and for short sentences. The specific situation of women in prison should also be addressed more effectively, which requires gender-sensitive and trauma-informed approaches in the management and care of female prisoners.

At Eleonas Prison, several women, especially those who had self-harmed, alleged physical ill-treatment by male custodial staff. A Roma woman notably alleged that she was handcuffed by her injured arm to the bars of the gate at the entrance of E Wing for several hours, punched in the face and that alcohol was poured on her wound, causing severe pain and distress. Such treatment could be considered as inhuman and degrading and requires a clear message that all forms of ill-treatment are unlawful and will be sanctioned, supported by adequate staffing and staff training.

Material conditions at Korydallos II and Eleonas Women's Prisons varied from acceptable to extremely poor. Most of the women were accommodated in large-capacity dormitories, which should be progressively phased out in favour of smaller living units. At Korydallos II Prison, overcrowding must be addressed and a rolling programme of refurbishment and maintenance, including regular disinfection, be put in place. At Eleonas Prison, urgent steps should be taken to repair the roof and the central heating system, and all women should be granted a minimum standard of basic living conditions to meet their specific needs: adequate food, potable water, sufficient heating and basic personal hygiene and cleaning products, such as sanitary pads, free of charge.

Although out-of-cell time and outdoor exercise was adequate, the design of most outdoor exercise yards should be reviewed to make them less bleak. Further, work, education and organised activities are insufficient, particularly for women on remand. The authorities should pursue their efforts to expand the range of purposeful activities, along with support for social reintegration.

The delegation met different vulnerable categories of prisoners. Women in segregation at Korydallos II Prison should not be held in conditions akin to solitary confinement. Pregnant women (from the seventh month of pregnancy onwards) and patients accommodated in the medical unit should have access to at least one hour of outdoor exercise every day, provided there are no medical contraindications. The mother-and-child unit, although bright and pleasantly decorated, consisted of a cell-type environment which is inappropriate for mothers caring for their babies and infants and does not sufficiently consider the best interests of the child. Moreover, gender-responsive, community-based alternatives to detention should be developed and applied in practice to ensure that pregnant women and mothers of young children are only imprisoned as a last resort. Both the mother-and-child unit and the female juvenile unit (which did not accommodate any minors at the time of the visit) required refurbishment and better access to activities.

Some progress was noted in the treatment of transgender women at Korydallos II Prison, including guidance for staff on the treatment of LGBTQI+ prisoners and the possibility for them to participate in some organised activities. Nevertheless, further steps are needed to improve material conditions, access to work, vocational training, and sports. All vulnerable categories of prisoners should also be provided with additional psychosocial support services.

The chronic shortage of staffing resources was also evident in the two female prisons visited, with numerous vacancies among custodial and administrative staff. All staff should receive initial and ongoing training.

In addition to the low healthcare staffing levels in the two women's prisons, the delegation received numerous complaints concerning poor access to a doctor, inadequate healthcare provision and medication shortages. The CPT found that the deaths of two women and the suicide of a third woman are illustrative of the poor healthcare provision, which should be reviewed. Such a review will require a 24/7 presence of healthcare staff and improved medical screening upon arrival, to better address the specific healthcare needs of women and identify their gender-specific needs and vulnerabilities. The lack of psychiatric care for female prisoners was particularly alarming. Medical confidentiality, suicide prevention, and support for women with drug dependence should also be enhanced.

In addition, acts of self-harm should no longer be subjected to disciplinary punishment and the use of means of restraint on women following acts of self-harm should be ended. Steps should also be taken to review the procedures and practices for carrying out strip-searches of female prisoners, and to improve contact with families.

Police establishments

The large majority of detained persons indicated that they were treated correctly by the police. However, the delegation once again received a number of credible allegations of physical ill-treatment of persons deprived of their liberty by the Hellenic Police, consisting of slaps, punches and kicks as well as the banging of the head against the wall. The purpose of the ill-treatment was apparently to coerce suspects to admit to certain offences or punish behaviour. It also received many complaints of excessively tight and prolonged handcuffing and verbal abuse.

A fundamental change in police culture within the ranks of the Hellenic Police is needed, which requires a shift in the attitude, behaviours, values and norms. The aim is to foster a professional policing culture that values evidence, respect for rights and ethical conduct, in particular through regular ongoing training. All police interviews should be conducted in a professional and non-coercive manner, using investigative interviewing techniques aligned with the Méndez Principles. Further, systematic electronic recording (preferably video and, if not possible, audio) of all police interviews should be introduced. Greater police accountability, clear reporting procedures and "whistle-blower" protective measures should also be put in place.

As regards the procedural safeguards against ill-treatment, the delegation received many complaints from persons who were – or had recently been – in police custody that they did not have the possibility to notify a family member or have access to a lawyer from the outset of their detention. Steps need to be taken to clarify the legislative provisions on these two rights by extending their application to criminal suspects as from the very outset of deprivation of liberty and ensure that these rights become fully effective in practice as from the moment a person is obliged to remain with the police. Swift and effective access to a doctor should also be ensured in practice.

Material conditions varied widely. While efforts undertaken to renovate detention areas in several police stations in the Attica region are welcome and the conditions of detention had effectively improved, they remained inadequate for holding persons beyond 24 hours in all other police stations visited. The material conditions were particularly poor and unhygienic at Chalkida Police Station. The CPT also recalls its long-standing position that foreign nationals held under immigration legislation should not be held for extended periods in police stations or transfer centres but be transferred promptly to dedicated pre-removal detention facilities. All persons deprived of their liberty by the police should be held in decent conditions of detention.

The CPT examined several recent deaths in police custody, several of which could have been prevented, in the Committee's view. The death of a Pakistani national in September 2024 at Agios Panteleimonas Police Station raises serious questions due to documented reports of extensive bruising on the body. The CPT requested a copy of the autopsy report and the findings of the administrative and criminal investigations in the case. In addition, all police stations should have a written, comprehensive protocol for managing persons with specific vulnerabilities or at risk in custody and steps should be taken to improve their care.

Conditions during prisoner transport remained unchanged since 2019 and 2021. The small, secured compartments in the transport vehicles continued to hold four persons in 1.2 m², even for journeys lasting several hours. Transfers of prisoners should always be carried out in a humane, secure and safe manner. Prisoners should be transported in vehicles suitably designed and fit for that purpose, meeting safety requirements. In particular, all vehicles used for this purpose should be regularly maintained and be equipped with safety belts and padded seats, which allow prisoners to be seated in the direction of travel.