



Report on İzmir and Aydın Removal Center Visits (October - December 2024)



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The **Association for Solidarity with Refugees (Mülteci-Der)** is an independent, rights-based civil society organization established in 2008, dedicated to advocating for the rights of refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers in Turkey. As part of its mission, **Mülteci-Der** provides legal aid, supports vulnerable individuals, and works to ensure that Turkey's policies and practices align with international human rights standards. The organization is an active member of several national and international networks, including the **European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)** and **Türkiye Mülteci Hakları Koordinasyonu (Turkey Refugee Rights Coordination)**.

Mülteci-Der has been providing crucial legal aid to detained migrants, asylum seekers, temporary protection status holders, and refugees across Turkey for more than a decade. Based in İzmir, the association's dedicated team of lawyers offers comprehensive legal support nationwide. These legal professionals are committed to ensuring that the rights of migrants and refugees are protected under Turkish and international law.

In addition to their office-based work, the lawyers of **Mülteci-Der** also conduct regular visits to **Removal Centers (Geri Gönderme Merkezleri)**, where migrants and asylum seekers are detained. During these visits, they provide direct legal services to detainees, assisting them in navigating complex legal processes such as appeals against deportation and applications for international protection. Furthermore, **Mülteci-Der** uses these visits to assess the living conditions and treatment of detainees within the centers, helping to highlight and address any human rights violations or inadequate standards of care.

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1. Introduction

Turkey continues to host approximately 3.7 million refugees and asylum seekers, with 3.3 million Syrians under temporary protection. The sheer volume of refugees places immense pressure on Turkey's economic, political, and social systems. In response to increasing antirefugee sentiments across the country, the government has intensified its efforts to manage irregular migration, including crackdowns on undocumented migrants, stricter enforcement of address verifications, and increased deportation activities¹.

Following the May 2024 elections, migration management became a priority for the government. Between May and June, migration authorities reported a 40 percent increase in arrests of undocumented migrants. On July 9, the Minister of Interior announced new measures to visibly curb irregular migration, leading to intensified identity checks and increased reports of police misconduct. These included allegations of police entering homes without permission, stopping individuals based on their perceived foreign appearance, and sending individuals to removal centers without due process. The crackdown has raised concerns over on going violations of asylum seekers' rights, particularly the principle of non-refoulement².

While Turkey's Law on Foreigners and International Protection provides a framework for asylum and mandates protections for asylum seekers, its implementation has been inconsistent. Despite the law allowing for asylum applications without valid identity documents and within a "reasonable time," there are increasing reports of asylum seekers being detained and deported before status determination interviews. NGOs report concerns that some individuals, including Afghans and Syrians, may be coerced into signing "voluntary return" forms due to pressure or inadequate detention conditions³.

¹ UNHCR Turkey Operational Update. <https://www.unhcr.org/tr/en>; Human Rights Watch, "Turkey: Mass Deportations of Syrians" (2018) <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/03/22/turkey-mass-deportations-syrians>

² Amnesty International. Sent to a war zone: Turkey's illegal deportations of Syrian refugees. (2019). <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur44/1102/2019/en/>; Global Detention Project. Turkey: Immigration detention profile. (2023) <https://www.globaldetentionproject.org/countries/europe/turkey>

³ Amnesty International. (2019). Sent to a war zone: Turkey's illegal deportations of Syrian refugees. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur44/1102/2019/en/>; Global Detention Project. (2023). Turkey:

The government has also encouraged the return of one million Syrians to Turkish-controlled areas in northern Syria, despite ongoing instability and violence in the region. Reports⁴ from international organizations, such as the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), have raised concerns over forced returns and inadequate safeguards against refoulement. Instances of deportations to Syria, Afghanistan, and Iran without due process or access to legal aid have become more frequent, highlighting systemic gaps in Turkey's migration management practices.

Abuse of refugees and asylum seekers remains a critical issue. There have been allegations of pushbacks at Turkey's borders with Iran, Syria, Greece, and Bulgaria, often involving violence and forced returns. Human rights organizations have documented cases of mistreatment in detention and removal centers, including limited communication with lawyers and family members, further exacerbating detainees' vulnerability⁵. Furthermore, vulnerable groups face additional risks, including exploitation, gender-based violence, and discrimination .

This report provides a detailed analysis based on visits conducted to İzmir Harmandalı and Aydın Removal Centers between October and December 2024. These visits were undertaken to assess the conditions of administrative detention, monitor compliance with international and national legal standards, and provide legal assistance to detainees. The findings reflect ongoing systemic challenges within Turkey's detention centers, including overcrowding, inadequate healthcare, legal barriers, and insufficient support for vulnerable groups.

Against this backdrop, the report highlights the urgent need for Turkey to address systemic deficiencies in its detention and deportation practices. The findings emphasize the importance of ensuring compliance with international human rights standards,

Immigration detention profile. <https://www.globaldetentionproject.org/countries/europe/turkey> ; Human Rights Watch. (2019). Turkey: Mass deportations of Syrians. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/07/26/turkey-mass-deportations-syrians>; U.S. Department of State. (2023). 2023 country reports on human rights practices: Turkey. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/turkey/>

⁴ Politico. (2024, October 11). The EU is helping Turkey forcibly deport migrants to Syria and Afghanistan. Politico. Retrieved from <https://www.politico.eu/article/the-eu-is-helping-turkey-forcibly-deport-migrants-to-syria-and-afghanistan/>; UNHCR. (2023). Turkey: Operational update. <https://www.unhcr.org/tr/en>; European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE). (2023). Asylum Information Database (AIDA) country report: Turkey. <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/turkey/>

⁵ OMCT, Türkiye: Torture and lack of effective investigations remain serious problems, 2024. <https://www.omct.org/en/resources/reports/t%C3%BCrkiye-torture-and-lack-of-effective-investigations-remain-serious-problems>

including the 1951 Refugee Convention and the principle of non-refoulement, to protect the rights and dignity of refugees and asylum seekers. Persistent challenges, such as overcrowding, coerced "voluntary return" agreements, and inadequate safeguards against forced returns, require immediate attention and targeted reforms to improve conditions within removal centers.

The documentation of these challenges and the provision of evidence-based recommendations aim to contribute to ongoing efforts to strengthen safeguards for individuals in need of international protection. By addressing these deficiencies, Turkey can align its migration management practices with its international commitments and ensure humane and fair treatment for all individuals held in administrative detention.

2. Overview

Between October and December 2024, a total of eight visits were carried out to the İzmir Harmandalı Removal Center and the Aydın Removal Center. These two facilities serve as primary locations where individuals are held under administrative detention while awaiting deportation decisions or asylum processes. The visits were conducted by the Mülteci-Der legal teams with the primary objectives of monitoring the conditions of detention, offering legal aid to detainees, and assessing procedural compliance with legal frameworks.

The İzmir Harmandalı Removal Center, as one of the largest facilities in Turkey, revealed significant challenges during the monitoring visits. Overcrowding was one of the most pressing issues, with rooms intended to accommodate 8 to 10 individuals frequently housing up to 16, forcing detainees to sleep on the floor. Hygiene and sanitation were similarly concerning, with many detainees reporting unclean toilets and showers, as well as limited access to hot water. Additionally, newly arrived detainees were kept in outdoor areas without roofs for extended periods, exposing them to harsh weather conditions. A recurring issue at Harmandalı was the persistent verbal pressure placed on detainees to sign voluntary return forms, a process further complicated by the lack of interpreters for non-Turkish-speaking individuals.

The Aydın Removal Center, while smaller in capacity, exhibited similar deficiencies. Overcrowding and poor sanitation remained prominent concerns, with detainees reporting shared facilities in inadequate conditions. Legal aid processes were delayed due to interruptions in bar association services, exacerbating the challenges faced by detainees attempting to contest deportation orders. Vulnerable groups, such as women, children, and individuals with health issues, were not provided with the necessary accommodations or additional support to meet their specific needs. Language barriers further marginalized detainees, limiting their ability to understand legal processes or communicate their grievances effectively.

The findings from these visits highlight overarching systemic issues, including overcrowding, inadequate access to healthcare, and procedural failures that hinder detainees' ability to exercise their rights. Many detainees described significant challenges in accessing medical care, with basic treatments often reduced to the provision of painkillers. Procedural fairness was also undermined by delays in legal aid appointments and a shortage of interpreters, leaving detainees unable to fully understand their legal status or options for appeal. Additionally, verbal pressure to agree to voluntary returns created an environment of uncertainty and mistrust.

The purpose of this report is to document these findings and call for immediate action to address the systemic deficiencies observed during the visits. Aligning the practices at removal centers with international human rights standards, including the 1951 Refugee Convention and the European Convention on Human Rights, is essential to ensuring that detainees' rights are protected. By shedding light on the current conditions and challenges within Turkey's removal centers, this report aims to contribute to necessary reforms that uphold the dignity, health, and legal rights of all individuals held in administrative detention.

3. Methodology

The visits were conducted on the following dates: October 10, October 21, November 11, November 12, November 26, December 4, December 5, and December 9, 2024.

These visits were carried out at two removal centers: İzmir Harmandalı GGM and Aydın GGM. A total of 42 detainees were interviewed during these visits to assess their legal status, living conditions, and overall treatment within the centers.

The methodology followed a structured process to ensure a comprehensive assessment of conditions and detainee experiences. Upon arrival at the centers, on-site observations were made to monitor entry processes, security protocols, and the general conditions within the facilities.

Structured interviews were conducted with detainees to gather detailed information about their individual cases, legal status, and treatment within the centers. Special attention was given to vulnerable groups, including families with children, women, and individuals with physical or psychological health concerns. An anonymized list of interviewees is included as an annex to this report.

In addition to interviews and observations, legal documents related to deportation decisions and administrative detention orders were reviewed. These reviews focused on assessing procedural compliance with national and international laws, including the right to legal representation and appeal processes. The data collected from interviews, observations, and document reviews provided a comprehensive understanding of the systemic issues within the removal centers.

Through this methodology, the visits aimed to provide a detailed and evidence-based analysis of the conditions and challenges faced by detainees in İzmir Harmandalı and Aydın removal centers. The findings presented in this report reflect the recurring issues observed and documented during each visit.

Furthermore, the findings were compared with the findings of the previous report (Report on İzmir and Aydın Removal Center Visits July - September 2024)⁶ to highlight both persistent challenges and new developments. A detailed comparison of these findings can be found in the conclusion section of this report.

⁶ Mültecilerle Dayanışma Derneği (December 2024), Report on İzmir and Aydın Removal Center Visits July - September 2024 <https://multeci.org.tr/en/2025/01/17/report-on-izmir-and-aydin-removal-center-visits-july-september-2024>

4. Key findings

The visits to İzmir Harmandalı and Aydın Removal Centers between October and December 2024 revealed significant ongoing challenges that largely mirror findings from previous assessments. Overcrowding remains one of the most pressing issues, with rooms consistently exceeding their intended capacity, forcing detainees to sleep on floors and endure suffocating, stressful conditions. Sanitation facilities remain poorly maintained, with limited access to hot water, cleaning supplies, and hygiene products, contributing to unsanitary and degrading living conditions. Detainees also reported insufficient food portions and a lack of clean drinking water, particularly impacting vulnerable groups such as families with young children.

Healthcare access continues to be a major concern, with detainees receiving inadequate medical attention for chronic illnesses, injuries, and mental health conditions. Psychological distress has notably worsened, with many detainees reporting severe anxiety and hopelessness exacerbated by prolonged detention and a lack of mental health services. Persistent legal and procedural issues, such as delays in legal aid appointments and a lack of interpreters, hinder detainees' ability to challenge deportation or understand their rights. Vulnerable groups, including women, individuals with disabilities, and children, remain without tailored support, further exposing systemic failures within the detention system. These findings underscore the urgent need for reform to improve living conditions, healthcare access, and procedural fairness across removal centers.

4.1. Living Conditions

The living conditions in both İzmir Harmandalı and Aydın Removal Centers were among the most frequently cited concerns during interviews with detainees. Overcrowding was a persistent issue, with rooms often housing more detainees than their designed capacity. At İzmir Harmandalı, one detainee remarked, *"There are 16 of us in a room meant for 8 people. Some of us sleep on the floor because there are not enough beds."* (D-001) Another detainee described the physical discomfort of overcrowding,

explaining, *"It's impossible to sleep properly here. The room is too hot, and people argue all the time because there's no space."* (D-002) In Aydın, detainees reported similar experiences, with one stating, *"For days, I slept on a blanket on the ground until a bed became available."* (D-003)

Sanitation conditions were equally concerning, as many detainees described the communal toilets and showers as unhygienic and poorly maintained. A detainee in İzmir explained, *"The toilets are dirty, and the smell is unbearable. I try not to use them unless I absolutely have to."* (D-004) Another detainee highlighted the lack of hot water, stating, *"We only get cold water for showers, and sometimes we wait hours to use the bathroom."* (D-005) In Aydın, detainees reported that cleaning supplies were scarce, with one detainee noting, *"They give us soap every two weeks, but it's never enough. We have to share everything."* (D-006)

Access to food and water also remained a challenge for many detainees. While some reported that meals were provided regularly, complaints about portion size and quality were widespread. A detainee from Aydın remarked, *"The food is so little, I'm always hungry. We have to buy water from the canteen because the water they give us tastes bad."* (D-007) In İzmir, one detainee shared a similar frustration: *"Sometimes we get the same food three days in a row. I don't have money to buy better food, so I just eat what they give."* (D-008)

Overall, the overcrowding, poor sanitation, and limited access to essential supplies contributed to a stressful and unhealthy environment for detainees. These conditions, combined with the emotional toll of detention, were described by many as *"inhumane"* and *"degrading."*

4.2. Health and Medical Care

Detainees in both İzmir Harmandalı and Aydın Removal Centers consistently reported inadequate access to healthcare services. Those suffering from physical injuries, chronic illnesses, and psychological distress struggled to receive proper treatment. A common complaint was the limited availability of medications, with Parol, a generic painkiller, often being the only option provided regardless of the condition.

A detainee in İzmir shared their experience: *"I told them about the pain in my leg from a previous surgery, but they just gave me Parol. I haven't seen a doctor yet, and it's been weeks."* (D-009) Another detainee recovering from surgery explained, *"My stitches are still there, and they are infected. I asked for help, but they said I have to wait until the next week."* (D-010)

Psychological issues were also a prominent concern. Several detainees expressed feelings of depression and anxiety exacerbated by the conditions in detention. One detainee remarked, *"I can't sleep or eat properly. I asked for a psychologist, but they just told me to calm down. I don't think they take mental health seriously."* (D-011) Another detainee in Aydın described the impact of prolonged detention on their mental health, stating, *"Every day feels like a year here. I feel like I'm losing my mind."* (D-012)

In cases where detainees had visible or severe injuries, delays in medical attention were common. A detainee in İzmir recalled, *"I hurt my arm when I fell in the bathroom, but no one helped me. I couldn't move my arm for days."* (D-013) Another detainee with chronic asthma reported difficulty accessing necessary medication, stating, *"I told them I need my inhaler, but they haven't given me anything. I'm scared something will happen to me here."* (D-014)

The consistent lack of timely medical care, both for physical and mental health conditions, left detainees feeling neglected and vulnerable. Many described the healthcare system within the centers as dismissive, inadequate, and failing to address even the most urgent needs.

4.3. Legal and Procedural Issues

Language barriers were a significant issue for many detainees, particularly Francophone and Arabic-speaking individuals. A detainee from Guinea explained, *"I couldn't understand what the officer was saying, and they didn't give me an interpreter. I signed a paper, but I don't know what it was for."* (D-015). Another detainee, speaking Arabic, shared frustration: *"When they call me to talk about my case, I don't understand anything. They just tell me to sign."* (D-016).

Delays in accessing legal aid were common, especially in Aydın. A detainee stated, *"I requested a lawyer weeks ago, but no one has come yet. My deportation appeal deadline passed because of this."* (D-017). Another detainee expressed similar concerns: *"I don't know what to do or how to appeal. They keep delaying my appointment."* (D-018).

Verbal pressure to sign voluntary return forms was reported frequently. A detainee explained, *"They call us and tell us to go back to our countries. They say, 'You'll stay here longer if you don't sign.'"* (D-019). Another detainee described the emotional toll: *"I don't want to go back, but they keep pushing me to sign the papers."* (D-020).

4.4. Vulnerable Groups

Families with young children and individuals with health concerns were not provided with separate accommodations. A mother of two children described her struggles: *"We sleep on the floor with everyone else. My children are always sick because it's cold here."* (D-021).

Female detainees, especially those with physical impairments, faced additional hardships. A female shared her experience: *"I can't move properly because of my leg injury, but they don't help me. I struggle to get to the bathroom."* (D-022). Another woman explained, *"There's no privacy for us. We're treated the same as everyone else, even when we're sick or weak."* (D-023).

5. Conclusion

This report, based on visits conducted to İzmir Harmandalı and Aydın Removal Centers between October and December 2024, highlights ongoing systemic concerns and some areas where conditions remain unchanged since the previous visits in July to September 2024. While both reports underscore persistent challenges such as overcrowding, inadequate healthcare, legal barriers, and insufficient support for vulnerable groups, notable observations reveal an escalation in certain issues and limited progress toward reform.

5.1. Persisting Issues

Overcrowding:

Overcrowding remains a severe and unresolved problem. Both reports confirm that rooms designed for fewer detainees continue to accommodate double or even triple their intended capacity. As highlighted previously, this leads to physical discomfort, unsanitary conditions, and heightened psychological stress. The recurrence of detainees sleeping on floors, rotating bed schedules, and dealing with suffocating environments underscores the urgent need for interventions to address facility capacity limits.

Inadequate Healthcare Access:

Despite earlier findings, access to healthcare has not improved. Chronic illnesses, visible injuries, and psychological conditions remain inadequately addressed, with Parol (a generic painkiller) being the only treatment provided in most cases. Comparatively, delays in accessing doctors and specialist care have worsened, as reports of infected wounds and untreated chronic conditions have become more frequent. The deteriorating health outcomes indicate further strain on the limited medical infrastructure of the centers.

Legal and Procedural Barriers:

Language barriers and delays in accessing legal aid continue to obstruct detainees' ability to challenge deportation or understand their rights. Both reports document the absence of interpreters and the coercive practice of pressuring detainees to sign "voluntary return" forms without informed consent. The lack of legal representation remains particularly problematic in Aydın, where delays have directly resulted in missed appeal deadlines.

Vulnerable Groups:

Persistent neglect of vulnerable groups, including families with children, women, and individuals with disabilities, remains a significant concern. The previous report emphasized the lack of special accommodations, while the current findings highlight specific cases of deteriorating health among children and mobility challenges faced by

women with physical impairments. This issue reflects a systemic failure to provide tailored care and support to those most at risk.

5.2. Emerging and Escalating Issues

Mental Health Deterioration:

While psychological stress was acknowledged in the earlier report, this issue has become more pronounced in recent findings. Detainees report severe mental health declines, with increased cases of anxiety, hopelessness, and emotional distress exacerbated by the prolonged detention periods and inadequate mental health services.

Resource Shortages:

Limited access to hygiene products, clean water, and adequate food has worsened since the previous reporting period. Detainees continue to face insufficient portions and poor-quality meals, with growing concerns about malnutrition and dehydration, especially for children and vulnerable individuals.

Annex: List of interviewed detainees

D-001 Male İzmir Harmandalı
D-002 Male İzmir Harmandalı
D-003 Male Aydın GGM
D-004 Male İzmir Harmandalı
D-005 Male İzmir Harmandalı
D-006 Male Aydın GGM
D-007 Male Aydın GGM
D-008 Male İzmir Harmandalı
D-009 Male İzmir Harmandalı
D-010 Male İzmir Harmandalı
D-011 Male Aydın GGM
D-012 Male Aydın GGM
D-013 Male İzmir Harmandalı
D-014 Male İzmir Harmandalı
D-015 Male İzmir Harmandalı
D-016 Male Aydın GGM
D-017 Male Aydın GGM
D-018 Male İzmir Harmandalı
D-019 Male Aydın GGM
D-020 Male İzmir Harmandalı
D-021 Male Aydın GGM
D-022 Female İzmir Harmandalı
D-023 Female Aydın GGM

Mültecilerle Dayanışma Derneđi / Association for Solidarity with Refugees is a civil society organization that has been carrying out rights-based work since 2008 to ensure asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants affected by forced migration can access their rights and services with dignity, in line with universal human rights, as well as international and national law.

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