



Report on İzmir Removal Center Visits

(April – June 2025)



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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 occupy a central role in international migration dynamics, serving both as a major host country and a key transit state along irregular migration routes. With approximately 3 million refugees and asylum seekers, of which 2.5 million are Syrians under temporary protection, the country has one of the largest refugee populations worldwide. This demographic reality places significant political, social and economic pressures on the Turkish migration management system. Against this backdrop, administrative detention has become a cornerstone of state policy, implemented primarily through the widespread use of Removal Centers (Geri Gönderme Merkezleri - GGM).

The primary legal framework governing detention is the Law on Foreigners and International Protection, which authorizes administrative detention under various circumstances, including irregular entry or stay, breach of visa conditions, perceived threats to public order or security and pending deportation proceedings¹. In principle, the LFIP also provides for alternatives to detention, such as reporting obligations or designated residence requirements² (Articles 57–59).³ However, consistent with prior monitoring reports, the application of these alternatives remains limited and detention is frequently applied as a default rather than as a measure of last resort³.

Turkey's detention infrastructure is extensive. As of mid-2025, there were 32 removal centers⁴ across 25 provinces with an official capacity of around 16,000 places, although estimates by the Global Detention Project place the number closer to 20,000 due to expansions financed in part by the European Union⁵. These facilities, notably İzmir Harmandalı

¹ Republic of Turkey, Law No. 6458 on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP), 2013, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/2016/en/114283>

² Ibid., Articles 57–59.

³ Mültecilerle Dayanışma Derneği, Report on İzmir Removal Center Visits (Jan–Mar 2025), p. 7, 2025, available at: <https://multeci.org.tr/en/2025/04/18/report-on-izmir-removal-center-visits-january-march-2025/>

⁴ İçişleri Bakanlığı Göç İdaresi Başkanlığı, Geri Gönderme Merkezleri <https://www.goc.gov.tr/geri-gonderme-merkezleri-iletisim>

⁵ Global Detention Project, *Turkey: Immigration Detention Profile*, 2023, available at: <https://www.globaldetentionproject.org/countries/europe/turkey>

and Aydın Removal Centers, have been repeatedly scrutinized for overcrowding, inadequate healthcare, poor hygiene, and lack of procedural safeguards⁶. Detainees' testimonies frequently describe being housed in rooms far exceeding capacity, receiving minimal or inappropriate medical attention and facing barriers in accessing legal representation or translation services.

Persistent concerns have also been raised by international bodies. The Council of Europe's Special Representative on Migration and Refugees noted as early as 2016 that arbitrary detention and lack of effective remedies posed systemic risks in Turkey's detention regime⁷. Human Rights Watch⁸ has documented forced returns of Afghans and inadequate safeguards against refoulement, while Amnesty International⁹ highlighted systemic deportations of Syrians without due process¹⁰.

Within this context, this report provides a detailed analysis based on visits conducted to the İzmir Harmandalı Removal Centre between April and June 2025. These visits were undertaken to assess the conditions of administrative detention, provide legal support to detainees, and monitor compliance with national and international legal standards, including the right to due process, access to healthcare and protection against arbitrary detention and refoulement.

This report builds upon earlier reporting cycles; July - September 2024¹⁰, October - December 2024¹¹ and January - March 2025¹² which consistently documented chronic

⁶ Mültecilerle Dayanışma Derneği, Report on İzmir and Aydın Removal Center Visits (Jul–Sept 2024), pp. 8–10, 2024, available at: <https://multeci.org.tr/en/2025/01/17/report-on-izmir-and-aydin-removal-center-visits-july-september-2024/>

⁷ Council of Europe, *Report of the fact-finding mission to Turkey by Ambassador Tomáš Boček, Special Representative of the Secretary General on migration and refugees, 30 May – 4 June 2016*, SG/Inf(2016)29, 10 August 2016, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/reference/factfinding/coe/2016/en/119628>

⁸ Human Rights Watch, “No One Asked Me Why I Left Afghanistan”: Pushbacks and Deportations of Afghans from Turkey, 2022, available at: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2022/11/18/no-one-asked-me-why-i-left-afghanistan/pushbacks-and-deportations-afghans-turkey>

⁹ Amnesty International, *Sent to a War Zone: Turkey's Illegal Deportations of Syrian Refugees*, 2019, available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur44/1102/2019/en/>

¹⁰ Mültecilerle Dayanışma Derneği, Report on İzmir and Aydın Removal Center Visits (Jul–Sept 2024), January 2024, available at: <https://multeci.org.tr/en/2025/01/17/report-on-izmir-and-aydin-removal-center-visits-july-september-2024/>

¹¹ Mültecilerle Dayanışma Derneği, Report on İzmir and Aydın Removal Center Visits (October–December 2024), February 2025, available at: <https://multeci.org.tr/en/2025/02/01/report-on-izmir-and-aydin-removal-center-visits-october-december-2024/>

¹² Mültecilerle Dayanışma Derneği, Report on İzmir Removal Center Visits (Jan–Mar 2025), April 2025, available at: <https://multeci.org.tr/en/2025/04/18/report-on-izmir-removal-center-visits-january-march-2025/>

overcrowding, denial of adequate medical care, insufficient legal aid and coercive return practices. In addition to these long-standing concerns, the report identifies several escalating issues, including increased psychological distress among detainees, the worsening healthcare crisis in the women's wards and a growing trend of indefinite detention without access to legal remedies. These developments reflect deepening structural deficiencies within Turkey's detention regime and raise serious concerns about compliance with fundamental human rights obligations.

Against this backdrop, the report once again underscores the urgent need for Turkey to adopt immediate and targeted reforms to address ongoing violations and systemic failures within its immigration detention system. The findings reinforce the importance of aligning detention and deportation practices with international human rights frameworks, including the 1951 Refugee Convention, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the principle of non-refoulement under both international and domestic law. Specific attention is needed to address the use of coercive tactics in obtaining "voluntary return" agreements and the absence of legal safeguards against forced returns to countries where individuals face serious harm.

By documenting these issues and offering evidence-based analysis, this report aims to support ongoing advocacy and reform efforts. Ensuring the humane and lawful treatment of migrants and asylum seekers in administrative detention is essential not only to meeting Turkey's legal obligations but also to upholding the fundamental dignity and rights of all individuals seeking safety and protection.

2. Overview

Between April and July 2025, two visits were conducted to the İzmir Harmandalı Removal Centre. These visits were carried out by legal professionals from Mülteci-Der and in-depth interviews were conducted with men and women of varying ages, including elderly detainees, individuals with chronic medical conditions, survivors of violence and young adults were among those interviewed. Each visit combined structured legal casework, private or semi-private interviews with detainees, review of administrative files and follow-up action such as

legal aid appointments, referrals for urgent medical care and/or procedural interventions before the authorities.

The findings documented across these visits confirm the persistence of long-standing structural deficiencies within İzmir GGM. Overcrowding remained a systemic problem, with rooms designed for 8 detainees routinely holding between 12 and 16 individuals. Detainees reported sleeping on floors or sharing beds, with poor ventilation and insufficient hygiene supplies contributing to unhealthy and degrading conditions. Access to food, water, and sanitation was limited with repeated concerns raised about the scarcity and poor quality of meals, the rationing of drinking water and restricted access to hot water.

Daily free time remained limited to short periods after meals, typically around 15–20 minutes in the outdoor yard, which detainees consistently described as insufficient for physical and psychological relief.

Healthcare services continued to fall short of minimum standards. Chronic illnesses, visible injuries and urgent medical needs reportedly went untreated or were addressed only with generic painkillers. Several detainees described delays or complete denial of access to external hospitals, while others reported worsening conditions due to the lack of adequate treatment. Mental health deterioration was widely reported, with detainees describing symptoms of depression, anxiety and trauma, often exacerbated by the uncertainty of indefinite detention.

Testimonies further highlighted degrading treatment and discriminatory practices. While some detainees described respectful staff behaviour, many others recounted verbal abuse, neglect of basic requests, and discriminatory attitudes.

Overall, the April - July 2025 findings demonstrate the continuation of systemic shortcomings previously documented in earlier reporting periods with no evidence of meaningful improvement. The persistence of overcrowding, medical neglect and inadequate safeguards for vulnerable groups raises serious concerns.

3. Methodology

The monitoring visits detailed in this report were conducted between April and July 2025 at the İzmir Harmandalı Removal Centre (Geri Gönderme Merkezi - GGM). These visits were carried out by the legal team of the Association for Solidarity with Refugees (Mülteci-Der) with the purpose of providing direct legal assistance to detainees and systematically monitoring detention conditions and practices.

Between April and July 2025 two visits were conducted to İzmir Harmandalı GGM. During these visits, eight individuals were interviewed in detail and the legal files of additional detainees were reviewed. In some cases, scheduled interviews could not be completed due to detainees' transfer, release or unavailability.

A structured and consistent methodology was applied across all visits to ensure the reliability of findings and comparability with previous reporting periods. Upon arrival at the facility, the team conducted environmental and procedural observations, focusing on entry procedures, security checks, staff behaviour and the physical state of the infrastructure, including accommodation areas, common facilities and outdoor spaces.

Interviews were conducted in private or semi-private spaces where permitted, following a structured format that enabled detainees to share detailed information about their cases and circumstances. Interviews focused on individuals' migration backgrounds, legal status, the conditions they experienced in detention, and their access to medical care and legal representation. Where necessary, interpretation was provided to ensure full understanding between interviewers and interviewees. Particular attention was paid to vulnerable groups, including women, unaccompanied minors, chronically ill individuals and survivors of trauma or violence, including pushbacks at sea.

In addition to oral testimonies, legal documents were reviewed for each accessible case. These included deportation orders, administrative detention decisions and procedural documentation related to the provision of legal aid and the detainee's ability to challenge state decisions. Throughout the visits, where appropriate and possible, the team also engaged in direct support activities. These included submitting urgent health care requests to the facility administration, assisting individuals with international protection applications,

coordinating with bar associations to ensure legal representation and facilitating communication with family members when permitted.

Finally, the information collected during this period was systematically analysed and compared with findings from previous monitoring cycles, including reports from July - September 2024, October - December 2024 and January - March 2025. This comparative approach allowed for the identification of persisting problems, emerging trends and areas of deterioration or limited improvement.

4. Key findings

The visits conducted between April and July 2025 to İzmir Harmandalı Removal Center revealed persistent and systemic deficiencies across all areas of detention conditions, healthcare access, legal safeguards and treatment of vulnerable groups.

Living conditions remained harsh, with widespread reports of overcrowding and inadequate hygiene. Rooms designed for eight detainees were often occupied by 14 to 16 individuals, forcing some to sleep on the floor. *“Even though the rooms are for eight people, there are 14 of us staying together. Hygiene products are not enough, they give one box of shampoo for the entire room,”* explained D-001, a young male detainee.

Similarly, D-002, an elderly male detainee, noted, *“There are 16 of us in a room meant for eight. It is suffocating, we cannot breathe. The gendarmerie treat us like ‘creatures,’ and wash their hands after touching us. It is so humiliating.”* The lack of hot water was a consistent problem, with detainees often forced to shower in cold water, while laundry was typically done by hand due to limited cleaning supplies. Access to the canteen was restricted to short daily intervals and described as prohibitively expensive for detainees without financial means.

Access to healthcare remained gravely insufficient. Detainees with chronic illnesses, visible injuries or urgent needs repeatedly reported being denied timely or adequate medical treatment. D-006, an elderly female detainee, who suffers from kidney disease and impaired hearing, recounted: *“The hospital prescribed me daily treatment, but here I cannot access it.”* Another elderly detainee, D-002, who lives with heart disease and severe varicose veins, lifted

his trousers to show his swollen leg and explained, *"I am sick but cannot see a doctor or get medicine."* Younger detainees also reported serious neglect. D-008, a female detainee who had previously experienced gender-based violence, told interviewers: *"My eye is sick, I need to go to hospital, but my requests have been ignored."* D-007, a young male detainee, stated: *"When I have the flu or headaches, they give no medicine and never take me to hospital. My psychology is ruined. If I stay here longer, I will completely lose myself."* In addition to untreated chronic conditions, several detainees described worsening mental health. Feelings of hopelessness, depression and severe anxiety were frequently reported, with no access to psychosocial support.

Legal and procedural safeguards were also found to be inconsistent and in some cases entirely absent. Several detainees indicated that despite requests, they had not been assigned legal counsel. Others were presented with official documents in Turkish without any translation. D-003, a mid-aged male detainee, explained, *"Documents are delivered to us without an interpreter. One of our friends who speaks both Turkish and Arabic translates for the rest of us."* Most of the detainees reported reliance on fellow detainees to understand critical legal documents.

Treatment by staff varied greatly with detainees recounting both respectful and degrading experiences. Some reported professional behaviour by certain gendarmerie officers, while others described humiliation and intimidation. The detainee D-002 said through tears, *"The gendarmes treat us like monsters. They run to wash their hands after touching us. It breaks my dignity."* D-007 highlighted discrimination by private security staff: *"The gendarmerie are polite, but the private security are very bad, they use hate speech against us."* Meanwhile, D-001 recounted that two months earlier he had been beaten by gendarmerie inside the infirmary, where no cameras were present: *"They later accused me of attacking the doctor and sent me to prison for one month."*

The situation of **vulnerable groups** further underscored systemic neglect. Families with children, elderly detainees, and women with chronic illnesses were not provided with the accommodations or support they required. D-005, a young female detainee held with her mother and siblings, explained: *"My mother is sick and cannot access healthcare. Staying here for so long without knowing when we will be released is unbearable for the whole family."* D-008 described the toll of prolonged detention on her mental health: *"My psychology is*

destroyed, I cry all the time.” Young unaccompanied detainees expressed feelings of isolation, despair, and a lack of psychosocial support, intensifying their vulnerability.

Although detainees generally confirmed that they were able to practice their religion freely, **communication with the outside** world remained difficult. Access to telephones was dependent on the purchase of prepaid cards, which many detainees could not afford. International calls were not permitted. As D-007 explained, *“We cannot call abroad from the center. I miss my mother so much and worry about her, but I cannot reach her.”*

Taken together, these testimonies reveal persistent overcrowding, deteriorating health outcomes, inconsistent access to legal safeguards, discriminatory or degrading treatment by staff, and systemic neglect of vulnerable individuals. The findings strongly echo those documented in previous reporting periods, with some issues, such as untreated chronic illnesses, psychological distress, and prolonged detention without resolution, showing signs of escalation.

5. Conclusion

The April-July 2025 visits to İzmir Harmandalı Removal Center confirm that the systemic deficiencies documented in previous reporting periods remain largely unaddressed. Overcrowding, inadequate healthcare, persistent legal and procedural barriers and the neglect of vulnerable groups continue to define the detention environment. Despite consistent documentation of these conditions since mid-2024, little evidence suggests that meaningful reforms have been implemented to improve detainees’ living standards or ensure compliance with basic rights.

5.1. Persisting Issues

The April–July 2025 visits confirm that several structural problems previously documented in İzmir Harmandalı Removal Center continue without meaningful improvement. Overcrowding remains one of the most visible concerns. Rooms designed for eight detainees

were frequently accommodating up to sixteen individuals, forcing some to sleep on the floor and creating suffocating conditions. These findings mirror those from July–September and October–December 2024, as well as January–March 2025, when similar reports of overcrowded rooms and rotating use of beds were recorded.

Inadequate healthcare access also persists as a defining issue. Detainees with chronic illnesses, visible injuries, and psychological conditions continue to experience untreated or poorly managed symptoms, often receiving nothing beyond basic painkillers. The April–July findings confirm the same patterns identified in earlier cycles, where individuals with heart disease, kidney conditions, or mobility impairments could not access prescribed treatment or specialist care. Reports of untreated cancer, asthma, and surgical complications from previous quarters remain consistent with the testimonies collected in this period.

Legal and procedural barriers likewise remain entrenched. Deportation and detention decisions are still delivered in languages that many detainees do not understand, often without interpretation or legal assistance. Requests for lawyers continue to go unanswered, leaving detainees unable to challenge decisions or pursue appeals effectively. Vulnerable groups such as families with children, elderly detainees, and women with chronic conditions remain without targeted support, with little change since October–December 2024, when children were reported to be persistently unwell due to poor sanitation and cold facilities. Overall, the April–July 2025 findings confirm that overcrowding, inadequate healthcare, systemic legal barriers, and neglect of vulnerable detainees remain unresolved despite repeated documentation and calls for reform.

5.2. Emerging and Escalating Issues

The April–July 2025 monitoring period revealed a deepening mental health crisis among detainees. While earlier reports documented rising levels of distress, the latest findings indicate a more severe deterioration, with widespread accounts of depression, hopelessness, and suicidal ideation. Prolonged detention without clear timelines or outcomes has compounded these issues, leaving detainees feeling trapped in indefinite confinement. The

absence of any psychosocial services or psychological support structures has allowed this crisis to escalate unchecked, making mental health one of the most pressing emerging concerns.

Risks for elderly detainees and those with chronic illnesses have also intensified. The April–July findings show visible deterioration in the health of older individuals with conditions such as heart disease, kidney problems and varicose veins, who remain without the necessary medical follow-up or daily treatment prescribed by external hospitals. Although inadequate healthcare has been a long-standing problem, the accumulation of untreated cases highlights a growing medical emergency within the facility. This deterioration underscores the systemic inability of the removal center to address even basic healthcare needs for those most at risk.

Another escalating issue relates to the treatment of detainees by staff and the increasing prevalence of prolonged detention without clear legal resolution. Allegations of physical violence and degrading treatment by gendarmerie officers point to a worsening culture of impunity. At the same time, detainees continue to report being held for months without clarity on their legal status, appeals, or release prospects, reinforcing a sense of abandonment and despair. Communication restrictions, particularly the inability to make international calls and the dependence on prepaid cards that many cannot afford, have further deepened isolation. Taken together, these developments demonstrate that beyond persisting structural failures, new layers of psychological harm, medical neglect and procedural uncertainty are emerging and escalating.

Annex: List of interviewed detainees

D-001 Male İzmir Harmandalı
D-002 Male İzmir Harmandalı
D-003 Male İzmir Harmandalı
D-004 Male İzmir Harmandalı
D-005 Female İzmir Harmandalı
D-006 Female İzmir Harmandalı
D-007 Male İzmir Harmandalı
D-008 Female İzmir Harmandalı

Mltecilerle Dayanıřma Derneęi / 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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