



3.4. Prison conditions and treatment of detainees in Mogadishu

A study conducted by Saferworld in the period 2018-2021, with Police Advisory Committees (PACs)[255](#) visiting detention facilities (prisons, police stations, sub-police stations, CID sites, and traffic stations) across three cities in Somalia (Mogadishu, Baidoa, and Kismayo), resulted in 1 026 visits (and 94 failed one, 46 of which rejected). The study found that prison cells are generally overcrowded throughout Somalia. This has ‘devastating consequences on prisoners’ lives’, because it results in, among others: shortages of bedding and food, sharing of cells and other areas between juveniles and adults as well as men and women, increased risk of diseases, and increased risk of violence, including sexual assault and rape.[256](#)

Focusing on the general prison conditions in Mogadishu, the most outstanding issues include, in terms of infrastructure and management:

- **infrastructure:** most correctional facilities in Somalia are in urgent need of renovation, [257](#) being in ‘serious disrepair’[258](#) or ‘extremely poor state’.[259](#) The MCP is a notable example of establishment dating back to colonial times and extensively damaged.[260](#) The recently inaugurated MPCC represents an exception within this context;[261](#)
- **management** and record keeping: administration and record keeping are inadequate with lacking policy and legal frameworks for manual and digital record keeping. While manual records are still predominant, correctional officers lack the necessary specialised training; [262](#)
- staff’s (lack of) qualifications and ad-hoc training: as of June 2023, the Mo
- JCA reported that Custodial Corps counted a total of 6 800 staff members, about 2 800 of which were deployed in Banadir, and with women representing about the 15 % of them. However actual figures and staff/prison population ratio are contested. Moreover, recruitment procedures are largely informal, based on recommendations, and lack formal prerequisites. Similarly, staff training is not standardised and prison specific. There is a significant level of illiteracy among the staff members;[263](#)
- **Living conditions:** general living conditions in the Somali prisons are considered, ‘below international standards’ or ‘substandard’,[264](#) generally ‘poor’,[265](#) or ‘mostly inhumane’, while they also violate international human rights laws due to overcrowding.[266](#) Most facilities lack appropriate bedding, and over 60 % of them lack sleeping amenities.[267](#) Poor ventilation and lack of natural lightening are also widespread issues.[268](#) Reported

issues regarding living conditions in Mogadishu prisons include:

- **overcrowding**: prison cells generally suffer from overcrowding issues in Somalia, with MCP being a notable example.[269](#) Overcrowding affects the Godka Jilacow Prison (The Hole), the CID, and the smaller detention centres as well, where pre-trial detainees are forced into limited space.[270](#) The Saferworld study indicates that the rapid urbanisation and the high concentration of IDPs and returnees in urban areas such as Mogadishu resulted in high criminality rates and thus had substantial impact on overcrowding.[271](#) The government's anti-Al-Shabaab campaign unleashed in 2022 also contributed to this issue;[272](#)
- lack of **segregation** between male and female inmates: while cells for male and female inmates are usually separated, no adequate segregated areas – such as bathrooms, toilets, or private areas – are provided to women;[273](#) it is highly likely that women prisoners and detainees come into contact with men prison officers and police personnel without women prison officers or police personnel present;[274](#)
- lack of **separation** among prisoners: prisons in Somalia, including the MCP, often do not separate adult from juvenile offenders, pretrial detainees from convicted prisoners, as well as minor offenders from serious crimes, such as murder or terrorism;[275](#)
- access to **food**: various sources note that the government supplies food only to prisons and CID sites,[276](#) while families are supposed to provide for food supplies in the District Police Stations.[277](#) In practice, according to Zakia Hussen, food and water provisions in prisons in Mogadishu is a hybrid between government provisions and heavy reliance on family and clan networks.[278](#) While the government, through the Somali Custodial Corps, provide basic rations consisting of beans, rice porridge, for the majority of the prisoners the primary source of quality food is through their families bringing hot pots or dry goods to the prison gates.[279](#) In this vein, Abdirizak Farah Mohamed points out that access to adequate food for those who have no relatives in Mogadishu or financial resources might be problematic.[280](#) Zakia Hussen adds that inmates with little to no family ties – particularly IDPs – rely solely on government provisions or the generosity of other inmates. And this also makes prisons fertile ground for criminal recruitments particularly of IDPs in exchange for food and funds.[281](#)

In general, according to various sources, inmates in Somalia receive insufficient food, in terms of both quality and variety, with many cases of anaemia and lack of vitamin A. Rates of acute malnutrition and severe micronutrient deficiencies are high.[282](#) Abdirizak Farah Mohamed confirms that some detainees struggle with the meals provided because the food may not meet basic nutritional needs or may not be suitable for individuals with specific health conditions.[283](#)

Alternatively, many detainees rely on internal prison restaurants or external food suppliers, but these options are often unaffordable.[284](#) A typical meal from an external restaurant costs around 5 USD, while meals from internal prison restaurants can cost more than that.[285](#) According to OPR, often prisoners are even required to purchase food from restaurants located within the prison premises, which are run by prison officials. Those refusing to do so may undergo punishment, including solitary confinement under torture-like conditions.[286](#)

- **access to **water**:** access to clean drinking water is an issue of concern in the prison system,[287](#) with inmates often required to pay monthly charges in order to access it.[288](#) According to Saferworld's research conducted across prison facilities in three cities (including Mogadishu), in 2022 88 % of the observed detention centres had potable water, while 12 % had unclean drinking water.[289](#) Prison facilities often rely on borehole wells for water provision. However, their frequently needed maintenance is often neglected;[290](#)
- **access to **healthcare**:** access to adequate healthcare is an issue of concern across the prison system in Somalia, with health services inadequate or unresponsive.[291](#) Main challenges, notably in the Mogadishu prisons, include: poor access to medication and medical care, often any at all; limited number of qualified medical personnel, often lacking training and regular salary; lack of medical supplies and equipment for first aid and for the nursing staff; overcrowding, lack of sanitation and isolation often resulting in the spreading or the outbreak of communicable diseases; lack of an ambulance for transporting inmates. [292](#) Only few prisons across Somalia have on-site medial facilities, and when they do, they often lack the equipment and the (human) resources to treat the full spectrum of needs. [293](#) In CID sites resources for healthcare are 'markedly' insufficient, with extensive concerns about mental health issues;[294](#)
- **sanitation and hygiene:** 80 % of detention facilities across Somalia are considered 'unacceptable' due to inadequate hygiene;[295](#)
- **diseases and causes of death:** inmates are often victims of scabies, ringworm, hepatitis A and B, H, pylori infections, tuberculosis, STIs, pneumonia, and anaemia.[296](#) The primary causes of death include transmissible diseases such as tuberculosis and cholera, along with insufficient food supplies and violent confrontations. Since the beginning of 2019, OPR has confirmed a total of 137 deaths in prisons and detention facilities located in Mogadishu.[297](#)
- Reported violations during arrest and detention:
- **apprehensions:** individuals in Mogadishu can be apprehended by the police and the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA), and can be held in police stations, CID, Godka Jilacow, as well as private residences. In the last few years (2019 – 2024), apprehended people were mostly identified as suspected AS members, journalists, or

members of youth gangs (*Ciyaal Weero*). On various instances there were allegations of unjust apprehension and detention;[298](#)

- **arbitrary arrest and detention:** there are widespread reports of arbitrary (unwarranted) arrests and detentions carried out by government security forces, allied militias, and regional authorities, often using allegations of affiliation with Al-Shabaab as their basis.[299](#) Individuals are detained without proper justification, particularly those accused of terrorism, those showing support for AS, those opposing the government, or those just critical of it, notably journalists.[300](#) According to Zakia Hussen, people detained at Mogadishu's prisons facilities and establishments – apart from MCP – are mixed, with some convicted and some awaiting conviction and/or trial dates, or held for investigation purposes.[301](#) According to Abdirizak Farah Mohamed, a licensed Somali lawyer, most individuals detained in these establishments are held without legal basis. While arrests must generally be carried out with a warrant – exception made for the limited circumstances provided under Articles 34–39 of the Somali Criminal Procedure Code – many detainees are held unlawfully, he adds. In many cases, their constitutional rights as accused persons are not protected and are frequently violated during law-enforcement operations;[302](#)
- **Prolonged pre-trial detention** and (lack of) access to a **fair trial:** despite Constitutional safeguards, many detainees are not brought to court within the 48 hours limit,[303](#) and do not have access to a legal counsel, while they are also denied access to bail.[304](#) In some instances, influential figures such as security personnel, judicial officers, politicians, and clan elders exert pressure to secure the release of preferred detainees. Lack of independence, widespread corruption, and clan-politics severely affect the functioning of the judiciary in Somalia.[305](#) As a result pre-trial detention is often prolonged, with many inmates facing years of detention without trial, some wrongly detained post-bail, others still in detention despite having completed their sentences, or still in detention after three years for minor offenses, such as 10 USD worth;[306](#)
- **torture**, inhuman and degrading treatment: the Somali security forces – which include the SNA, the SPF, the NISA, and the Custodial Corps – they all routinely engage with torture practices, as well as cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment of detainees and suspects,[307](#) among others in the context of counter-terrorism efforts or operations.[308](#) A culture of impunity for torture and other forms of ill-treatment persists in Somalia.[309](#) Reports indicate that inmates endure constant abuse and daily torture in Godka Jilacow, including inhuman and degrading treatment, in order to coerce them into confession;[310](#) the use of torture has been reported as well at the level of CID,[311](#) District Police Stations, and NISA undisclosed detention sites across Mogadishu, also with instances of sexual violence and murder.[312](#) Coerced confessions also involve minors, who are reportedly forced into providing written or recorded confessions under duress.[313](#) Reports of solitary confinement practices include undressing, food and water deprivation, limited sunlight, and inhuman sleeping conditions.[314](#) Lacking Somalia a specific anti-torture legislation, judicial authorities do not punish acts that could be classified as torture.[315](#)

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