

# **Visit Report**

**Detention centre on Hverfisgata  
Supervision of detainees**

**2025**

**OPCAT monitoring of the conditions  
of persons deprived of their liberty**

## **Summary**

### **The Visit**

The Althingi Ombudsman visited the detention centre at the police station on Hverfisgata on the evening of 10 October 2025; the visit lasted until the morning of 11 October. The Ombudsman's investigation this time was limited to procedures and practices in connection with the supervision and monitoring of detainees. Video recordings from the detention centre were also reviewed with a focus on these issues.

### **Facilities**

The report makes recommendations to the Commissioner of the Reykjavík Metropolitan Police regarding facilities in the detention centre, for instance concerning the lighting in police holding cells, sound signals associated with alarms in cells, and certain technical deficiencies in the video surveillance system in the detention centre.

During the Ombudsman's visit, it was noted that sheets of paper had been affixed to cell doors with the intention of blocking detainees' view out of the cell. This prevented them, for example, from seeing clocks in the corridors of the detention centre. The report points out to the Commissioner of the Reykjavík Metropolitan Police that people in police cells need to be able to monitor the passage of time. Bearing this in mind, the use of sheets of paper to obscure the view of detainees should not be practised except in very exceptional cases.

### **Monitoring and supervision of persons arrested**

The police are responsible for ensuring the safety of individuals held in detention facilities and for ensuring that their supervision accords with the law and standard operating procedures. Among the issues the Ombudsman considered were the detainees' possibilities to access the toilet. It appeared that there were examples where there was no response to detainees ringing for assistance and that they subsequently relieved themselves inside the cell. When such incidents occurred, cleaning was not always carried out promptly. The recommendation is addressed to the Reykjavík Metropolitan Police to make arrangements in the detention facility to have requests from detainees to use the toilet responded to without delay if at all possible, and that cleaning is also carried out without delay when an individual emits urine, feces, blood or other bodily fluids in a cell.

There were also examples of individuals being placed in cells without clothes. These were individuals who had been assessed as being at risk of suicide or self-harm, and therefore clothing, and in some cases also the mattress in the cell, had been removed for safety reasons. The Ombudsman repeats the recommendation that every means be sought to avoid placing detainees in cells without clothing, so that they can maintain their human dignity, in addition to ensuring always a regular reassessment of the need for an individual to remain unclothed in a cell.

In connection with the monitoring and supervision of arrested persons, the recommendation is also made to the Commissioner of Police to make various improvements in relation to the actual monitoring by staff of those held in detention facilities and to ensure that the attitude and

conduct of police officers and other detention centre staff towards them accords with law and general considerations of humanity and human dignity.

### **Healthcare services**

While individuals are being held in detention, the authorities have a duty to ensure that they have access to necessary health care. The report refers, among other things, to an initial assessment of their condition when detained. Since the Ombudsman's last visit, new operating guidelines have been adopted, providing for a personalised assessment of an individual's capacity to be detained in a police cell and their possible need for health care. Although the introduction of an assessment of the person's condition is to be welcomed, the Ombudsman points out the disadvantages of the assessment being carried out by the duty supervisor without the involvement of a health-trained employee, when appropriate.

In previous reports, the Ombudsman has focused on the lack of an adequate framework for the detention of individuals in police cells in cases where their condition requires health care due to a mental health problem, which is partly due to problems of co-operation between the law enforcement and health care systems. The report further discusses these issues and recommends that the relevant authorities consult and co-operate to take measures to ensure that deprivation of liberty does not prevent those in detention from accessing necessary mental health services.

### **Records and supervision**

According to the Regulation on the Legal Status of Detainees, Police Questioning etc., a detention report must be written on the detention of everyone placed in a cell. To judge by the daily record and detention reports that the Ombudsman received in connection with the visit, there appeared to be significant shortcomings in the recording of various aspects required under the regulation. The Ombudsman therefore recommends that the Commissioner of the Reykjavík Metropolitan Police ensure accurate recording, as provided for in the relevant provisions, and also record other aspects that may be of significance, such as incidents at the detention centre.

The recommendation is also directed to the Commissioner of the Reykjavík Metropolitan Police that they review their internal checks and controls regarding the operations of the detention centre on Hverfisgata, with the aim of ensuring that administrators receive the necessary information and are sufficiently aware of the operations to be able to respond to systemic shortcomings or individual incidents that may arise.

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