

Probation and Prisons in Europe, 2024:

Key Findings of the SPACE reports

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Executive Summary

This report presents the main findings from the 2024 SPACE II survey on probation and compares them with the 2024 SPACE I survey on prisons. The analysis reveals relevant patterns in European criminal justice systems:

Main findings:

- **Probation is now the dominant form of correctional supervision in Europe:** With approximately 1.4 million probationers compared to 1.0 million inmates, there are roughly 1.5 probationers for every prisoner across the continent.
- **Probation population rates vary dramatically:** From 19 probationers per 100,000 inhabitants in North Macedonia to 627 probationers per 100,000 inhabitants in Poland, reflecting diverse criminal justice philosophies and practices across Europe.
- **Gender disparities persist but vary between prison and probation systems:** Women represent 10.2% of probationers but only 4.5% of prisoners. This suggests not only a general underrepresentation of women among offenders, but also possible differences in sentencing or release decisions that warrant further examination.
- **Foreign nationals under supervision:** They constitute 9.2% of probationers compared to 17% of prisoners in participating jurisdictions, likely reflecting residence requirements for probation eligibility.
- **Most European countries prioritize probation over prison:** In 27 out of 36 jurisdictions with comparable data, probation population rates exceed prison population rates.
- **Trends:** The total number of probationers increased from 1,003,767 in 2023 to 1,026,524 in 2024 among agencies using person-based counting methods, representing a growth of +2.3%. The overall trend in the prison population across Europe also shows an upward trajectory, with a +3.9% increase.
- **Total correctional population exceeds 2.4 million:** Combining both forms of supervision, approximately 2,448,391 persons are under some form of criminal justice control in Europe.

- **Methodological challenges persist:** Different counting methods across countries (persons vs. cases/orders) complicate direct comparisons, highlighting the need for harmonized data collection.

Policy implications:

These findings suggest that while community sanctions have expanded significantly since the 1990s, they may not always serve as true alternatives to imprisonment. In several jurisdictions, high rates of both probation and incarceration indicate that community measures function as supplements rather than substitutes for prison sentences.

Key recommendations:

- Harmonize data collection methods across Europe to use person-based counting consistently, at least for key indicators
- Monitor and investigate the concerning trend of increasing probation populations alongside rising imprisonment
- Review staffing levels, particularly in jurisdictions with high probationer-to-staff ratios exceeding 30:1

1. Introduction

This document summarises the main findings of the *2024 Council of Europe Annual Penal Statistics on Persons under the Supervision of Probation Agencies*¹ better known under the acronym SPACE II, and compares them to those of the *2024 Council of Europe Annual Penal Statistics on Prison Populations*, SPACE I, which was published in July 2025².

The rates and percentages presented here correspond to the *European median values and averages* computed on the basis of figures weighted by the population and the number of probationers—or, respectively, of inmates—in each jurisdiction (see *Methodology* for further details). Forty-eight (48) out of the 51 probation agencies (or equivalent institutions) in the 46 Council of Europe member States answered the 2024 SPACE II questionnaire, which corresponds to a participation rate of 94%. Their answers are compared to those of the 51 prison services that replied to the 2024 SPACE I questionnaire. The countries that did not answer the SPACE II questionnaire are Greece, Iceland, and San Marino.

To ensure meaningful comparisons and avoid distortions caused by very small populations, detailed interpretations and trend analyses in this report are limited to countries with populations exceeding 500,000 inhabitants. While data from smaller jurisdictions are included in tables and figures, their extreme values can significantly affect percentages and rates when dealing with small absolute numbers. For instance, a single probationer added or removed in

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¹ Aebi, M. F., Cid-Pozo, I., Monar, L. & Hashimoto, Y. Z. (2025). *SPACE II – 2024 – Council of Europe Annual Penal Statistics: Persons under the Supervision of Probation Agencies*. Council of Europe. Available at: www.unil.ch/space

² Aebi, M. F. & Cocco, E. (2025). *SPACE I – 2024 – Council of Europe Annual Penal Statistics: Prison Populations*. Council of Europe. Available at: www.unil.ch/space.

a country with 40,000 inhabitants would change the probation rate by 2.5 per 100,000 inhabitants.

It must also be mentioned that the 48 probation agencies and the 51 prison administrations that completed the SPACE questionnaires did not necessarily provide data for all the items included in them. Thus, in the title of each Figure and Table included in this document we indicate the number (N) of probation agencies—or, respectively, of prison administrations—that provided the data required for the analysis³.

Important Note on Data Comparability: Not all European probation agencies count individuals in the same way. While prison statistics consistently count individual inmates, probation statistics vary considerably. Some agencies count *persons* (one person = one count regardless of how many measures they are serving), while others count *cases, files, or orders* (one person with multiple measures = multiple counts). This creates a risk of double counting⁴. Throughout this report, jurisdictions not using person-based counting are indicated with diagonal stripes (partial use) or crosshatched stripes (no person-counting) in figures. In total, twenty-seven (27) probation agencies use the person as the counting unit for their stock, nine use it only partially, and seven do not use it at all⁵. Some agencies using the person as a partial counting unit are able to provide their total number of probationers but cannot disaggregate these figures by specific sanctions or measures. Similarly, Denmark, Slovenia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina (see footnote 7), despite not using the person as their standard counting unit, were able to provide their total number of probationers for this report.

2. Defining probation and community sanctions and measures (CSM)

According to Appendix I to the Council of Europe’s Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)1, **probation** “relates to the implementation in the community of sanctions and measures, defined by law and imposed on an offender. It includes a range of activities and interventions, which involve supervision, guidance and assistance aiming at the social inclusion of an offender, as well as at contributing to community safety”.

³ Many Figures include data from the two Spanish probation agencies (Catalonia and the State Administration) as well as the overall total for Spain. In these cases, only two probation agencies are counted in the N indicated in the title of the Figures. That N also excludes the European median values and averages. **Readers counting the bars included in each Figure are kindly asked to keep these exceptions in mind.**

⁴ The European median and average values shown in Figure 1 are calculated on the basis of data from the probation agencies that use the *person* as the counting unit of their statistics. It also includes Czechia, France, Spain, and Sweden, which count the *person* for the *total probation stock* but use *other* counting units (such as *cases*) for the different forms of probation; consequently, these countries mentioned that they only *partially* use the person as the counting unit of their statistics (and are presented in diagonal red stripes in the Figure). Although Serbia also *partially* uses the person as their counting unit (and therefore is also presented in diagonal red stripes), it does not use it when calculating their probation stock and is as a result excluded—together with the probation agencies using other counting units (in crosshatched red stripes in the Figure)—from the computation of the European median and average values.

⁵ The seven probation agencies that do not use the *person* as the counting unit of their statistics are those of Belgium, Denmark, Hungary, Luxembourg, Portugal, Slovenia, and Ukraine. The nine that only use *partially* the person as their counting unit are those of Czechia, France, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Sweden, the State Administration of Spain, UK: Northern Ireland, and UK: Scotland. Consequently, the *total* figures for Spain are also based only *partially* on persons, even if the Catalan probation agency does use the *person* as the counting unit of its statistics.

According to the Council of Europe’s Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)3, **community sanctions and measures** means “sanctions and measures which maintain suspects or offenders in the community and involve some restrictions on their liberty through the imposition of conditions and/or obligations. The term designates any sanction imposed by a judicial or administrative authority, and any measure taken before or instead of a decision on a sanction, as well as ways of enforcing a sentence of imprisonment outside a prison establishment”.

These conceptualizations show that the Council of Europe adopts broad definitions of probation and of community sanctions and measures. For example, according to the Council of Europe’s Recommendation Rec(2003)22 on **conditional release (parole)**, “[c]onditional release is a community measure” that “means the early release of sentenced prisoners under individualised post-release conditions”. This implies that persons conditionally released and placed under the supervision of probation agencies are considered as *probationers* and not as a separate category (usually called *parolees* in common law jurisdictions).

As the distinction between these two large categories is useful when analyzing the use of probation, Figure 1 presents the percentage of persons conditionally released among the total number of probationers on 31 January 2024 in the 31 jurisdictions that provided the necessary data⁶. That percentage varies widely across Europe, from none in several countries (Norway, Netherlands, Poland, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Bulgaria) to 12% in Austria, 35% in England and Wales, and 52% in Türkiye. In broad terms, the highest percentages are found in Western and Northern European countries, with the notable exception of Türkiye. Nevertheless, some probation agencies included in Figure 1 do not use the *person* as the counting unit in their probation statistics (those presented with *crosshatched red stripes*) and others do so partially (those presented with *diagonal red stripes*).

3. Probation and prison populations on 31 January 2024

For the reasons explained above, among the 48 probation agencies that completed the SPACE II questionnaire, only 37 answered the item on the total number of persons under their supervision (*stock*). On 31 January 2024, there were **1,426,960 probationers** under the supervision of these probation agencies, which corresponds to a median European probation population rate of **157 probationers per 100,000 inhabitants**.

Probation population rates

The probation population rates of each probation agency are presented in Figure 2. The European median and average rates are calculated on the basis of the data provided by the probation agencies that use the *person* as their counting unit and those that provided data on their stock of probationers⁷. The highest probation population rates are found in Poland (627), Georgia (583), Türkiye (459), and Albania (413), while the lowest are in North Macedonia (19), Montenegro (23), Norway (41), Serbia (42), and Switzerland (44). However, as noted earlier, comparisons across jurisdictions must be conducted carefully because the way in which data

⁶ It is to note that the reference date might differ depending on the country. Further information can be found within the SPACE II report.

⁷ In Bosnia and Herzegovina there is no formal probation agency at the state level. A limited component (341 persons) related to community service is overseen by the Sector for the Execution of Criminal Sanctions within the Ministry of Justice of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and is implemented following principles common to all probation systems. This 341 persons are included in the total number of probationers in Europe.

are collected varies across them. As in Figure 1, data provided by the probation agencies that do not use the *person* as the counting unit for the total number of probationers are presented in crosshatched red stripes and those who comply only partially in diagonal red stripes.

Probation measures rates

SPACE II national correspondents were asked to include both the number of probationers and the number of measures applied. This enhancement aims to offer a more detailed understanding of the data, despite the challenges posed by the varying methodologies of different countries. However, complexities still remain, especially with jurisdictions like Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, France, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Northern Ireland and Scotland. These countries either count individuals to a limited extent only or face challenges in providing detailed statistics on the measures taken. Figure 3 provides an illustration of the probation measures per 100,000 population. The rates vary significantly from country to country, with the lowest rate found in North Macedonia at 19 measures per 100,000 inhabitants, and the highest in Poland with 695 measures per 100,000 inhabitants.

The probation measure rates shown in Figure 3 are not directly comparable to the person-based rates presented in Figure 2 unless the average number of measures per probationer is known. This distinction is essential, as individual probationers may be subject to multiple concurrent mandates. In Belgium, for instance, a study by Jonckheere (2022) found that 92% of mandates referred to only one probationer, suggesting that in that jurisdiction, the number of measures closely approximates the number of individuals under supervision.⁸ In this context, reducing Belgium's measure-based rate in Figure 3 (591 per 100,000 inhabitants) by approximately 10% would yield an estimated person-based rate of 532, positioning Belgium as the country with the third highest probation population rate (see Figure 2). However, such ratios may vary substantially across jurisdictions.

Even if all probation agencies were to apply the same statistical counting rules, the interpretation of the ranking of jurisdictions that stems from Figure 2 would not be straightforward. For example, the probation agency of Serbia was created only in 2011, which suggests that its low probation population rate could be due to the fact that probation is still developing in the country. The same interpretation can be made for North Macedonia, where the first probation office opened in November 2017 and the remaining offices started operating only in November 2019.

Comparing probation and prison population rates

It is important to note that there is no “magic formula” to estimate a rate of probationers that would be appropriate for a jurisdiction. The reason is that probationers are serving community sanctions and measures, which are frequently referred to as alternatives to imprisonment because they aim at the social inclusion of the offender by keeping them in the community. Consequently, the probation rate cannot be interpreted without comparing it to the prison population rate. For that reason, Figure 4 shows the probation and prison population rates for

⁸ Jonckheere, A. (2022). *Un regard sur les chiffres de la justice: les mandats en maison de justice*. In Service public fédéral Justice (Ed.), *Mesurer l'activité en justice. Actes du colloque du 6 décembre 2022* (pp. 167–168). Bruxelles: SPF Justice. With our thanks to Ms Annie Devos (*Administratrice générale* of the *Administration générale des Maisons de Justice*, Belgium) for pointing us to this reference.

Figure 1. Percentages of persons on conditional release among probationers on 31 January 2024 (N=31)

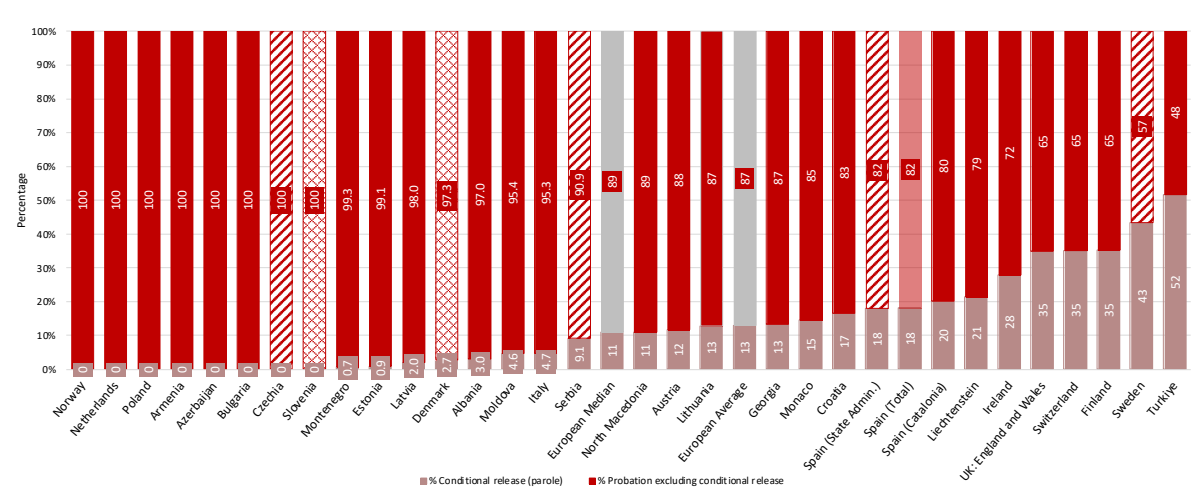


Figure 2. Probation population rates (probationers per 100 000 inhabitants) on 31 January 2024 (N=36)

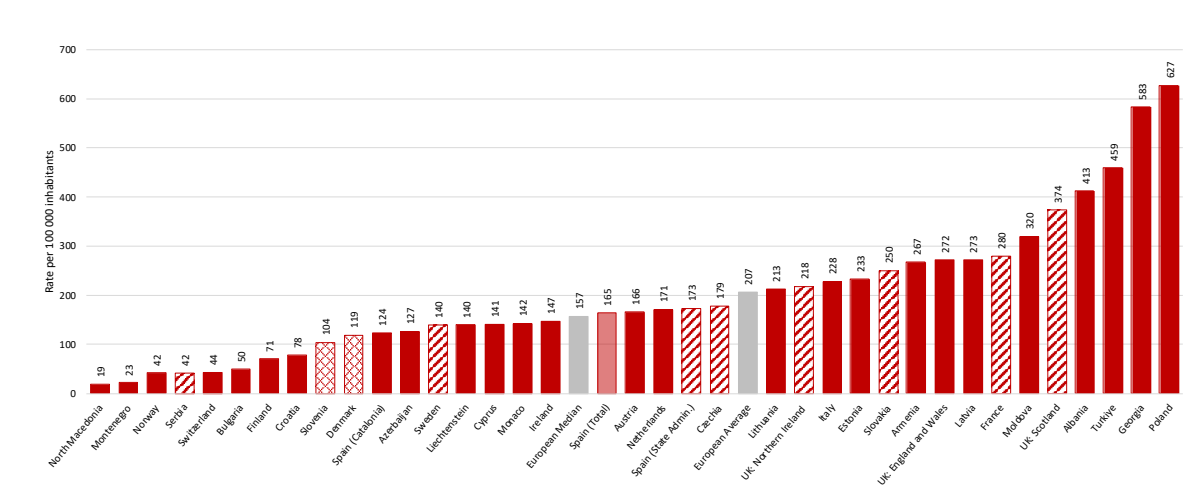
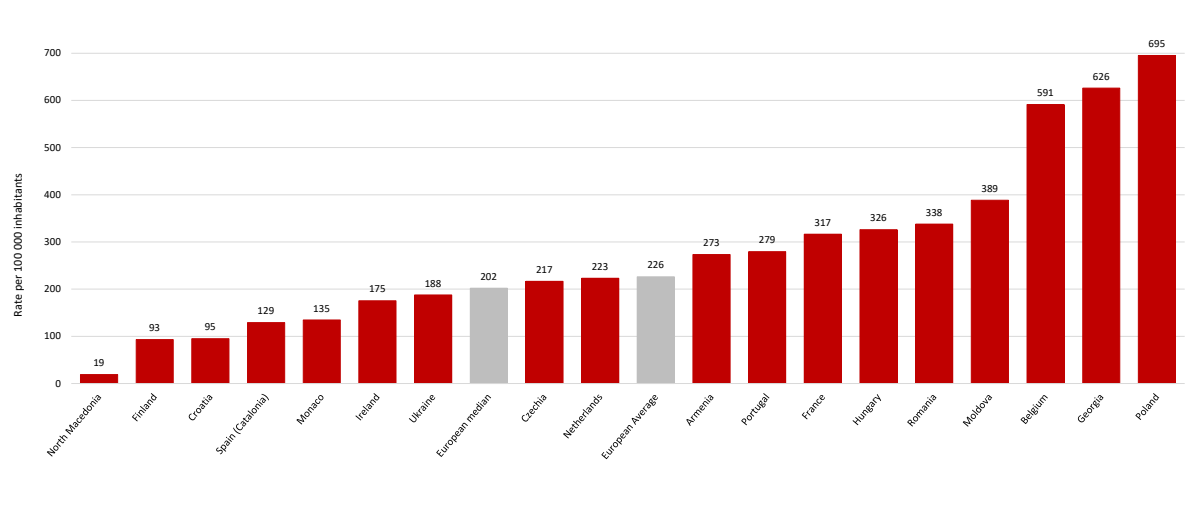


Figure 3. Probation measures rates (measures per 100 000 inhabitants) on 31 January 2024 (N=18)



the 36 probation agencies and prison services that answered both SPACE questionnaires in 2024.

In Figure 4, jurisdictions are arranged according to their probation population in ascending order. It can easily be seen that this distribution is completely different from the one that would be obtained if they were ranked by their prison population rate. One notable result of this comparison is that, in **27 out of the 36 probation agencies and prison services** included in Figure 4, the probation population rate is higher than the prison population rate. The exceptions are North Macedonia, Montenegro, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland, Bulgaria, Croatia, Azerbaijan, and Czechia, where the rates of inmates are higher than the rates of probationers per 100,000 inhabitants.

The average and median probation rates are depicted using a checkered grid pattern to distinguish them visually from prison rates. Again, it is important to emphasize the fact that not all probation agencies use the same counting unit. Accordingly, the European median and the European average rates for both the probation population rate and the prison population rate were computed excluding the probation agencies that do not count persons. Nevertheless, there are still major divergences across jurisdictions. In order to better illustrate these divergences, Figure 5 shows the ratio of probationers per 100 inmates.

Figure 5 shows that among jurisdictions with at least half a million inhabitants using the person as the counting unit, the highest ratios of probationers per 100 inmates can be observed in Armenia (324 probationers per 100 inmates), the Netherlands (317), and Poland (311). In contrast, North Macedonia and Montenegro display the lowest ratios, with only 13 and 14 probationers per 100 inmates, respectively. In the specific case of North Macedonia, this low ratio is likely due to the previously mentioned recent establishment of its probation service, whereas elevated ratios may have multiple explanations.

For instance, the Netherlands maintains a comparatively low ratio of 14 probationers per probation staff member, while Poland has 33 probationers per staff member, and Armenia has an even higher ratio of 50, as shown in Figure 6. This indicates that some jurisdictions with large probation populations may face challenges in providing adequate supervision due to limited staffing, whereas others, such as the Netherlands, may theoretically be better equipped to ensure effective probation management.

In order to categorize the jurisdictions according to the relationship between their probation and prison population rates, Table 1 presents the different ways in which both rates are combined in practice. The jurisdictions in Table 1 are categorized as follows: a probation or prison population rate up to 100 per 100,000 inhabitants is considered as low, a rate higher than 100 but lower than 200 per 100,000 inhabitants is considered as relatively high, and a rate equal to or superior to 200 is considered as high. Entries in italics mean that the probation agency (or equivalent institution) specified that it does not use the person as the counting unit for the stock of probationers.

Figure 4. Probation and Prison population rates (per 100 000 inhabitants) on 31 January 2024 (N=36)

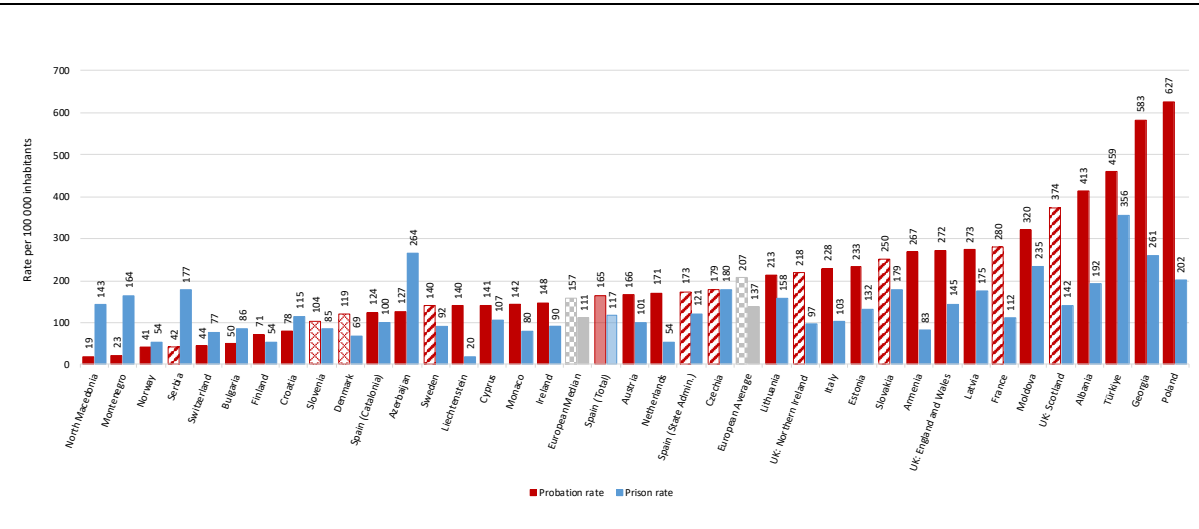


Figure 5. Ratio of probationers per 100 inmates on 31 January 2024 (N=34)

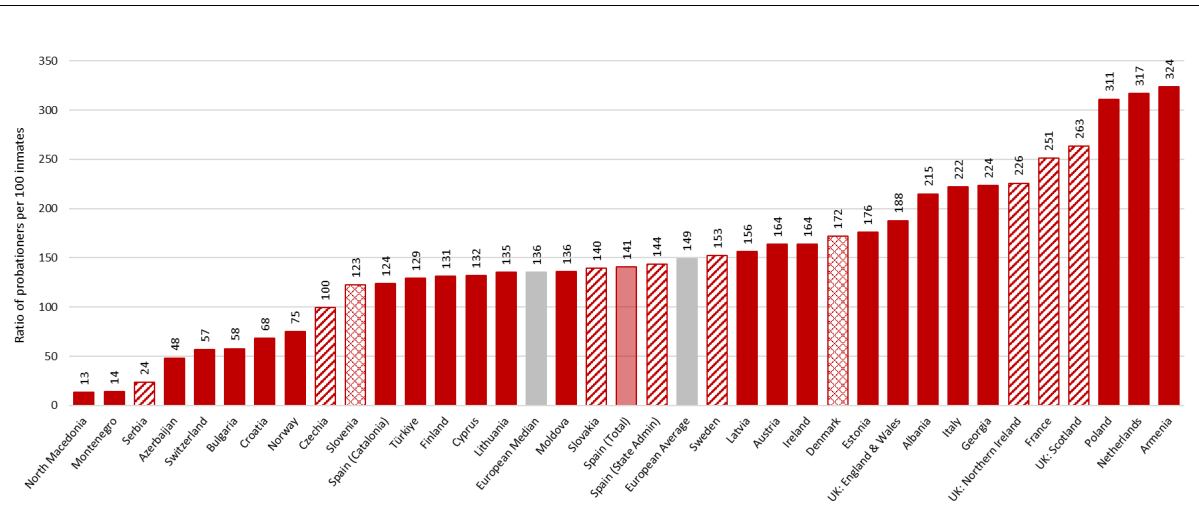


Figure 6. Ratio of probationers per one staff member on 31 January 2024 (n=31)

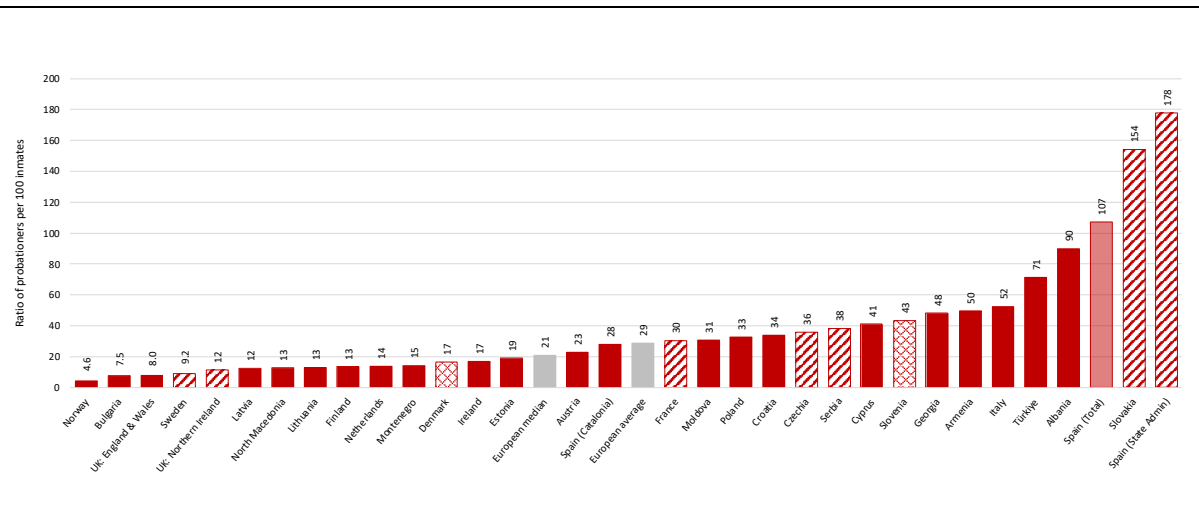


Table 1. Relationship between probation and prison population rates on 31 January 2024 (N=41, 8 categories)

Jurisdiction	Probation population rate	Prison population rate
1. Jurisdictions with a low probation population rate (≤ 100 per 100 000 inhabitants) and a low prison population rate (≤ 100 per 100 000 inhabitants)		
Switzerland	43.5	76.8
Bulgaria	49.8	86.2
Finland	71.2	54.3
2. Jurisdictions with a low probation population rate (≤ 100 per 100 000 inhabitants) and a relatively high prison population rate (>100 to <200 per 100 000 inhabitants)		
North Macedonia	19.0	142.6
Montenegro	22.7	164.0
<i>Serbia</i>	41.8	177.1
Croatia	78.3	115.1
3. Jurisdictions with a relatively high probation population rate (>100 to <200 per 100 000 inhabitants) and a low prison population rate (≤ 100 per 100 000 inhabitants)		
<i>Slovenia</i>	104.2	85.0
<i>Denmark</i>	119.0	69.3
Liechtenstein	139.9	20.0
<i>Sweden</i>	140.8	92.4
Monaco	142.4	80.2
Ireland	147.5	90.0
Netherlands	171.0	54.0
4. Jurisdictions with a relatively high probation population rate (>100 to <200 per 100 000 inhabitants) and a relatively high prison population rate (>100 to <200 per 100 000 inhabitants)		
Spain (Catalonia)	124.1	100.1
Cyprus	141.2	106.8
<i>Spain (Total)</i>	165.0	117.2
Austria	165.6	101.1
<i>Spain (State Admin.)</i>	173.1	120.6
<i>Czechia</i>	178.8	179.5
5. Jurisdictions with a relatively high probation population rate (>100 to <200 per 100 000 inhabitants) and a high prison population rate (> 200 per 100 000 inhabitants)		
Azerbaijan	126.9	264.2
6. Jurisdictions with a high probation population rate (≥ 200 per 100 000 inhabitants) and a low prison population rate (≤ 100 per 100 000 inhabitants)		
<i>UK: Northern Ireland</i>	218.4	96.8
Armenia	267.3	82.5
7. Jurisdictions with a high probation population rate (≥ 200 per 100 000 inhabitants) and a relatively high prison population rate (>100 to <200 per 100 000 inhabitants)		
Lithuania	213.1	157.7
Italy	228.1	102.8
Estonia	232.9	132.4
<i>Slovakia</i>	250.3	179.3
UK: England and Wales	272.3	145.0
Latvia	273.0	174.7
<i>France</i>	279.9	111.5
<i>UK: Scotland</i>	374.0	142.1
8. Jurisdictions with a high probation population rate (≥ 200 per 100 000 inhabitants) and a high prison population rate (≥ 200 per 100 000 inhabitants)		
Moldova	319.6	235.0
Türkiye	459.4	355.7
Georgia	583.1	260.7
Poland	627.3	201.6

Note: Entries in italics indicate jurisdictions that do not use the person as the counting unit (or use it only partially) for the stock of probationers.

The countries in the first category of Table 1 (Switzerland, Bulgaria, and Finland) are those that seem to be using prison and probation most parsimoniously, because they show low rates in both indicators. Countries in the eighth category (Moldova, Türkiye, Georgia, and Poland) are exactly in the opposite situation. These countries appear to be using community sanctions not as alternatives to imprisonment, but rather as supplementary sanctions. The reason is that their probation population rate is remarkably high, but their prison population rate remains above the European median value. This observation also applies to the probation services included in the seventh and most populated category. In between these categories, the situation of the jurisdictions differs considerably.

The correctional population

The correctional population of a country is a **stock indicator**, defined as the total number of inmates and probationers in that country on a given date. These are individuals who are, in one way or another, under the supervision of state institutions of formal criminal justice control.

By combining the total number of probationers (1,426,960) with the total number of inmates (1,021,431) reported by jurisdictions that participated in at least one of the two SPACE surveys conducted in 2024 and provided data on both stock indicators (probationers and inmates as of 31 January 2024), one obtains a total of **2,447,539 individuals under formal criminal justice supervision in Europe**.

Nevertheless, this number should be considered a conservative estimate of Europe's correctional population. Regarding probationers, this figure includes data from only the 36 probation agencies that provided their total number of probationers (for example, Germany responded partially to the SPACE II questionnaire but did not supply their total number of probationers). In contrast, it includes data from all 51 prison administrations regarding inmates deprived of liberty in Europe.

The correctional population can be converted into a **rate** by relating it to the total population of each country. The resulting correctional population rate corresponds to the combined number of probationers and inmates per 100,000 inhabitants.

Figure 7 presents these estimated correctional population rates (number of inmates and probationers per 100,000 inhabitants) for the 36 jurisdictions that reported both figures.

It must again be emphasized that these rates represent estimates rather than precise, fully comparable figures. The main reason is the inconsistent use of the person as the counting unit across probation statistics throughout Europe. As illustrated in previous figures, probation agencies that provided their total number of probationers but do not consistently use the person as the counting unit are represented with diagonal or crosshatched stripes in Figure 7.

Figure 7 clearly illustrates substantial variability in the estimated correctional population rates among European jurisdictions. The lowest correctional population rates are found in Norway (95), Switzerland (120), and Finland (125), countries reflecting relatively moderate use of correctional measures. In contrast, Türkiye (815), Poland (829), and Georgia (844) show significantly higher correctional population rates, suggesting more intensive use of criminal justice control mechanisms.

The wide differences observed are consistent with the broader findings of the SPACE II report, emphasizing the diversity in correctional philosophies and practices across Europe. It is important to stress that jurisdictions marked with diagonal or crosshatched stripes indicate

potential methodological issues due to the inconsistent use of the person as a counting unit in probation statistics. Consequently, their figures should be interpreted with caution, as these methodological variations may contribute to an inflated estimation of their correctional populations.

4. Year-on-year trend of the probation population rates

The high rates of probationers observed in several jurisdictions corroborate the expansion of community sanctions and measures across the European continent since the 1990s. However, this increase has not necessarily been accompanied everywhere by a parallel decrease of imprisonment, which community sanctions and measures are supposed to substitute (see the SPACE I series). In order to continue monitoring that trend—which can be seen as a signal of the development of mass probation in some jurisdictions—Figure 8 shows the annual variation of the probation population rate in the probation agencies that provided data on their probation population for 2023 and 2024.

As the aim of this analysis is to measure the trend in the use of probation in each jurisdiction, the use of different counting units in different jurisdictions does not affect the comparison, as long as they do not change their counting unit from one year to the other. Hence, Figure 8 includes data on 20 probation agencies that count the number of persons, 7 agencies that partially count the number of persons, and 2 that count the number of cases, files, or orders (presented in diagonal and crosshatched stripes respectively).

Figure 8 shows that, comparing 2024 to 2023, if one considers increases and decreases between -5% and 5% as indicating stability, there were **11 probation agencies that registered significant increases** (5% or more), **8 that experienced significant decreases** (-5% or less), and **10 where the situation remained stable**⁹.

If we restrict the comparison to the 20 probation agencies that count *persons* and provided data both for 2023 and 2024, the total number of probationers **increased from 1,003,767 in 2023 to 1,026,524 in 2024** (see Table 2 towards the end of this document). This represents an increase of 2.3% that warrants further investigation.

5. Characteristics of the probationers under the responsibility of European probation agencies, and comparison with the inmates held in penal institutions

5.1. Gender, probation and imprisonment

In the 30 probation agencies that provided data on both the gender of probationers and the total probation stock, the median percentage of men was **89.8%** and the median percentage of women was **10.2%**.¹⁰ The low proportion of women confirms what is widely observed in criminology: offending is an activity disproportionately concentrated among men.

A comparison with the prison population, as shown in Figure 9, reveals a clear difference: with the exception of Montenegro, the proportion of women is systematically higher in probation

⁹ As indicated in the Methodology Section, in order to avoid double counting, Spain (total) is not counted as a separate probation agency because it corresponds to the sum of Spain (State Administration) and Spain (Catalonia).

¹⁰ Romania was excluded from earlier Figures based on person-based data because it reports identical values for

Figure 7. Estimated correctional population rate (inmates + probationers) per 100 000 inhabitants on 31 January 2023 (N=3)

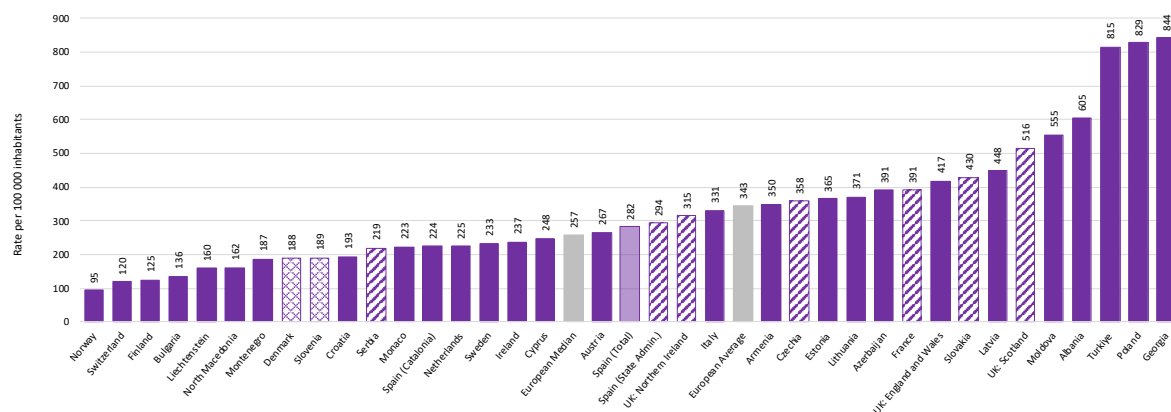


Figure 8. Annual percentage change in probation population rates from 2023 to 2024 (N=29)

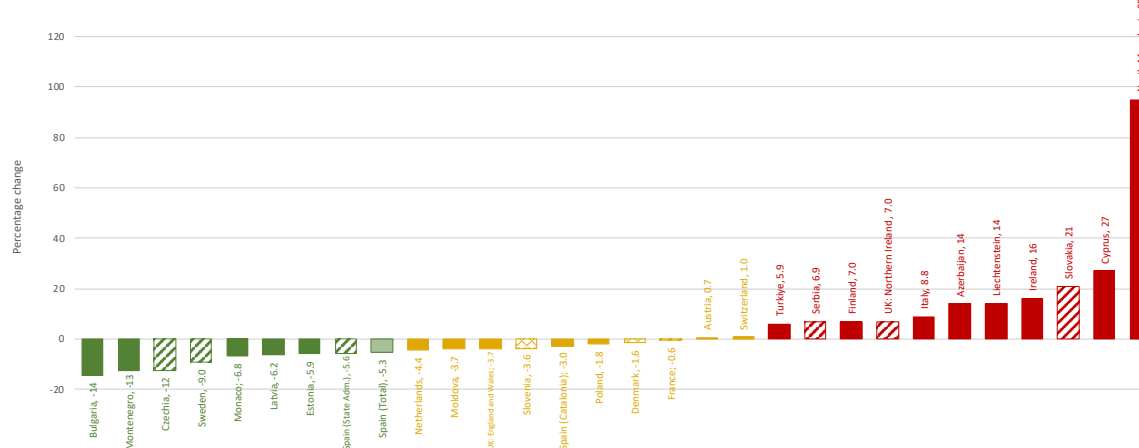
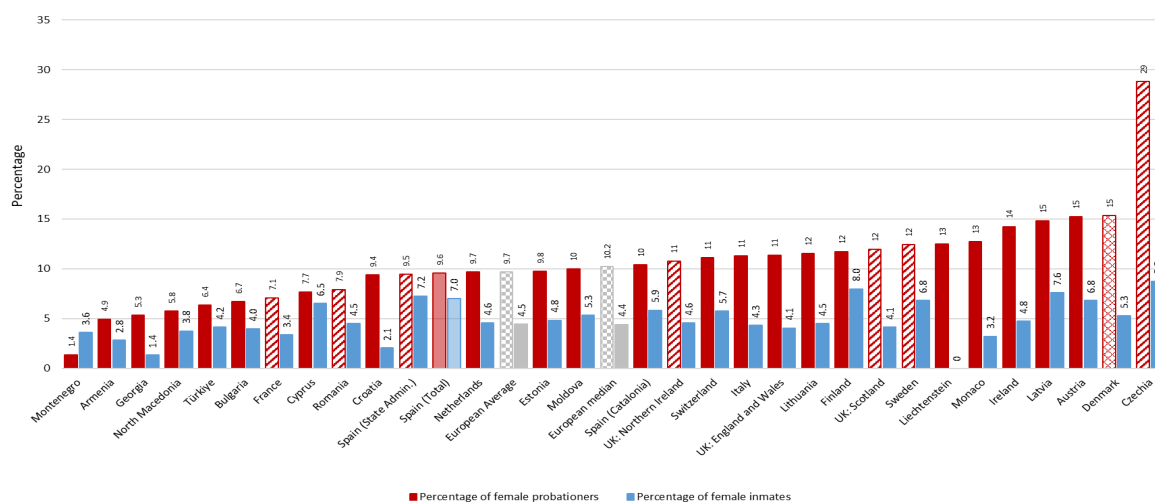


Figure 9. Percentage of female probationers in the probation population and percentage of female inmates in the prison population on 31 January 2024 (N=30)



than in prison. On average, **women make up about 10.2% of probationers, but only around 4.5% of the total prison population**—meaning the proportion is more than twice as high in probation.

This gap may be explained by several interrelated factors. First, probation is usually applied to less serious offences, and women tend to be even more underrepresented in serious (especially violent) crimes than in offending in general. Second, women may be perceived as posing a lower risk of reoffending and therefore be more likely to receive non-custodial sanctions or benefit from early release. Third, social considerations such as caregiving responsibilities can play a role: women are more often the primary caregivers of minor children, which may influence decisions at the sentencing and release stages. The same consideration is rarely applied to men.

Together, these factors may lead to gender-based differences in the application of probation and imprisonment. Whether these differences constitute discrimination or reflect appropriate individualisation based on social and criminological factors remains an open and complex question.

5.2. Citizenship, probation and imprisonment

In the 21 probation agencies that provided data on both the number of foreign probationers and the total probation stock, the median percentage of probationers who were nationals was **90.8%** and the median percentage of probationers who were foreign citizens was **9.2%** (restricting to jurisdictions counting *persons*).¹¹ In contrast, the average percentage of foreign inmates reaches **17%** among jurisdictions that provided data for both SPACE surveys.

This distribution reflects significant geographical variation. Among the jurisdictions that participated both in SPACE I and SPACE II, there are several Western European EU countries where the percentages of foreign inmates are among the highest (see the right half of Figure 10). The same pattern holds when estimations are restricted to jurisdictions that provided demographic data for both their probation (SPACE II) and their prison (SPACE I) populations.

Although there is great diversity in these percentages, most foreign probationers are placed under supervision in Western and Central Europe. In fact, information on citizenship is not collected in several Eastern European countries, which suggests that the issue has limited relevance for policy-makers in that region. This overall distribution of foreign probationers across the continent is similar to the one observed for foreign inmates in the 2024 SPACE I report, although the percentages of the latter are much higher. As a reminder, on 31 January 2024, around **25%** of the inmates placed in European penal institutions were foreigners, but that percentage was usually lower than 5% in Eastern Europe, while in Central and Western Europe it was at least 10% and, in a few countries such as Austria, Greece and Switzerland, it was higher than 50% (see SPACE I - 2024). Sweden data on inmates are omitted from Figure

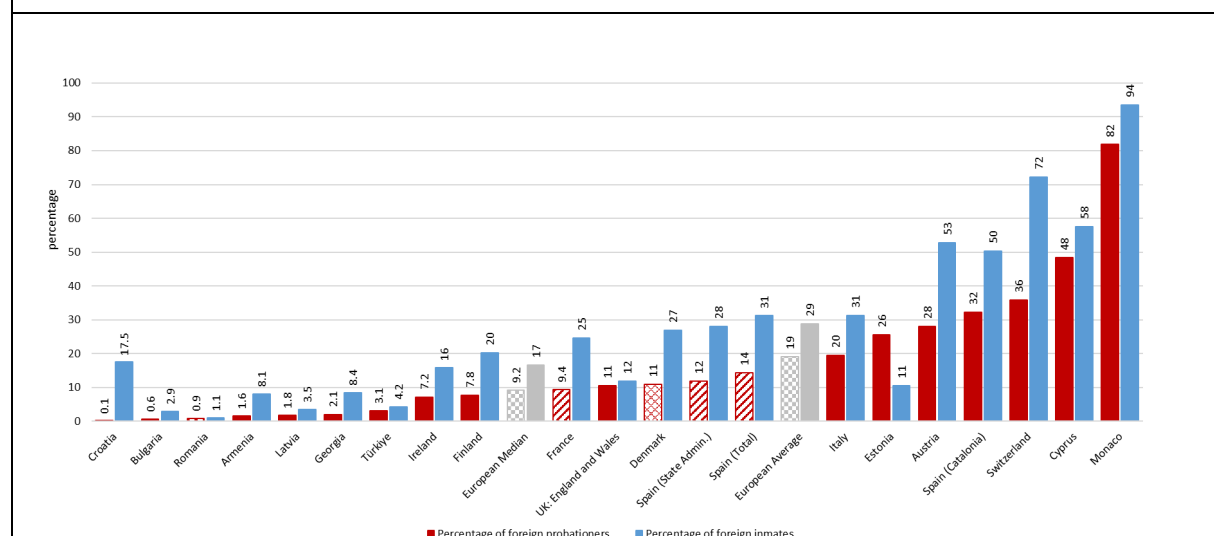
the total number of probation measures and the total number of individuals under probation supervision. This makes it impossible to determine whether the data refer to persons or measures. However, for Figures 9 and 10—where the shares of women and foreign nationals under probation supervision are computed—Romania's stock values were included, as the relevant breakdowns were available. This assumes that the shares of women and foreigners apply consistently across individual probationers.

¹¹ See the previous footnote about the inclusion of Romania.

10 because the country counts foreign inmates only after they receive a final sentence; among its probationers, 17% are foreign citizens.

Figure 10 shows that in all jurisdictions—with the exception of Estonia—the percentage of foreign inmates is higher, usually at least double, than that of foreign probationers. This difference is at least partially due to the fact that it is more difficult for a foreign citizen than for a national to meet the conditions required to be placed on probation. The main obstacle in that context is the requirement of having a stable address in the country where probation is being served. Furthermore, in some cases, it is plausible to assume that some of the foreign inmates have also been the object of a deportation order to be applied after release, which means that they will be expelled from the country after serving their prison term and have no possibility of being placed on probation. The specific situation in Estonia may be linked to the country’s demographic structure and citizenship policies, which affect the legal status and integration of certain population groups residing in the country.

Figure 10. Percentage of foreign probationers in the probation population and percentage of foreign inmates in the prison population on 31 January 2024 (N=21)



6. Methodology

Throughout this document, the term *jurisdiction* is often preferred to *country* because some countries have more than one probation agency. Hence, in Spain, both the General State Administration and the Administration of the Autonomous Community of Catalonia provide data, while in the United Kingdom data are provided separately by England and Wales, Northern Ireland, and Scotland.

Unless stated otherwise, the remarks made in the body of this document refer, for each indicator, to the *European median value*. The *median* is the value that divides the data in two equal groups so that 50% of the countries are above the median and 50% are below it. The median is preferred to the *arithmetic mean* (commonly referred to as the *average*) because the latter is extremely sensitive to very high or very low values (technically known as *outliers*). Outliers are quite common in the sample of countries included in the SPACE reports because some member states, like Liechtenstein, Monaco or San Marino, have very small numbers of inhabitants and, as a consequence, a change in only one person can have a significant impact on their percentages and rates. The *average* value is, however, regularly included in the Figures presented throughout the document.

The European median values are weighted according to the population and the number of probationers in each country. This means that they are estimated on the basis of the percentages and rates per 100,000 inhabitants of each country (or jurisdiction of the country) and not on the absolute numbers for the whole continent. Using the latter would produce different values, which could hide the diversity observed across countries. For example, on 31 January 2024, there were 1,411,491 probationers under the supervision of the 34 probation agencies of the Council of Europe member states which provided data on their stock of probationers. At the same time, the total population of the territories in which these probation agencies are located was around 590 million inhabitants, which would lead to a probation population rate of 239 probationers per 100,000 inhabitants. However, when the European median value is estimated on the basis of the population and the number of probationers of each country, it corresponds to 188.6 probationers per 100,000 inhabitants, as stated at the beginning of this document (see Figure 2).

The questionnaire used for the SPACE II series of Council of Europe Annual Penal Statistics asks countries to provide data on stock indicators using the person as the counting unit. For example, the number of probationers on 31st January (stock) should correspond to the number of persons placed under the supervision of probation agencies on that day. However, some probation agencies do not use the person as the counting unit of their statistics. The risk when an agency uses files, cases or orders as their counting unit is that the same person may be counted more than once (e.g., a person placed in home arrest with electronic monitoring could be counted as two persons: one for the home arrest order and another for the electronic monitoring order). This issue is addressed systematically throughout this document, which indicates for each indicator, Figure, and Table the jurisdictions that do not use the person as the counting unit of their probation statistics. These jurisdictions are presented in stripes in

the Figures, unless they have specified that they use the person as the counting unit for the *specific* indicator presented in the Figure. For example, nine (9) jurisdictions mentioned that they only *partially* use the person as the counting unit in their probation statistics (for details, see note 5), but eight (8) of them specifically count the *person* when computing the total stock of probationers on 31st January (for details, see note 7). In order to allow comparisons, the same logic was applied when computing the European median and average values as well as other measures based exclusively on the number of probationers: jurisdictions not using the *person* as the counting unit in their probation statistics are excluded from the computation.

The Tables presented include one decimal but, in the comments, all numbers equal to or superior to 10 are in principle presented in round numbers (*i.e.*, without decimals), while those inferior to 10 are presented with one decimal. In order to facilitate the reading, numbers have also been rounded in the Figures except when the majority of them were lower than 10.

The sample size (N) indicated on top of each Figure and Table is computed excluding the bars and lines that present the European average and the European median, as well as the total figures for Spain whenever data for the two probation agencies of the country (Catalonia and the State Administration) are also included. This explains why the N is smaller than the number of columns or lines found in the Figures and Tables. To avoid double counting, the overall total for Spain is also excluded from the computation of the European averages and median whenever data for the two probation agencies of the country are available.

8. Tables

Table 2. Stock indicators on 31 January 2024

Country	Total number of probationers	Probation population rate	Total number of inmates	Prison population rate	Ratio of probationers per 100 inmates	Total correctional population (probationers + inmates)	Correctional population rate
Figure		2		4	5		7
Albania	11 534	413.1	5 359	192.0		16 893	605.1
Andorra			61	71.7		61	71.7
Armenia	7 995	267.3	2 469	82.5	323.8	10 464	349.8
Austria	15 169	165.6	9 258	101.1	163.8	24 427	266.7
Azerbaijan	12 917	126.9	26 894	264.2	48.0	39 811	391.0
Belgium			12 041	101.8		12 041	101.8
BiH: State level			262	7.7		262	7.7
BiH: Federation BiH	341		1 001	44.6		1 342	59.8
BiH: Republika Srpska	NAP		590	52.9		590	52.9
Bulgaria	3 209	49.8	5 557	86.2	57.7	8 766	136.0
Croatia	3 025	78.3	4 445	115.1	68.1	7 470	193.4
Cyprus	1 318	141.2	997	106.8	132.2	2 315	248.0
Czechia	19 490	178.8	19 569	179.5	99.6	39 059	358.3
Denmark	7 096	119.0	4 129	69.3	171.9	11 225	188.3
Estonia	3 202	232.9	1 820	132.4	175.9	5 022	365.3
Finland	3 989	71.2	3 041	54.3	131.2	7 030	125.4
France	191 447	279.9	76 275	111.5	251.0	267 722	391.4
Georgia	22 202	583.1	9 926	260.7	223.7	32 128	843.8
Germany			59 413	71.2		59 413	71.2
Greece			10 203	98.1		10 203	98.1
Hungary			18 729	195.4		18 729	195.4
Iceland			140	35.1		140	35.1
Ireland	7 881	147.5	4 808	90.0	163.9	12 689	237.5
Italy	134 537	228.1	60 637	102.8	221.9	195 174	330.9
Latvia	5 111	273.0	3 271	174.7	156.3	8 382	447.8
Liechtenstein	56	139.9	8	20.0	700.0	64	159.9
Lithuania	6 149	213.1	4 551	157.7	135.1	10 700	370.8
Luxembourg			613	91.2		613	91.2
Malta			671	119.1		671	119.1
Moldova	7 744	319.6	5 695	235.0	136.0	13 439	554.6
Monaco	55	142.4	31	80.2	177.4	86	222.6
Montenegro	145	22.7	1 047	164.0	13.8	1 192	186.7
Netherlands	30 681	171.0	9 683	54.0	316.9	40 364	225.0
North Macedonia	347	19.0	2 605	142.6	13.3	2 952	161.6
Norway	23 36		3 004	54.1		26 370	475.1
Poland	229 725	627.3	73 822	201.6	311.2	303 547	828.9
Portugal			12 193	114.6		12 193	114.6
Romania			23 879	125.3		23 879	125.3
San Marino			15	44.7		15	44.7
Serbia	2 762	41.8	11 701	177.1	23.6	14 463	219.0
Slovakia	13 580	250.3	9 724	179.3	139.7	23 304	429.6
Slovenia	2 214	104.2	1 806	85.0	122.6	4 020	189.3
Spain (Total)	80 226	165.0	56 979	117.2	140.8	137 205	282.3
Spain (State Admin)	70 280	173.1	48 951	120.6	143.6	119 231	293.7
Spain (Catalonia)	9 946	124.1	8 028	100.1	123.9	17 974	224.2
Sweden	14 862	140.8	9 748	92.4	139.6	24 610	233.2
Switzerland	3 900	43.5	6 881	76.8	56.7	10 781	120.3
Türkiye	392 233	459.4	303 705	355.7	129.1	695 938	815.2
Ukraine			44 024	116.3		44 024	116.3
UK: England & Wales	164 359	272.3	87 489	145.0	187.9	251 848	417.3
UK: Northern Ireland	4 240	218.4	1 878	96.8	225.8	6 118	315.2
UK: Scotland	20 883	374.0	7 932	142.1	263.3	28 815	516.1

Notes: (1) Data refers to 31 January 2024 (for exceptions, see the SPACE reports); (2) Average and median values were calculated from the original database, which contains all the decimals not shown in this Table; (3) NAP = Not applicable (i.e. there are no probation agencies in the jurisdiction)

Table 3. Composition of the probation and prison populations on 31 January 2024

Country	Percentage of female probationers in the probation population	Percentage of female inmates in the prison population	Percentage of foreign probationers in the probation population	Percentage of foreign inmates in the prison population
Figure	9	9	10	10
Albania		1.4		2.4
Andorra		9.8		80.3
Armenia	4.9	2.8	1.6	8.1
Austria	15.2	6.8	28.1	52.8
Azerbaijan		2.9		2.0
Belgium		4.4		41.4
BiH: Fed. BiH		0.0		
BiH: Republika Srpska		7.6		
BiH: State level		0.9		1.4
Bulgaria	6.7	4.0	0.6	2.9
Croatia	9.4	2.1	0.1	17.5
Cyprus	7.7	6.5	48.3	57.6
Czechia	28.8	8.8		8.4
Denmark	15.4	5.3	10.9	27.0
Estonia	9.8	4.8	25.6	10.5
Finland	11.7	8.0	7.8	20.2
France	7.1	3.4	9.4	24.6
Georgia	5.3	1.4	2.1	8.4
Germany		5.6		48.8
Greece		4.9		54.1
Hungary		8.4		5.0
Iceland		8.6		40.0
Ireland	14.2	4.8	7.2	15.8
Italy	11.3	4.3	19.5	31.3
Latvia	14.8	7.6	1.8	3.5
Liechtenstein	12.5	0.0		
Lithuania	11.6	4.5		3.4
Luxembourg		4.2		75.4
Malta		6.3		51.9
Moldova	10	5.3		1.3
Monaco	12.7	3.2	81.8	93.5
Montenegro	1.4	3.6	0	16.1
Netherlands	9.7	4.6		24.3
North Macedonia	5.8	3.8		7.1
Norway		5.2		26.5
Poland		5.0		3.2
Portugal		7.4		16.7
Romania		4.5		1.1
San Marino		20.0		66.7
Serbia		4.1		6.3
Slovakia		7.7		5.2
Slovenia		5.2		48.1
Spain (Catalonia)	9.6	7.0	14.4	50.3
Spain (State Admin.)	9.5	7.2	11.9	28.1
Spain (Total)	10.4	5.9	32.3	31.2
Sweden	12.4	6.8	16.8	
Switzerland	11.1	5.7	35.8	72.3
Türkiye	6.4	4.2	3.1	4.2
Ukraine		5.7		1.9
UK: England and Wales	11.4	4.1	10.6	11.9
UK: Northern Ireland	10.8	4.6		10.3
UK: Scotland	12	4.1		6.5

9. Definitions

For the purposes of this report, the following definitions apply:

Community sanctions and measures (CSM): According to the Council of Europe's Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)3, these are "sanctions and measures which maintain suspects or offenders in the community and involve some restrictions on their liberty through the imposition of conditions and/or obligations. The term designates any sanction imposed by a judicial or administrative authority, and any measure taken before or instead of a decision on a sanction, as well as ways of enforcing a sentence of imprisonment outside a prison establishment." Community sanctions and measures are frequently referred to as *alternatives to imprisonment* and some of them are also referred to as *diversionary measures*.

Conditional release (parole): According to the Council of Europe's Recommendation Rec(2003)22, this "means the early release of sentenced prisoners under individualised post-release conditions." It is considered a community measure. In Europe, persons conditionally released (known in common law jurisdictions as *parolees*) and placed under the supervision of probation agencies are considered as probationers.

Correctional population: The sum of the prison population and the probation population in a given jurisdiction.

Correctional population rate: The number of persons under the supervision of correctional services (both in prison and on probation) per 100,000 inhabitants.

Electronic monitoring: A form of supervision that uses electronic devices to monitor the location and/or movements of a person subject to a community sanction or measure.

Flow indicators: Data covering a specific period (in this case, one year), such as admissions, releases, or deaths.

Median: The middle value when all data are ranked in order. It is less sensitive to extreme values than the average.

Probation: According to the Council of Europe's Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)1, this "relates to the implementation in the community of sanctions and measures, defined by law and imposed on an offender. It includes a range of activities and interventions, which involve supervision, guidance and assistance aiming at the social inclusion of an offender, as well as at contributing to community safety."

Probation agency: The body designated by law to implement probation sanctions and measures. In some jurisdictions, this may be integrated within other criminal justice services.

Probationer: A person subject to probation supervision, including those on conditional release (parole).

Probation population rate: The number of probationers per 100,000 inhabitants.

Prison population rate: The number of inmates per 100,000 inhabitants.

Stock indicators: Data referring to a specific date (in this case, 31 January 2024).

Turnover ratio: The percentage of potential releases (stock at beginning of year plus admissions during the year) that actually occurred during that year.

List of abbreviations

CSM: Community Sanctions and Measures

N: Number (sample size)

NAP: Not applicable

PA: Probation Agency (or Prison Administration, depending on context)

SPACE: *Statistiques Pénales Annuelles du Conseil de l'Europe* (Council of Europe Annual Penal Statistics)

SPACE I: Council of Europe Annual Penal Statistics on Prison Populations

SPACE II: Council of Europe Annual Penal Statistics on Persons under the Supervision of Probation Agencies

About SPACE

The SPACE (*Statistiques Pénales Annuelles du Conseil de l'Europe*) project has been collecting data on prison and probation populations in Europe since 1983. The project is coordinated by the University of Lausanne (UNIL) and funded by the Council of Europe and UNIL. SPACE data are widely used by researchers, policy makers, and international organizations to monitor trends in criminal justice across Europe.

For more information and to access the full reports, visit <http://www.unil.ch/space>

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