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Prisons and Prisoners in Europe 2025: Key Findings of the SPACE I survey

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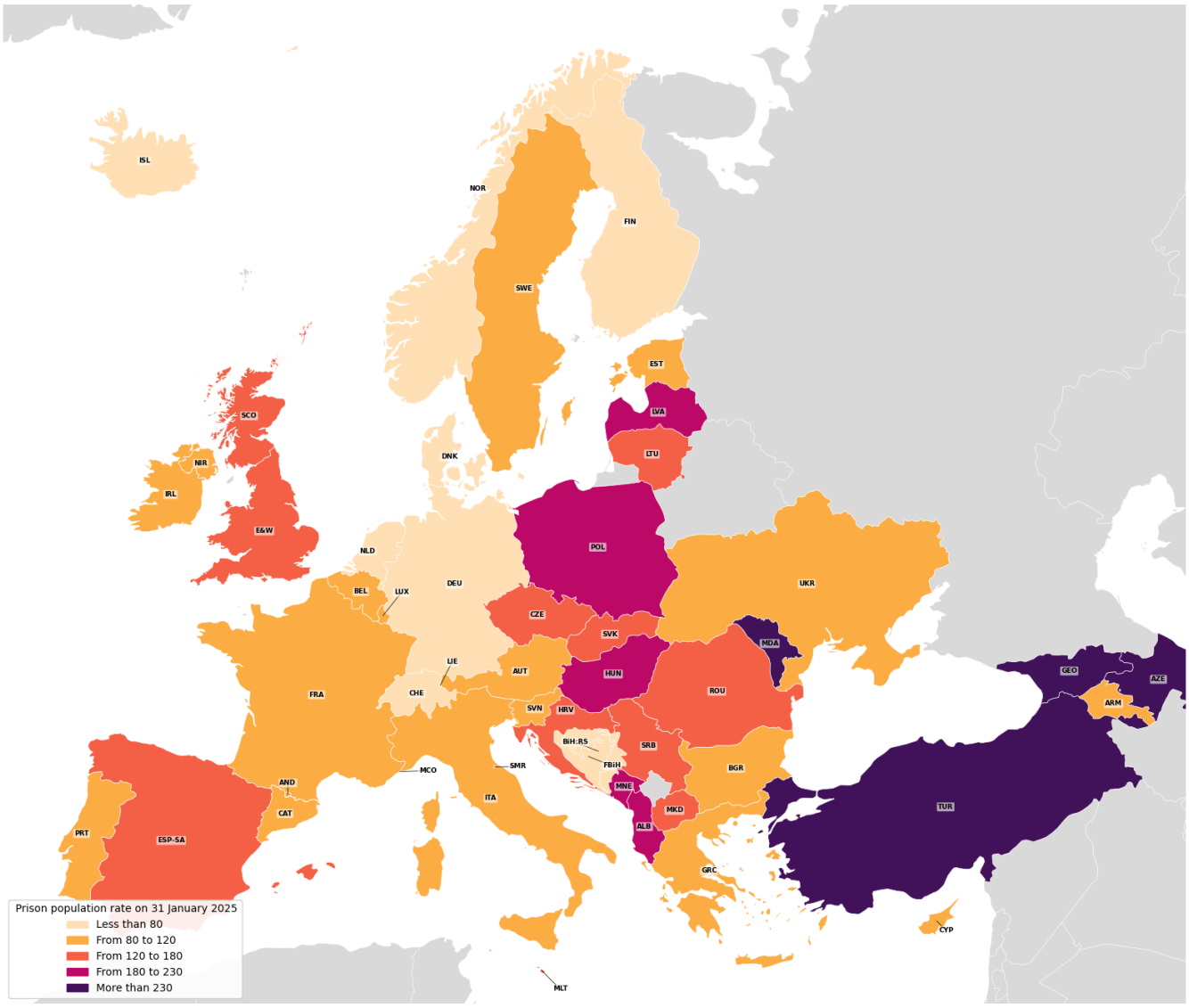

Map 1. Prison population rates (number of inmates per 100,000 inhabitants) on 31 January 2025 (N=51)

SPACE
Council of Europe
Annual Penal Statistics

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SPACE
Council of Europe
Annual Penal Statistics

Key Findings

- **Overall increase in prison population rate with regional variability**: While the average prison population rate in Europe stood at 127 per 100,000 in 2025, significant disparities persist across countries and regions.
- **Eastern Europe still leads in incarceration rates**: Countries such as Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Republic of Moldova and Georgia report the highest incarceration rates, reflecting more custodial penal cultures.
- **Converging low rates in the West and North**: Several countries— including Norway, the Netherlands, Finland, Germany, Denmark and Switzerland —maintain consistently low prison population rates despite differing legal and policy models.
- **Stock vs. flow disparities**: Countries with relatively stable prison population rates may still exhibit high prison turnover, illustrating the importance of flow indicators for a fuller picture.
- **Older and foreign inmate populations rising**: Both the proportion of prisoners aged 65+ and the presence of foreign nationals continue to increase, though the latter trend is primarily driven by Eastern European countries where shares remain low in absolute terms. Together, these shifts pose operational and policy challenges.
- **The European immigration paradox**: The same freedom of movement that drives European integration also generates structural challenges for prison systems. Western European countries, which serve as both destinations and transit points for diverse categories of foreign nationals—from EU workers to undocumented migrants and transnational offenders—bear disproportionate penal consequences of mobility, even as that mobility fuels economic growth and cross-cultural exchange.
- **Violent crimes and public safety**: The proportion of prisoners incarcerated for violent offences remained relatively stable at approximately one-third of sentenced inmates on 31 January 2025.
- **Drug offences and theft as leading causes of incarceration**: Meanwhile, drug-related offences continued to be the most common principal offence in Europe (17.3%), followed by theft (12.1%). While this trend may reflect the severity of trafficking and organized criminal activity, it also raises questions regarding the appropriateness of imprisonment for certain non-violent drug-related behaviours.
- **Long sentences correlate with high incarceration rates**: Countries with elevated prison population rates often report a long average length of imprisonment. This pattern suggests that beyond crime rates or admission flows, sentencing practices—particularly the length of custodial sanctions—play a central role in shaping prison populations over time.

1. Introduction

1.1. About SPACE I and the 2025 survey

The SPACE (***S**tatistiques **P**énales **A**nnuelles du **C**onseil de l'**E**urope*) surveys provide annual data on prison and probation populations in the member states of the Council of Europe. Conducted since 1983, they offer a comparative overview of key indicators related to imprisonment as well as sanctions and community measures across Europe.

This document summarizes key findings from the 2025 Council of Europe Annual Penal Statistics on Prison Populations, better known as SPACE I. For the second consecutive year, we have **achieved a 100% participation rate as all 51 prison administrations (PAs) across the 46 Council of Europe member states responded to the questionnaire**. Some countries have multiple prison administrations—for example, Spain has separate administrations for the State and Catalonia, and the United Kingdom maintains separate systems for England & Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland— which explains the difference in the number of countries and PAs.

The 2025 survey provides comprehensive data on prison populations as of **31 January 2025** (**stock indicators**) and prison movements **throughout 2024** (**flow indicators**), enabling both snapshot and longitudinal analyses of European prison systems.

1.2. Data coverage and limitations

While all prison administrations participated, not all responded to every question in the questionnaire. Additionally, not all administrations have consistently participated in previous years. Consequently, the number of prison administrations included in each analysis varies and is indicated as (N=XX) in figure titles[1]. For example, while 51 PAs provided basic prison population data, only 41 provided the average age of inmates . This variation affects the calculation of European averages and medians for different indicators.

Several countries' prison data exclude territories not under government control: Cyprus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine report only on territories under their control. Population figures used to calculate rates per 100,000 inhabitants may not fully account for these territorial exclusions, potentially affecting the accuracy of calculated rates.

The Russian Federation's exclusion from the Council of Europe on 16 March 2022 significantly impacts this report's analyses. Prior to exclusion, Russia accounted for approximately 478,714 inmates (34% of Europe's total prison population in 2021) and about 14% of total budget expended by European prison administrations in 2020. To maintain consistency in trend analyses, we have retroactively excluded Russian data from all longitudinal comparisons, recalculating European averages and medians for previous years. This ensures that trends reflect actual changes rather than the statistical effect of Russia's removal from the dataset.

1.3 Methodological considerations

Population-based rates: These key findings use rates per 100,000 inhabitants rather than absolute numbers to enable meaningful comparisons between countries of different sizes. These rates are influenced by both prison population changes and demographic shifts.

Demographic context: European population trends vary significantly by region. According to the Wittgenstein Centre for Demography and Global Human Capital, from 2000 to 2020, Western, Southern, and Northern Europe generally experience population growth due to immigration, while Central, South-Eastern, and Eastern Europe face population decline due to emigration and natural decrease. These demographic changes affect prison population rates even when absolute inmate numbers remain stable[2].

Statistical measures: The report uses both:

- **Average (arithmetic mean)**: The sum of all values divided by the number of PAs
- **Median**: The middle value when all PAs are ranked, less sensitive to extreme values (outliers) than the average

Data presentation:

- In principle, rates and percentages are rounded to whole numbers when equal to or greater than 10. A decimal place is added only when it meaningfully highlights a difference or comparison between values.
- Values below 10 are presented with one decimal place
- Original unrounded data are available in Tables 3 and 4 (Section 7)

[1] The numerical discrepancy between the number of PAs indicated in the title of each figure and the actual number of bars shown arises from the inclusion of additional bars representing the European average, the median, and the overall totals for Spain and Bosnia and Herzegovina. For Spain, three bars are included: one for the State Prison Administration (PA), one for the Catalonian PA, and one for the national total. However, the Spanish total is excluded from the calculation of the European average and median to avoid double counting. Similarly, Bosnia and Herzegovina is represented by four bars: one each for the PAs of the Republika Srpska and the Federation, one for the State-level PA, and one for the national total. The Bosnian total is likewise excluded from the computation of the average and median for the same reason. Furthermore, the State-level prison administration in Bosnia only accounts for inmates convicted of specific crimes, making its data not directly comparable with those of other PAs. These additional bars are visually distinguished: average and median values are shown in grey, while the Spanish and Bosnian totals are rendered in a more subdued colour. For example, although Figure 1 displays 53 bars, the "N" value refers specifically to the 51 unique PAs included in the comparative analysis.

[2] Zeman, K. & Sobotka, T. (2020). Contribution of migration and natural population change to long-term population growth in Europe 2020-2040. In *European Demographic data sheet 2020*. Wittgenstein Centre for Demography and Global Human Capital. https://eds2020.populationeurope.org/en/

- Interpretations are presented as indented bullet points to distinguish them from purely descriptive or statistical content
- **Focus is on countries with populations exceeding 1,000,000 when highlighting** significant deviations

1.4 How to read these key findings

Key terms used in this report:

- **PA**: Prison Administration
- **Stock indicators**: Data from a specific date (31 January 2025)
- **Flow indicators**: Data covering a full year (2024)
- **N**: Number of PAs included in each analysis
- **Average (arithmetic mean)**: The sum of all values divided by the number of PAs.
- **Median**: The middle value when all PAs are ranked, less sensitive to extreme values (outliers) than the average
- **Pre-trial detainees**: Inmates not serving a final sentence (also called remand prisoners)

Report structure:

- **Section 2**: Current situation - stock indicators as of 31 January 2025
- **Section 3**: Prison movements - flow indicators for 2024
- **Section 4**: Long-term trends from 2005 to 2025
- **Section 5**: Country-by-country overview of main indicators
- **Section 6**: Year-on-year changes in key indicators
- **Section 7**: Detailed statistical tables
- **Section 8**: Comprehensive methodology

For quick reference:

- Executive Summary provides key findings at a glance
- Figures include visual representations of all major indicators
- Country-specific data can be found in Tables 3 and 4
- Methodological details and limitations are explained in Section 8

Understanding the data:

- When comparing figures, always check the N value to understand coverage
- Consider both average and median values, as they may tell different stories
- Remember that rates account for population size, making cross-country comparisons more meaningful
- Bullet points [•] indicate interpretative comments rather than pure data description

This introduction provides the foundation for understanding the comprehensive analyses that follow. Readers are encouraged to consult the Methodology section (Section 8) for detailed explanations of calculation methods and data limitations.

2. Stock indicators: Prisons and prisoners on 31 January 2025

2.1 Prison population overview (Figure 1)

As of **31 January 2025**, a total of **1,107,921 individuals** were held in custody across the **51 prison administrations (PAs) of the 46 Council of Europe member states**. Adjusted for population size, the **average** prison population rate in Europe **was 127 inmates per 100,000 inhabitants**, while the **median** rate stood lower, at **110 per 100,000**.

This discrepancy reflects a positively skewed distribution in which a handful of countries with particularly high incarceration rates elevate the average above the typical experience of most member states. Indeed, approximately two-thirds of the prison administrations reported incarceration rates below the European average. This pattern confirms the utility of the median as a more robust indicator of central tendency for international comparisons, especially when national variations are large and unevenly distributed.

Regional patterns

Incarceration rates remain deeply heterogeneous across Europe, reflecting distinct regional penal philosophies, legal traditions, and crime control approaches. The highest prison population rates continue to be concentrated in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, where systems tend to favour custodial sanctions. Türkiye, with 458 inmates per 100,000 inhabitants, leads the region, followed closely by Azerbaijan (271), Republic of Moldova (245) and Georgia (232).

In contrast, Western and Northern European countries consistently maintain lower incarceration levels. Norway (54), the Netherlands (55), and Finland (58) present very low rates, with Germany (69), Denmark (70) and Switzerland (77) also well below the European average.

- Since the 1980s, Scandinavian countries have often been praised for their restrained use of imprisonment, typically attributed to their welfare-based criminal justice models. However, other countries—such as Germany, the Netherlands, and Switzerland—have also achieved consistently low incarceration rates despite operating under different legal frameworks and facing distinct socio-political conditions, including varied migration dynamics. These figures suggest that low imprisonment rates are attainable through a variety of institutional models, not exclusively those associated with Nordic traditions. Whether rooted in welfare approaches, legalist systems, or administrative efficiency, diverse paths can lead to similarly moderate use of custodial sanctions across Europe.

Deviations from regional patterns

Yet, the regional logic is not absolute. Several countries depart from their geographical patterns. For instance, Poland, with 189 inmates per 100,000, stands out in Central Europe, far above its regional peers. Similarly, Serbia (174) reports an elevated rate compared to neighbouring Balkan states. Conversely, Armenia (90) has one of the lowest rates in the Caucasus—a notable shift linked to criminal justice reforms following the 2018 Velvet Revolution and a general amnesty. Slovenia (85) also reports a relatively low incarceration rate within the Balkans, though this masks a rising trend in recent years.

Internal variation within countries is also visible where multiple prison administrations coexist. Spain's State Administration reports an incarceration rate of 124 per 100,000, while Catalonia, which manages its own prison system, reports a lower figure of 107. In the United Kingdom, England & Wales (141) and Scotland (148) both display considerably higher incarceration rates than Northern Ireland (99)—a level more consistent with that of the neighbouring Republic of Ireland (94).

Interpretation and caution

These disparities underscore that incarceration rates are shaped by a complex interplay of legal, institutional, socio-economic, and political factors. Legislative policies (such as the use of pre-trial detention, sentence lengths, and availability of alternatives), law enforcement practices, public attitudes toward crime, and socio-demographic dynamics all contribute to the observed patterns. Consequently, caution is warranted when interpreting country rankings: high or low incarceration rates may reflect structural conditions rather than simple differences in crime levels.

While SPACE I provides valuable comparative data, it is not designed to identify causal explanations (that is to say that SPACE I is not designed to explain **why** incarceration rates differ). Interpretations should be made carefully, acknowledging the multi-causal nature of imprisonment and the limits of cross-national comparisons. Readers are encouraged to avoid over-simplified explanations, as country rankings often reflect a blend of structural, historical, and policy-specific factors. In particular, they are encouraged to supplement these findings with national-level research that can explore the contextual factors behind divergent incarceration patterns across Europe.

2.2. Characteristics of inmates (detainees and sentenced Prisoners) in European penal institutions

2.2.1 Age and imprisonment

Age distribution overview (Figures 2.1 to 2.5)

On **31 January 2025**, the **average age** of inmates in European prisons was **39 years**, based on data provided by 41 prison administrations (PAs). This average, however, conceals important variation across countries.

Figure 1. Prison population rates (inmates per 100,000 inhabitants) on 31 January 2025 (N=51 PA)

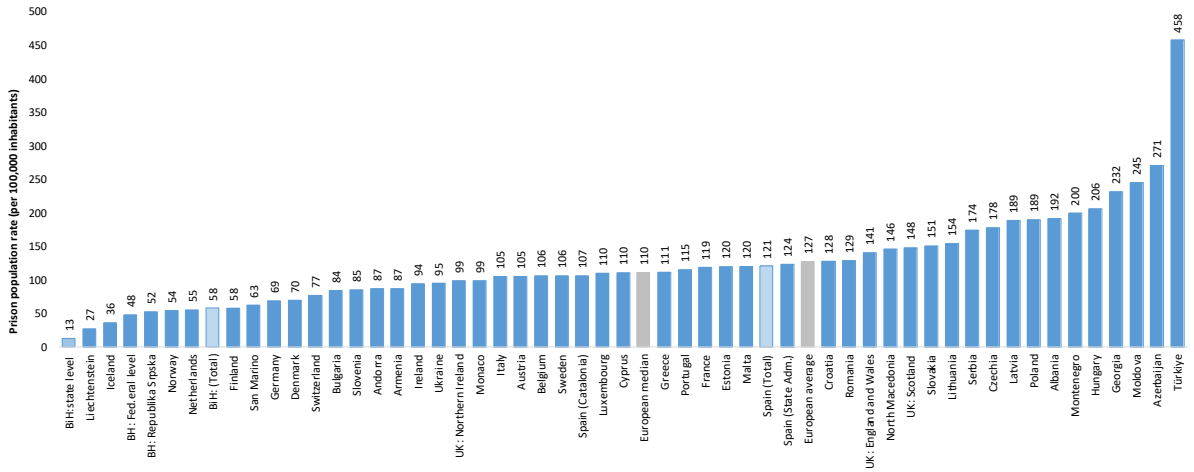


Figure 2.1. Average age of inmates on 31 January 2025 (N=41 PA)

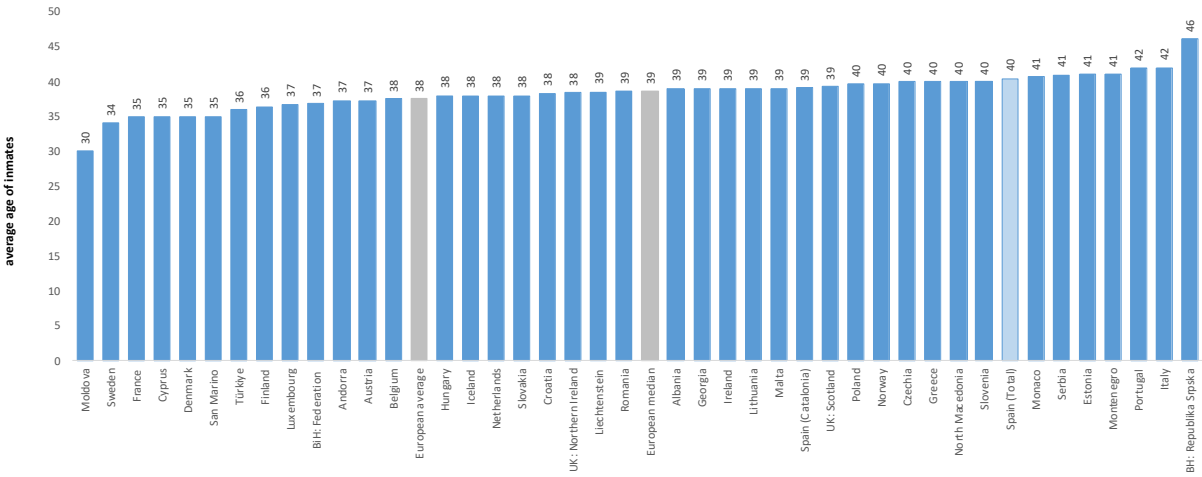
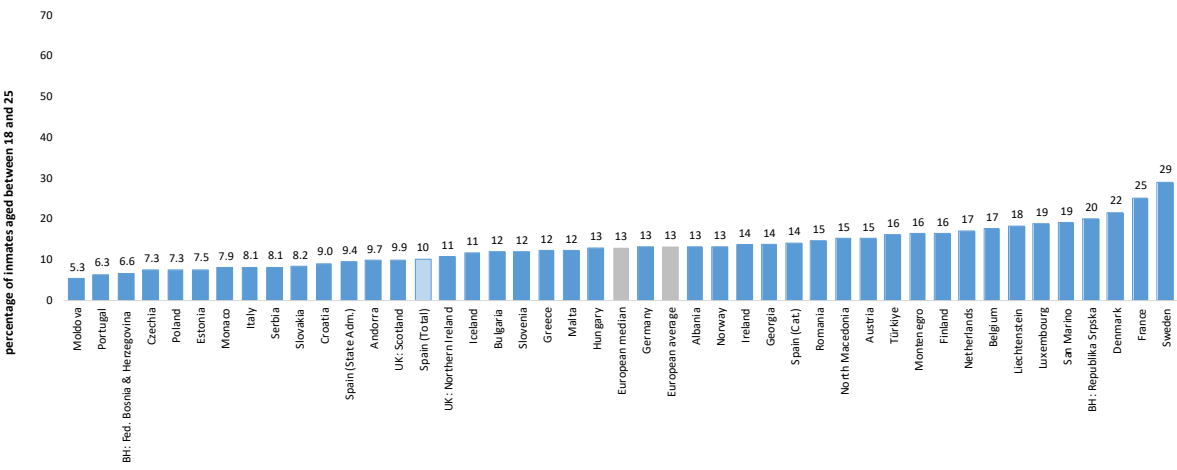


Figure 2.2. Percentage of inmates aged between 18 and 25 in the prison population on 31 January 2025 (N=42 PA)



The **age distribution** of the prison population shows that inmates aged **26 to 49** constitute the majority, accounting for **68%** of the total. Inmates aged 50 to 64 make up 15%, while those aged 18 to 25 represent 13%, and approximately 3% are aged 65 or older.

Among PAs of jurisdiction with more than one million inhabitants, the youngest average prison populations were found in Republic of Moldova (30 years), Sweden (34), France, Cyprus and Denmark (35). On the other end of the spectrum, Italy and Portugal reported the oldest average age (42), followed by Montenegro, Estonia and Serbia at 41 years old of average.

Understanding the age patterns

The fact that the average prisoner is 39 years old may seem inconsistent with criminological evidence showing that **criminal behaviour peaks in late adolescence and early adulthood**. Self-reported delinquency surveys suggest that the highest incidence of deviant behaviour occurs at ages 16–17, while violent crimes tend to peak in the early twenties. This pattern is widely known as the age-crime curve.[3]

The **prison population**, however, reflects **not the age of offending, but the age of incarceration**. Several factors explain this discrepancy. First, imprisonment is typically reserved for more serious offences, which usually involve longer court proceedings and delayed sentences. Second, long prison terms mean that inmates grow older while serving time. In addition, certain categories of offenders—such as white-collar criminals, leaders of organized crime networks, and drug traffickers—tend to be older than the general offender population. Recidivists also contribute to the aging of prison populations, accumulating across multiple custodial episodes over time.

The challenge of an aging prison population

As of 2025, **individuals aged 50 and over account for approximately 18% of the total prison population**—a proportion that has remained stable since 2020.[4] However, this apparent stability conceals important variations across countries and over time. In some jurisdictions, the age structure may have been temporarily altered by releases during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly for health-related or humanitarian reasons that disproportionately affected older inmates.

In contrast, the subgroup of **those aged 65 and over has increased from 2.5% in January 2020 to 2.9% in January 2025**. This 16% rise over just four years signals a growing presence of elderly individuals behind bars. However, it is worth noting that in January 2024, this proportion stood at 3.1%, suggesting that the observed change may reflect normal variation. The underlying causes are multifaceted. Life expectancy has risen significantly in Europe since the 1980s[5], and longitudinal data from the SPACE series show that average sentence lengths have also increased in many countries since that same decade[6]. As a result, more prisoners are reaching old age while still incarcerated.

Some countries already report comparatively high proportions of inmates aged 65 or older. Croatia stands out with 10.8%, followed by Serbia (7.2%), Slovenia (5.7%), and Bulgaria (5.2%). These countries do not fully overlap with those reporting the highest proportions of inmates aged 50 to 64—such as Slovakia (28%), Italy (24%), North Macedonia (22%), and Portugal (21%)—suggesting that different dynamics are shaping the two age groups. A plausible explanation is that the share of inmates aged 50–64 is generally determined by the overall age structure of the prison population and the average length of sentences. In contrast, the 65+ group may be more influenced by the presence of specific offender profiles, such as individuals serving life or indeterminate sentences, or those convicted of serious or organized crimes whose incarceration extends well into old age.

Although the proportion of elderly inmates remains modest, the implications for prison management are substantial. Older prisoners often present complex health needs, including chronic illnesses, cognitive decline,

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[3] Rocque, M., Posick, C., & Hoyle, J. (2016). Age and crime. *In* Jennings, W. G. (Ed.) *The encyclopaedia of crime and punishment*. John Wiley & Sons.

[4] Aebi, M. F. & Tiago, M. M. (2021). *Prisons and Prisoners in Europe 2020: Key Findings of the SPACE I report*. Series UNILCRIM 2021/1. Council of Europe and University of Lausanne.

[5] For instance, in round numbers, life expectancy in Czechia rose from 71 years in 1983 to 78 in 2021, in France and Italy from 75 years in 1983 to 83 in 2021, in Lithuania from 71 to 74 years, in Poland from 71 to 77 years, in Spain from 76 to 83, in Sweden from 77 to 83 and in the UK from 74 to 81 years (see https://ourworldindata.org/life-expectancy).

[6] Aebi, M. F., Linde, A., & Delgrande, N. (2015). Is There a Relationship Between Imprisonment and Crime in Western Europe? *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research*, *21*(3), 425-446.

Figure 2.3. Percentage of inmates aged between 26 and 49 in the prison population on 31 January 2025 (N=40 PA)

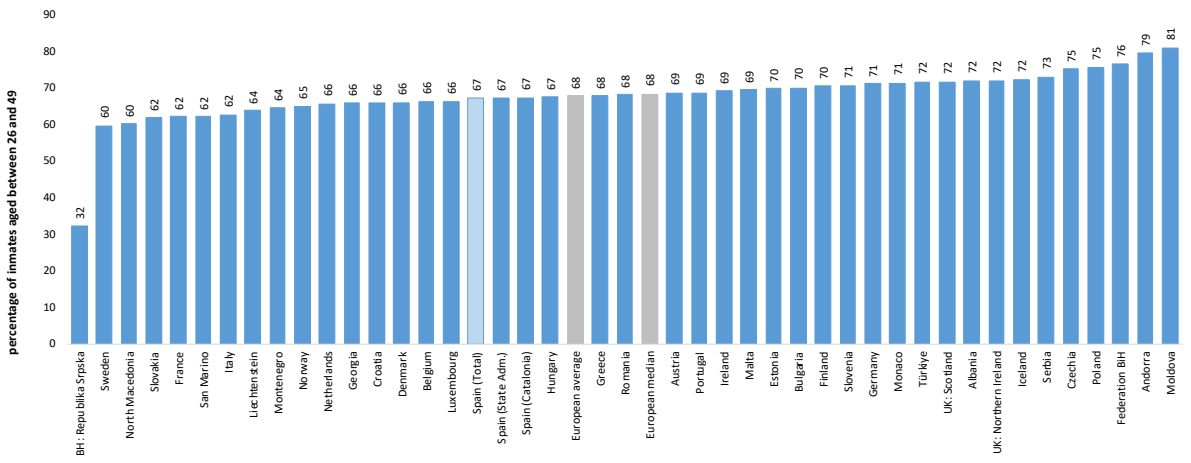


Figure 2.4. Percentage of inmates aged between 50 and 64 in the prison population on 31 January 2025 (N=43 PA)

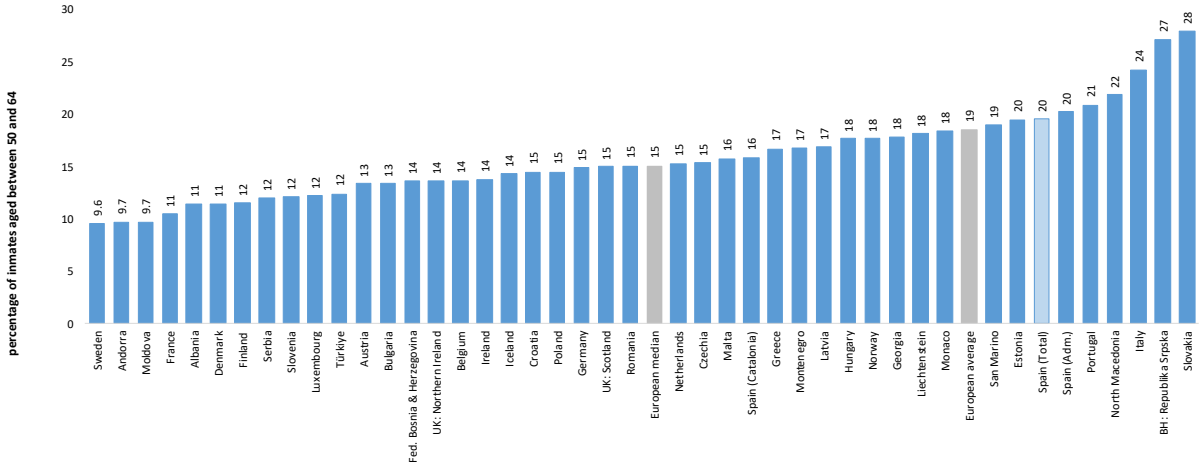
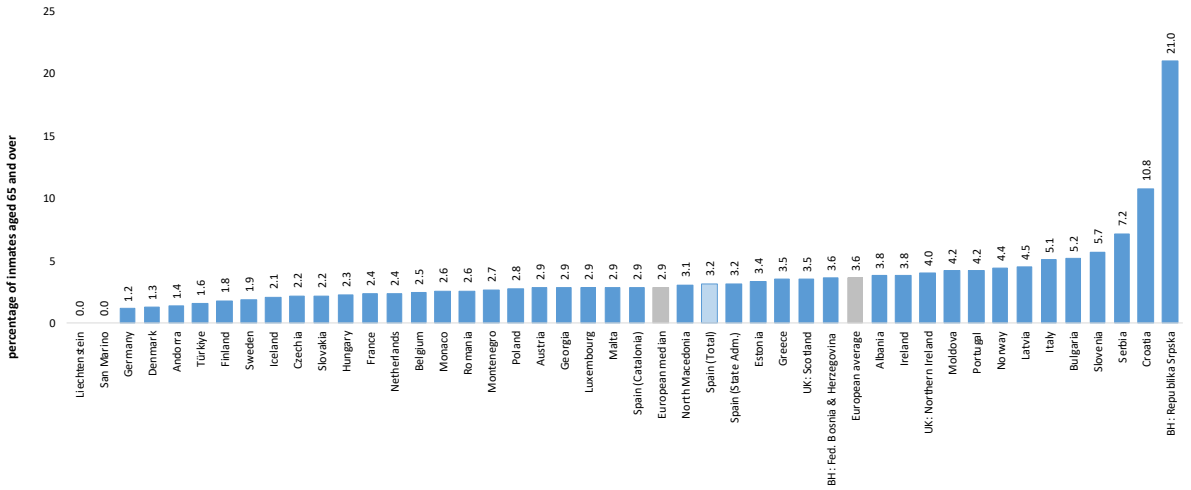


Figure 2.5. Percentage of inmates aged 65 or over in the prison population on 31 January 2025 (N=44)



and reduced mobility. Their presence raises operational challenges related to accessibility, staffing, and care standards, as well as ethical and legal questions about the continued detention of individuals who may no longer pose a significant threat to public safety. The growing number of elderly inmates is already placing pressure on prison infrastructure and healthcare budgets—a trend likely to intensify in the coming years.

To monitor this evolution, SPACE I began collecting disaggregated age data in 2020, with expanded age categories introduced in 2024. While this more detailed data now allows for a clearer picture of age-related dynamics, a robust longitudinal analysis will require several more years of consistent collection.

2.2.2. Gender and imprisonment

Gender distribution overview (Figure 3)

European prisons remain **overwhelmingly male-dominated**. On average, **women account for only 5.8%** of the total prison population, with a median of 5.4% (Figure 3). Although the average is slightly higher than in previous years, it appears to be inflated by outliers, primarily among smaller and thus more volatile prison administrations. Notably, the five prison administrations with the highest proportions of women inmates — all with populations below one million (Andorra, Iceland, Monaco, San Marino, and Liechtenstein) — report shares exceeding 9%. These figures are nonetheless remarkably consistent across the continent, with only modest variation between countries.

Among **countries with populations over one million**, the lowest shares of women prisoners were observed in Albania (1.6%) and Armenia (2.6%), followed by Azerbaijan (3.1%). In contrast, the highest proportions were found in Hungary (8.8%), Czechia (8.6%), and Sweden (7.9%).

However, for countries with populations over one million, the increase is not merely a statistical artefact: **the median** share of female inmates — which is unaffected by outlier values — **rose from 4.8% to 5.2% between January 2024 and January 2025**, an 8.9% increase observed across several regions of Europe (see Table 2). This marks a departure from the stability recorded in previous years, when the median had remained close to 5% or even declined slightly. Whether this shift reflects changes in sentencing practices, offence patterns, or the use of community-based alternatives for women remains an open question deserving further investigation.

This pronounced gender imbalance aligns with global trends. Worldwide, men account for approximately 93% of all prisoners, reflecting broad gender differences in both criminal behaviour and justice system outcomes.[7]

Understanding gender disparities in imprisonment

- The gender gap in incarceration rates reflects a complex interplay of behavioural, biological, social, and systemic factors. Empirical evidence indicates that men are considerably more likely to engage in violent behaviours, a primary category of offences resulting in imprisonment in Europe. This observation can be partially attributed to societal expectations and gender roles, which play a significant role in shaping the types of crimes men and women commonly commit and how they are perceived and treated within the criminal justice system. It is also a consequence of neurobiological factors such as the earlier development of the prefrontal cortex in women—approximately two years ahead of men—which plays a crucial role in regulating violent impulses.[8] This relation exemplifies the intricate interplay between biological and environmental factors in shaping human behaviour.

- Research also reveals gender disparities in sentencing, with women generally receiving more lenient sentences than men for similar offences.[9] One example of this is the courts' consideration of women's primary caregiver status for their children, which often results in the imposition of community-based

[7] UNODC (2024). Nearly twelve million people imprisoned globally, nearly one-third unsentenced, with prisons overcrowded in half of all countries. *Data matters*, *1*. Available at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/statistics/DataMatters1_prison.pdf.

[8] Blakemore, S.-J. (2018). *Inventing Ourselves: The Secret Life of the Teenage Brain*. Doubleday.

[9] Bontrager, S., Barrick, K., & Stupi, E. (2013). Gender and sentencing: A meta-analysis of contemporary research. *The Journal of Gender, Race & Justice*, *16(2)*, 349-372. Readers must bear in mind that this meta-analysis is based only on research conducted in the United States and that robust empirical research on this topic is rare in Europe. A noteworthy exception is Páez-Mérida, A. (2024). Estado de la cuestión del estudio de la influencia del género en la toma de decisiones judiciales. *Revista Española De Investigación Criminológica*, *19*(1), 1–25.

Figure 3. Percentage of women inmates in the prison population on 31 January 2025 (N=50 PA)

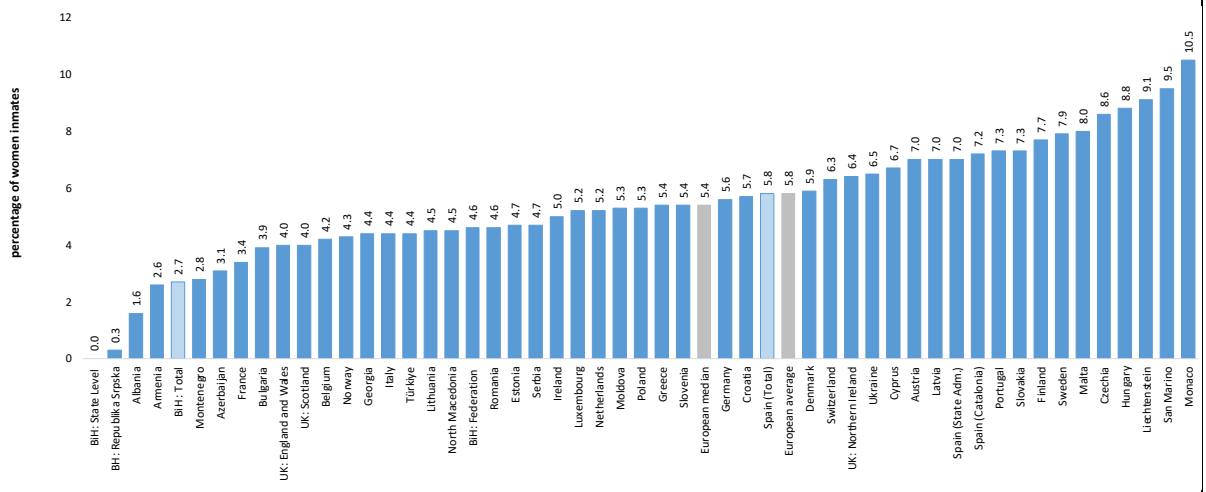


Figure 4.1. Percentage of foreign inmates in the prison population on 31 January 2025 (N=49 PA)

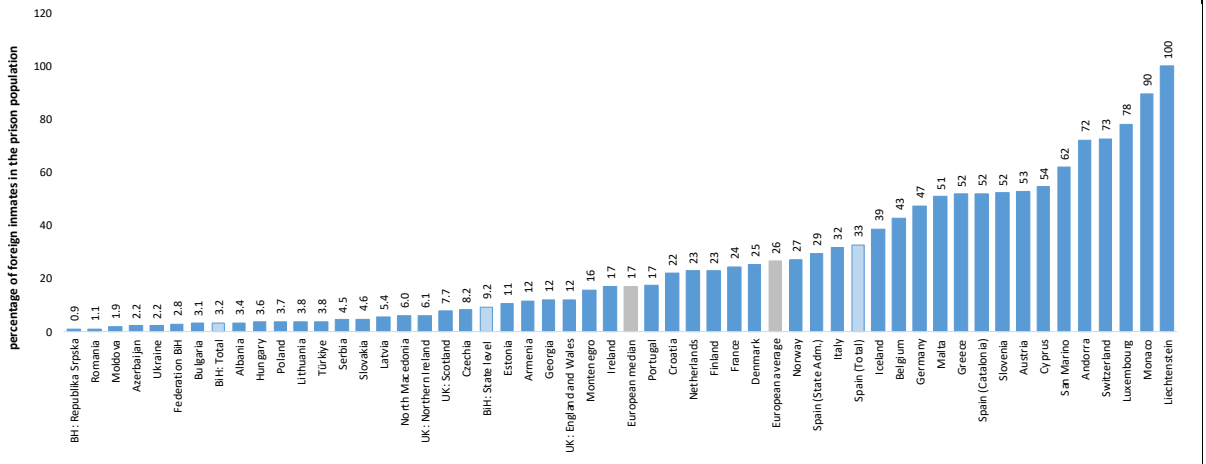
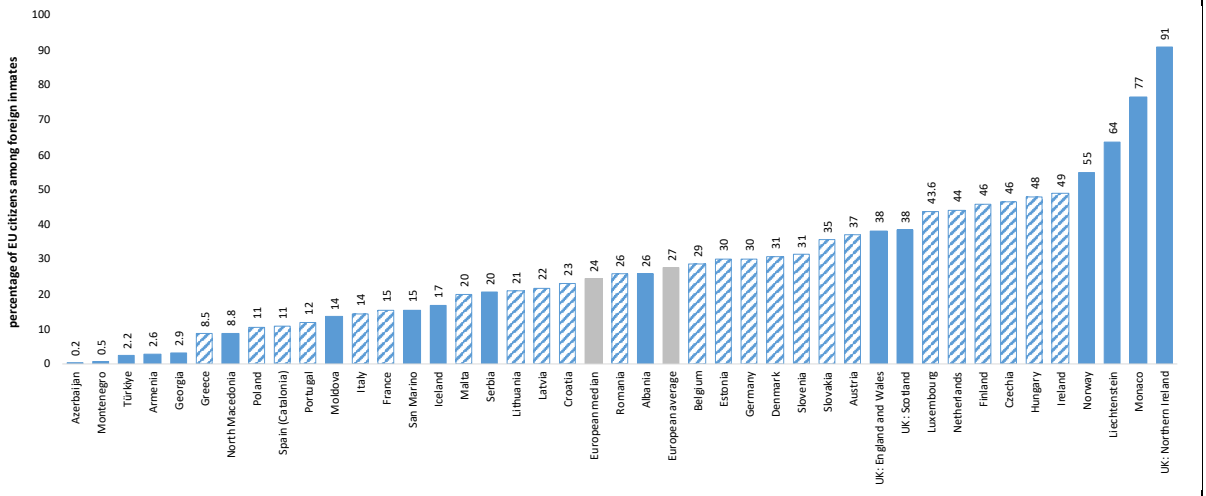


Figure 4.2. Percentage of EU citizens among foreign inmates on 31 January 2025 (N=40 PA, of which 24 EU)



Note to Figure 4.2: PAs of EU countries are presented in blue stripes.

sanctions and measures rather than incarceration. Data suggests that this phenomenon could be taking place in Europe, where the percentage of women serving community-based sanctions and measures is usually more than twice the percentage of those incarcerated. For example, according to the SPACE II report, as of 31 January 2025, women represented on average 11.9% of probationers in Europe, but only 5.4% of the inmates.[10]

2.2.3. Citizenship and imprisonment

Foreign nationals: An uneven European reality (Figure 4.1)

Foreign nationals represent a **substantial share of the prison population** across Europe, but their presence is distributed **highly unevenly**. On **average**, **26% of inmates** held in European prisons are non-citizens, but the **median is only 17%**. This large gap underscores a skewed distribution, shaped by migration flows, legal frameworks, and geopolitical geography (Figure 4.1).

At one end of the spectrum, PAs like Switzerland (73%), Austria (53%), and Slovenia, Catalonia and Greece (all around 52%) report extremely high proportions of foreign inmates. In contrast, several PAs in Eastern Europe—such as Romania (1.1%), Republic of Moldova (1.9%), and Azerbaijan (2.2%)—register some of the lowest shares of foreign prisoners. This geographic pattern broadly mirrors European demographic shifts since the early 2000s: Western European countries have seen immigration-fuelled population growth, while Eastern European nations often face population decline through emigration.

The median proportion of foreign inmates rose from 9.4% in January 2024 to 11.1% in January 2025 **among the 40 PAs of more than 1 million inhabitants** that provided data for both years (see Table 2). However, this increase was largely driven by Eastern European countries where the share of foreign inmates remains very low in absolute terms, and where small changes in numbers can produce large percentage variations. A plausible contributing factor is the indirect impact of the war in Ukraine, which has generated significant displacement flows into neighbouring Eastern European countries, potentially increasing the number of foreign nationals entering their criminal justice systems. The situation in Western European countries, where foreign nationals represent a substantial share of the prison population, remained comparatively stable.

EU citizens among foreign inmates (Figure 4.2)

Data from Figure 4.2 show that **27% of foreign inmates hold citizenship of an EU country**. This partly reflects the mobility framework established by the European Union, where freedom of movement allows citizens to live and work across member states.

Legal residence: A data gap (Figure 4.3)

Despite its importance, information on the **legal residence status** of foreign prisoners is still scarce. Only **16 prison administrations** provided this information (Figure 4.3), showing that on average, **about one quarter** of foreign inmates are legally resident in the country where they are incarcerated, with the median situated well below, at 6.7%. The range spans from none to 100%, but in most countries this data remains **incomplete or entirely absent**, complicating both policy evaluation and human rights monitoring.

Inside the numbers: The European immigration paradox

- Many controversies surrounding citizenship and imprisonment stem from a conceptual confusion between the broad category of *foreigners* and the narrower one of *immigrants*. In the context of prison statistics, *foreigners* are defined as individuals who do not possess the citizenship of the country in which they are incarcerated. Within this group, some may be *immigrants*—that is, people who have moved to the country with the intention of establishing long-term residence, forming new communities, or joining existing ones. But this is only one subset. The category of foreign inmates also includes tourists, business travellers, temporary workers, undocumented migrants, asylum seekers, and individuals involved in transnational criminal activity.[11]

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[10] Aebi, M. F., Cid, I.P., & Cocco, E. (2025). *Probation and Prisons in Europe 2025: Key Findings of the SPACE reports*. Series UNILCRIM 2025/3. Council of Europe and University of Lausanne.

[11] Aebi, M. F. (2005). Immigration et délinquance: Le mythe du conflit des cultures. In Queloz, N. et al. (Eds.). *Délinquance des jeunes et justice des mineurs: Les défis des migrations et de la pluralité ethnique*. Staempfli & Bruylant. Aebi, M. F. (2016). Inmigración y delincuencia. In Aebi M. F. et al. (2016). *Aspectos esenciales de la Criminología actual* (pp. 64-100). Editorial UOC.

Figure 4.3. Percentage of inmates with legal status of residence among foreign inmates on 31 January 2025 (N=16 PA)

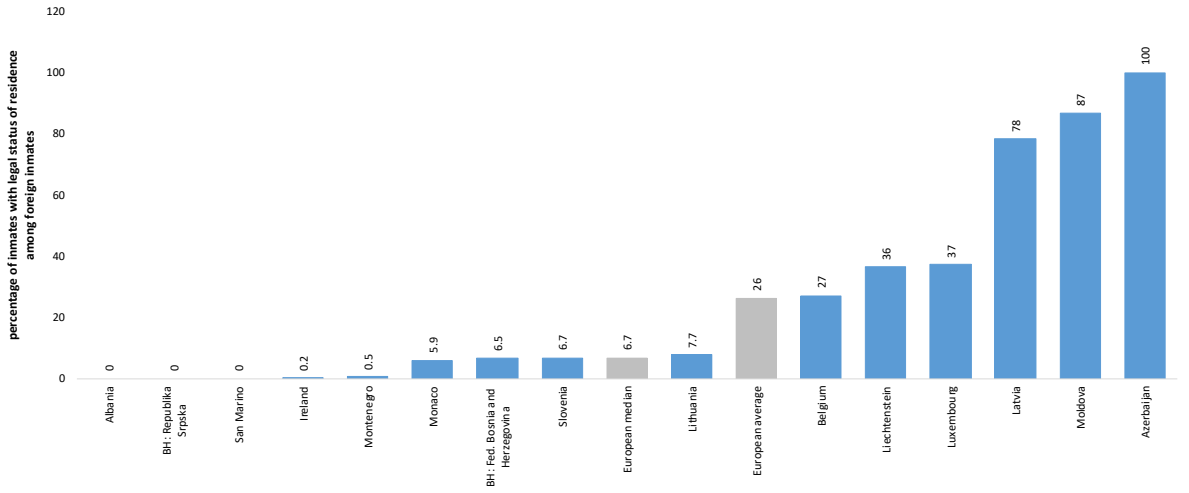


Figure 5. Percentage of inmates not serving a final sentence in the prison population on 31 January 2025 (N=50 PA)

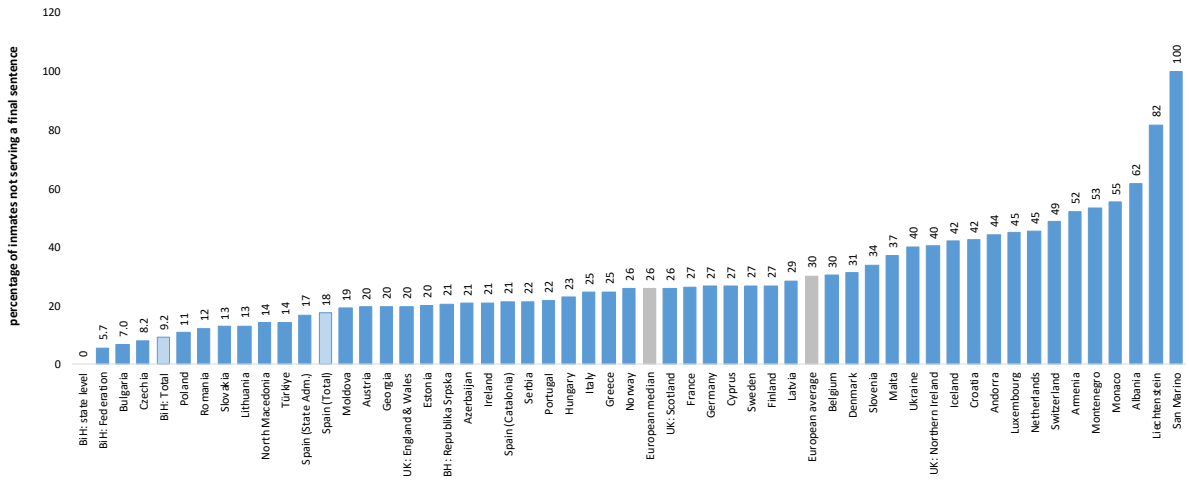
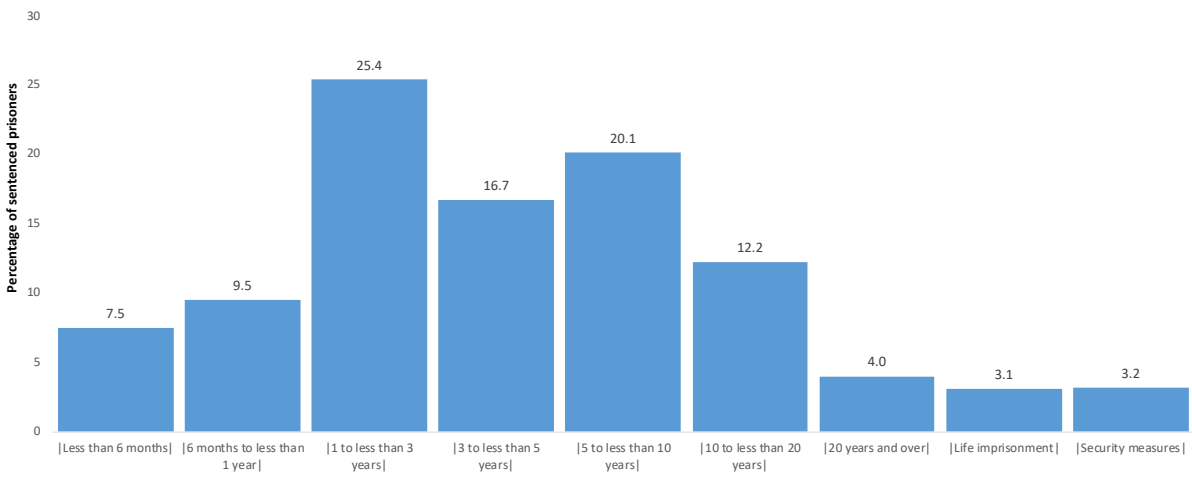


Figure 6. Breakdown of sentenced prisoners by sentence length on 31 January 2025, in percentages (N=43 PA)



Crime and criminal justice statistics—prison data included—typically do not distinguish among these subgroups. Instead, they register only the overarching category of *foreigners*. This statistical simplification risks distorting public debate. When commentators point to the "overrepresentation" of foreign nationals in Western European prisons, they often conflate the legal immigrant population with foreign nationals more broadly. This conflation may lead to simplistic—and sometimes demagogic—interpretations that fail to consider the diversity of legal statuses and life circumstances among non-citizen inmates.

To complicate matters, some European research continues to rely on theoretical models developed in the United States during the first half of the 20th century. These models were designed for a context of mass immigration by people who had settled under state-supported population policies. Such frameworks suggest that language barriers, unfamiliarity with the host country's laws, the absence of a local support network, and economic vulnerability all increase the likelihood of contact with the criminal justice system. Furthermore, discrimination and bias in policing and prosecution may lead to higher arrest and conviction rates for foreigners compared to citizens.

These factors are relevant to many foreign nationals in Europe, including citizens of the European Union (EU), who may relocate to other member states after fulfilling certain requirements, as well as third-country nationals who obtain residence permits. However, the situation becomes even more precarious for foreigners without a regular legal status. Undocumented individuals, asylum seekers awaiting a final decision, and those subject to deportation orders often face multiple obstacles in securing legal employment and housing. Their inability to build long-term plans increases their reliance on informal or high-risk activities—some legal, others not—that offer short-term survival. In countries where irregular entry or stay is criminalised, these individuals are at greater risk of detention, and their vulnerability makes them less likely to report crimes committed against them.

This leads to what we propose calling the **European immigration paradox**. On the one hand, the freedom of movement within the EU promotes integration, labour mobility, and cross-cultural exchange. On the other, it creates structural challenges for national prison systems, which must manage a highly mobile, legally diverse population. The same infrastructure that facilitates economic migration and intra-European cooperation can also be exploited by transnational criminal networks. In this context, Western European countries have become both destinations and transit points for a wide range of foreign nationals, bearing the brunt of both the integrative and disruptive aspects of mobility. This dual role complicates penal policy, prison management, and public perception alike.

2.2.4. Inmate's legal status of detention: Distinguishing between pre-trial detainees and sentenced prisoners

A significant share of inmates awaits trial (Figure 5)

Across Europe, a substantial proportion of inmates are held in **pre-trial detention**—meaning they have not yet received a final sentence. On average, **30%** of inmates were in this legal status as of 31 January 2025, while the median rate across reporting prison administrations was 26%. However, national rates vary widely, ranging from 5% to 58% of the prison population in countries with at least one million inhabitants (Figure 5). Adopting the Council of Europe's terminology, these inmates should be referred to as *detainees placed in remand on custody* (Committee of Ministers Recommendation Rec (2006)13), though in practice they are commonly referred to as *inmates in pre-trial detention*, *pre-trial detainees* or simply as *detainees*.

The lowest rates of pre-trial detention were recorded in Bulgaria (7%), followed by Czechia (8.2%), Poland (11%), Romania (12%), Slovakia and Lithuania (both 13%). On the opposite end of the spectrum, rates exceeded 45% in Albania (62%), Armenia (52%), Switzerland (49%) and the Netherlands (45%).

Absence of a regional pattern

Unlike other prison indicators—such as incarceration rates or share of foreign nationals—pre-trial detention does not follow a clear regional trend. Striking contrasts can be found even between neighbouring countries: Romania reports a relatively low pre-trial detention rate (12%), while Albania, geographically and historically close, reports the highest in Europe. Similarly, Austria's rate (20%) is less than half that of neighbouring Switzerland (49%). These divergences suggest that country-specific legal and institutional factors play a more decisive role than regional context in shaping pre-trial detention practices.

Interpreting the rates

- Criminologists tend to perceive high percentages of detainees on remand in custody as an indicator of potential inefficiencies within the legal system, frequently relating to slow court procedures, resource inadequacies, or even the reliance on pre-trial detention as a punitive rather than precautionary measure. However, these interpretations are generalisations, and the actual circumstances can be more nuanced and influenced by a multitude of country-specific factors. For instance, countries with a high proportion of foreign inmates, such as Switzerland, may find it necessary to keep those without a legal residence status in pre-trial detention due to the risk of absconding.

  Conversely, a low percentage of detainees in remand on custody is traditionally viewed as a potential indicator of an efficient legal system with prompt case processing, resulting in a reduced proportion of pre-trial detainees. It might also be reflective of policies and practices favouring non-custodial measures for individuals awaiting trial.

Methodology: Caution in cross-national comparison

It is necessary to underline a key methodological limitation when comparing pre-trial detention rates internationally: countries differ in how they classify prisoners. Some jurisdictions reclassify detainees as "sentenced" immediately after conviction, even during appeal periods, while others continue to categorize them as "pre-trial" until a final judgment is issued. These definitional differences significantly impact the data and require careful attention—Table 8 in the SPACE report provides country-specific notes on classification systems.

2.3. Characteristics of sentenced prisoners

Having distinguished between detainees and sentenced prisoners, we now focus on the latter to examine the length of sentences they are currently serving.

2.3.1 Sentence length distribution (Figure 6)

The structure of prison sentences across Europe reflects a complex mix of legal traditions, penal philosophies, and political choices. As shown in Figure 6, the **sentenced prison population** is not evenly distributed across sentence lengths, but rather concentrated around **three major clusters: short, medium, and long-term sentences**.

On average, about **17%** of sentenced prisoners are serving short sentences of **less than one year**. These include 9.5% serving less than six months, and 7.5% serving between six months and one year. A clear majority—approximately **62.2%**—fall within the medium-term category, spanning **1 to 10 years**: 25.4% serve 1–3 years, 16.7% serve 3–5 years, and 20.1% serve 5–10 years. Finally, **long sentences** of over 10 years account for **around 19.3%** of sentenced inmates, with 12.2% serving between 10 and 20 years, 4% serving 20 years or more, and 3.1% serving life sentences. An additional 3.2% are held under special security measures (although data coverage varies by country, so totals may not sum exactly to 100%).

The short sentence dilemma

The use of short sentences—especially those under a year—remains a contentious topic in European penal policy. While their overall share is relatively small, significant differences exist between countries. The Netherlands (30.5%) and Switzerland (29.1%) lead in their use, while countries such as Republic of Moldova, and Romania, Italy and Belgium report rates below 5%. The Nordic countries also display internal variation: Norway (21.4%), Finland (16.4%), Denmark (21.8%), and Sweden (12.7%).

- The proposal of abolishing short-term sentences has sparked debates among theoretical jurists and criminologists for contrasting reasons. Franz von Liszt (1851-1919) saw them as counterproductive for "occasional offenders" and insufficiently long for a proper rehabilitation of "reformable offenders."19F[12] Conversely, abolitionists since the 1970s view their elimination as a step towards dismantling an inherently unjust prison system.

  Empirical evidence from countries including Austria, Germany, Greece, and Portugal, which limited the use of short-term sentences in the 1970s and 1980s, especially those under six months, suggests a backlash

[12] Kempe, D. T. (1969). Franz von Liszt und die Kriminologie. In *Franz von Liszt zum Gedächtnis: zur 50. Wiederkehr seines Todestages am 21. Juni 1919* (pp. 260–280). De Gruyter.

effect. The initial reduction in prison population was short-lived as judges imposed harsher sentences, leading to an increase in the prison population.20F[13] This consequence seems to stem from judges feeling obliged to impose longer sentences, particularly when they perceive incarceration as necessary, such as in cases of repeat offenders. The media's role in advocating for harsher punishment can exert similar effects.

These findings suggest that, in the absence of a cultural shift towards rehabilitation and reintegration, abolishing short sentences entails the risk of leading to longer sentences. Whether a similar dynamic may be at play in countries such as Sweden and Slovenia—where incarceration rates have risen markedly since 2015, coinciding with shifts in sentencing policy—remains an open question deserving further investigation (see Section 4.3).

Long sentences and life imprisonment

At the higher end of the spectrum, **life imprisonment** accounts for **3.1%** of the sentenced prison population. Contrary to popular belief, life sentences in Europe do not equate to perpetual detention. **All countries provide mechanisms for review and possible release**, though parole eligibility periods vary widely.

- According to the latest factsheet on *life imprisonment* and the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR), the European Court of Human Rights deems compatible life imprisonment with the ECHR, as long as prisoners have both a chance of being released and a possibility for their sentences to be reviewed[14]. Therefore, in the countries reporting life sentences in Table 11 of SPACE I report, prisoners face a prescribed maximum sentence duration after which they can apply for parole or an equivalent release mechanism, such as a pardon, or a release on compassionate grounds or through executive clemency.

  For instance, in Switzerland, a life-sentenced offender is eligible for parole after 10 or 15 years, depending on circumstances. Similar provisions exist in Denmark (12 years), Germany (15 years), Sweden (10 years, but the sentence can be converted to a fixed sentence after 10 years), Italy (21 or 26 years), France (18 to 22 years), Spain (25 or 35 years), and Belgium (15, 19, or 23 years).

Security measures

A smaller group—**3.2% of prisoners**, in data from 11 Pas—are held under **security measures**, generally reserved for those deemed "dangerous offenders".

- Security measures aim to prevent future crime by incapacitating or treating offenders considered as a high risk to society (*dangerous offenders*), sometimes due to mental disorders. While these measures are generally indeterminate, legislation typically includes control mechanisms that may lead to eventual release. *Recommendation CM/Rec(2014)3* of the Committee of Ministers to Member States concerning dangerous offenders treats them under the denomination of Secure preventive detention and Preventive supervision.

  The application of security measures varies across countries. In Belgium, for example, inmates declared irresponsible by the court are treated in forensic psychiatric centres separate from the prison administration and are not included in the total inmate count. In contrast, the forensic detention facilities of Czechia fall under the prison administration, and individuals within them are included in the total inmate count. Portugal applies security measures to individuals found irresponsible, housing them in psychiatric institutions or hospitals that can be inside or outside prison facilities, but counting them in both cases as inmates under the responsibility of the prison administration.

A methodological note on security measures

Only 12 prison administrations provided figures on inmates held under security measures, while 13 others reported zero inmates in this category, and the remaining PAs indicated that such measures do not exist in their system or that such information is not available.

However, the true absence of these measures in the 13 systems reporting "zero" inmates remains uncertain. It is possible that in some cases, security measures exist in law but were not applied during the reference year—or that the reported "0" was used in place of a more appropriate response such as "not applicable" or "data not available". If these 13 systems are in fact countries where such measures are not legally foreseen, the actual

[13] Kuhn, A. (2000). *Detenus: Combien? Pourquoi? Que faire*? Haupt.
[14] https://rm.coe.int/thematic-factsheet-life-imprisonment-eng/1680ab3b93.

Figure 7. Breakdown of sentenced prisoners by principal offence on 31 January 2025, in percentages (N=40 PA)

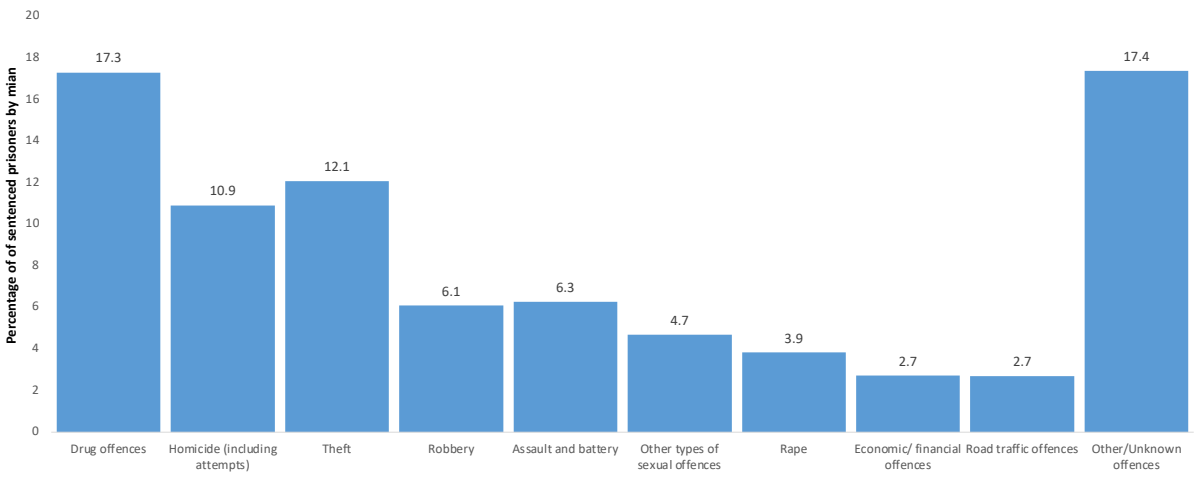
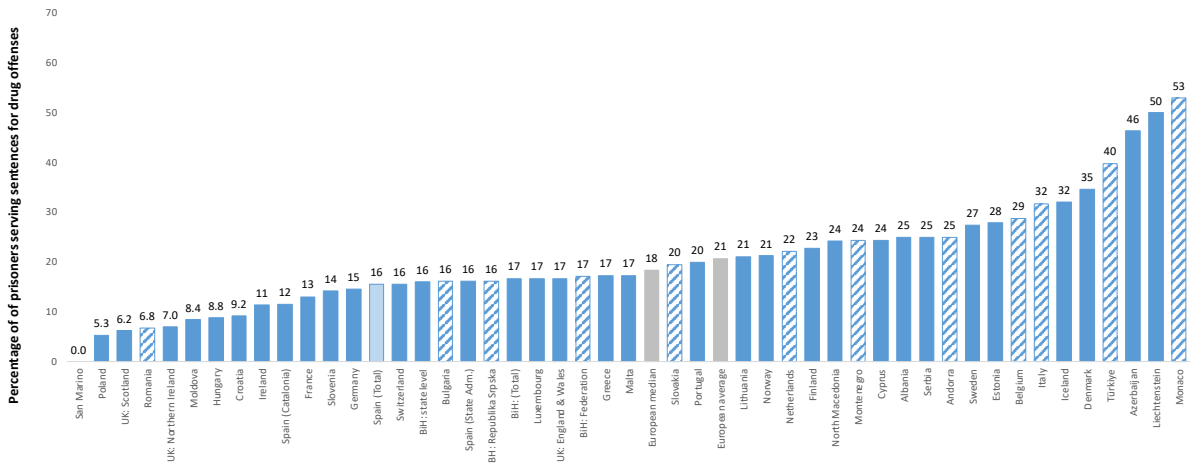
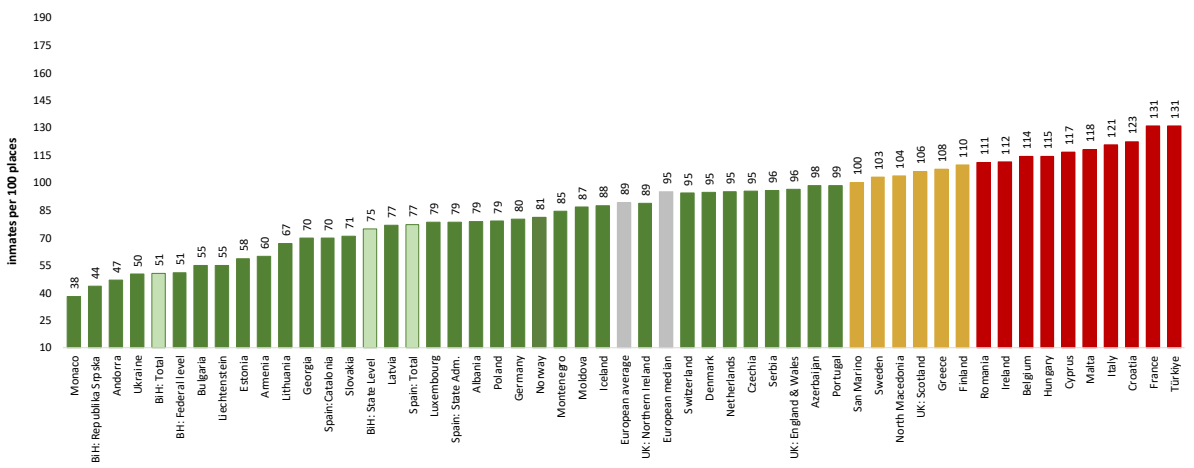


Figure 8. Percentage of sentenced prisoners serving sentences for drug offences on 31 January 2025 (N=45 PA)



Note to Figure 8: PAs that do not apply the principal offence rule are presented in blue stripes.

Figure 9. Prison density (number of inmates per 100 detention places) on 31 January 2025 (N=51 PA)



average percentage of inmates under security measures would increase significantly—from the current 3.2% to 3.8% among systems where such sanctions exist and are measured.

This clarification matters because security measures typically refer to indeterminate forms of detention for individuals classified as dangerous, and their prevalence and legal justification vary widely across Europe.

Several countries, including Belgium, Denmark, Italy, and Switzerland, implement both types of severe sanctions: indeterminate security measures and life imprisonment with the possibility of parole. These jurisdictions must therefore balance long-term risk management with compliance to human rights obligations, including those set by the European Court of Human Rights, which requires all life sentences to be reviewable and to offer a real prospect of release.

2.3.2 Distribution of sentenced prisoners by offence type (Figure 7)

The types of offences for which individuals are imprisoned vary widely across Europe, yet a few categories consistently dominate national prison populations. Based on the principal offence—that is, the most serious offence for which the person is sentenced—five categories emerge as the most common across the continent: **drug offences (17.3%), theft (12.1%), homicide including attempts (10.9%)**, sexual offences including rape (8.6%), robbery (6.1%) and assault and battery (6.3%). These are followed by road traffic offences (2.7%), economic or financial crimes (2.7%), and a collective 17.4% grouped under "other offences" (see Figure 7).

- The relatively low proportion of the "other offences" category may reflect several factors, including the lower frequency of certain crimes, the effectiveness of preventive or diversionary measures, and sentencing practices that prioritise non-custodial sanctions—such as fines or community service—for less severe infractions. It is also worth noting that some offences, particularly cyber-related crimes, remain difficult to detect, record, and prosecute. As a result, they may be underrepresented in prison statistics, even when a cyber element is involved in more traditional forms of criminal activity.

The prominence of drug offences (Figure 8)

Drug-related crimes represent the largest single category of imprisonment in Europe. Among countries that follow the principal offence rule, the average percentage of prisoners incarcerated for drug offences stands at **17.3%**. When including countries that report by **counting all offences**, this average rises to **20.7%** (Figure 8). These offences account for more than a quarter of inmates in some systems such as Türkiye (37%) and Belgium (29%).

Such figures must be interpreted in light of reporting methods (see below). Countries like Belgium and Türkiye, apply a "count-all-offences" rule, meaning they register every conviction rather than only the principal offence. This approach results in higher percentages of drug offences because individuals with multiple convictions—including drugs—are all included in the total. For example, the average number of offences per offender in Belgium is 2.4 and 1.4 in Türkiye.

- The challenge posed by drug use and misuse in Europe extends to all demographic segments and impacts millions of individuals, arguably making it a top priority for criminal policy. In December 2020, the Council of the European Union adopted a new EU Drugs Strategy for 2021-2025, structured around three pillars: drug supply reduction, drug demand reduction, and harm reduction:[15]. This strategy aligns closely with the "four pillars policy" (law enforcement, prevention, therapy, and harm reduction) introduced by Switzerland in 1991 and endorsed by almost 70% of the Swiss population in a 2008 referendum.3F[16] The resultant decline in drug-related crime and deaths by overdose could serve as a potential blueprint for policymakers in Europe and beyond.

Violent offences and the public safety rationale

When grouped together, **violent crimes account for roughly one-third (31.9%)** of the sentenced prison population: homicide (10.9%), robbery (6.1%), assault (6.3%), and sexual offences (8.6%).

- In democratic societies, the deprivation of liberty is generally justified when it protects others from serious harm or ensures justice in proportion to the offence. The fact that one in three inmates is serving a sentence

[15] https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14178-2020-INIT/en/pdf.
[16] https://www.bag.admin.ch/bag/en/home/strategie-und-politik/politische-auftraege-und-aktionsplaene/drogenpolitik.html.

for a violent crime suggests that, at least in principle, imprisonment is being applied in accordance with this rationale. However, this finding also raises important policy questions. If incarceration is primarily intended for the most dangerous offenders, then efforts to reduce prison populations might be more appropriately focused on non-violent offenders—individuals who may benefit more from alternative sanctions. Moreover, this pattern underscores the need for specialised interventions within prisons to address violent behaviour and reduce the risk of reoffending upon release.

A methodological note on the classification of offences

Criminology research uses one of two methods to determine the distribution of sentenced prisoners by offence: the principal offence rule or the count-all-offences rule. Under the principal offence rule, only the most severe crime is considered in instances where an individual is convicted of multiple offences. Typically, the severity of an offence is judged by the maximum penalty defined by law. This approach provides a streamlined, but simplified, overview of the crime distribution among prisoners, emphasising the most serious crimes leading to convictions. However, it can inadvertently underrepresent less severe but frequently associated crimes.

On the other hand, the count-all-offences rule involves acknowledging all offences that an individual has been convicted of, without prioritising their severity. This method offers a more holistic understanding of the crime distribution known by the latest stage of the criminal justice system, considering both minor and major offences. However, it introduces the issue of *double-counting*, where individuals convicted of multiple crimes are counted more than once.

The SPACE I questionnaire asks Council of Europe member states to provide their distribution of sentenced prisoners applying the principal offence rule. This method is also commonly employed by most of those states for their prison statistics. Yet, certain PAs—namely Belgium, Georgia, Latvia, Malta, Monaco, Bulgaria and Türkiye—deviate from this rule and count all offences.

Understanding these differences is crucial when analysing prison population trends. The legal and policy frameworks that define what is counted—and how—can significantly shape perceptions of criminality and penal severity.

2.4. Prison conditions and resources

2.4.1 Prison density and overcrowding (Figure 9)

Figure 9 ranks 51 PAs according to their prison density on 31 January 2025. The prison density is a measure of how crowded a prison system is. It is expressed as the number of inmates per 100 available places in penal institutions. If the prison density is greater than 100, that means there are more prisoners than available places, indicating overcrowding. Conversely, if the prison density is less than 100, that suggests that there are fewer prisoners than available places, and the prison system is not overcrowded.

Prison overcrowding remains one of the most visible indicators of strain in European penal systems. On 31 January 2025, the **average density** across Europe stands at **89 inmates per 100 available places**, while the **median is slightly higher at 95**. This difference between average and median reflects the impact of several severely overcrowded systems that pull the mean upward. In total, **16 out of 50 prison administrations (32%)** report inmate populations exceeding their stated capacity.

Mapping overcrowding across Europe

Overcrowding can be classified into three levels of severity. **Severe overcrowding**—defined as over 110 inmates per 100 places—is observed in Türkiye (131%), France (131%), Croatia (123%), Italy (123%), Hungary (115%), Belgium (114%), Ireland (112%) and Romania. These countries exceed the threshold by a significant margin and report some of the most pressing conditions in the region.

A second group falls into the category of **moderate overcrowding** (100–110%), including Finland (110%), Greece (108%), UK: Scotland (106%), North Macedonia (104%) and Sweden (103%). Though less acute, these levels still pose considerable challenges to daily prison management and service provision.

Finally, several jurisdictions operate at or **near full capacity**, such as Portugal (98.5%), and Azerbaijan (98.3%), where minor fluctuations in admissions can tip systems into overcrowding.

A methodological note on interpreting prison capacity

Cross-national comparisons of prison density must be approached with caution, as countries vary in how they define prison capacity. The two principal definitions are:

- Design capacity, which refers to the original architectural intention—how many prisoners the facility was built to accommodate. This is generally considered the most stable and internationally comparable metric. In some countries, national laws stipulate a minimum number of square or cubic metres per inmate, producing results broadly consistent with the design capacity concept.
- Operational capacity, which reflects administrative decisions about how many people a prison can hold under current conditions. This figure can be influenced by political, legal, or logistical decisions and may include temporary beds or emergency provisions.

Because operational capacity can be adjusted upward to reduce the appearance of overcrowding, it is less reliable for international comparison. The SPACE I survey encourages reporting based on design capacity where available, but in practice, data sources are mixed, and the calculation method is not always fully transparent.

2.4.2. Prison staff resources (Figure 10)

Figure 10 presents the inmate-to-staff ratios in 49 European PAs. This represents the number of inmates that each staff member is responsible for. Staffing levels are a critical component of prison operations, influencing not only daily functioning but also long-term outcomes for inmates and personnel alike. The 2025 SPACE I data (Figure 10) show that **staff-to-inmate ratios** vary significantly across Europe. The **average ratio** is **1.7 inmates per staff member**, while the **median** is slightly lower at **1.4**. However, the range is wide—from highly resourced systems with **0.4 inmates per staff member** to severely stretched systems operating at **4.6 inmates per staff**.

Contrasting models: Staffing extremes

At the high end of the spectrum—where systems are likely **understaffed**—are **Türkiye (4.6 inmates per staff)**, **Serbia (2.6)**, **Greece (2.5)**, **Poland (2.4)** and **the state administration of Spain (2.3)**. Conversely, countries like **Republika Srpska (0.6)**, the **Netherlands (0.8)**, **Norway (0.8)**, and **Sweden (0.8)** are examples of **well-staffed systems** where it seems logic to assume that more individualized supervision and treatment become possible.

Disaggregating the ratios

When examining staffing by category, important distinctions emerge. Across Europe, the **median overall staff ratio** is **1.4 inmates per staff**. But when considering only **custodial staff**, the median rises to **2.3 inmates per officer**. Focusing more narrowly on **security-focused custodial staff**, the ratio increases further to **3.2 inmates per security officer**.

- These distinctions highlight not only quantitative differences but also qualitative ones in how systems prioritize staff roles—whether toward surveillance, rehabilitation, or administrative support. At the same time, staffing is the largest component of prison budgets, and thus subject to both political and fiscal constraints. Governments must balance the need for adequate staffing levels with the financial realities of managing large prison systems.

  Countries with high incarceration rates often also report higher inmate-to-staff ratios, suggesting a compounding effect where overcrowded systems simultaneously lack the resources to manage their population effectively. However, although this correlation is noteworthy, one must be cautious about drawing causal conclusions. A low ratio can indicate a well-balanced system or successful rehabilitation programmes leading to reduced recidivism. It does not simply imply an adequate staff number due to a low inmate population, and vice versa.

A methodological note on prison staff

When comparing prison staff ratios, it is crucial to consider the varying definitions and classifications of prison staff across different countries. The term staff member can encompass a range of roles, from security personnel to those offering health services, educational instruction, or rehabilitation programme coordination, to individuals handling administrative tasks. Consequently, the ratios between non-custodial and custodial staff can vary widely across PAs. Furthermore, among the custodial staff, some individuals might focus exclusively on custody duties, while others might also undertake additional responsibilities.

Figure 10. Ratio of inmates per one prison staff member on 31 January 2025 (N=49 PA)

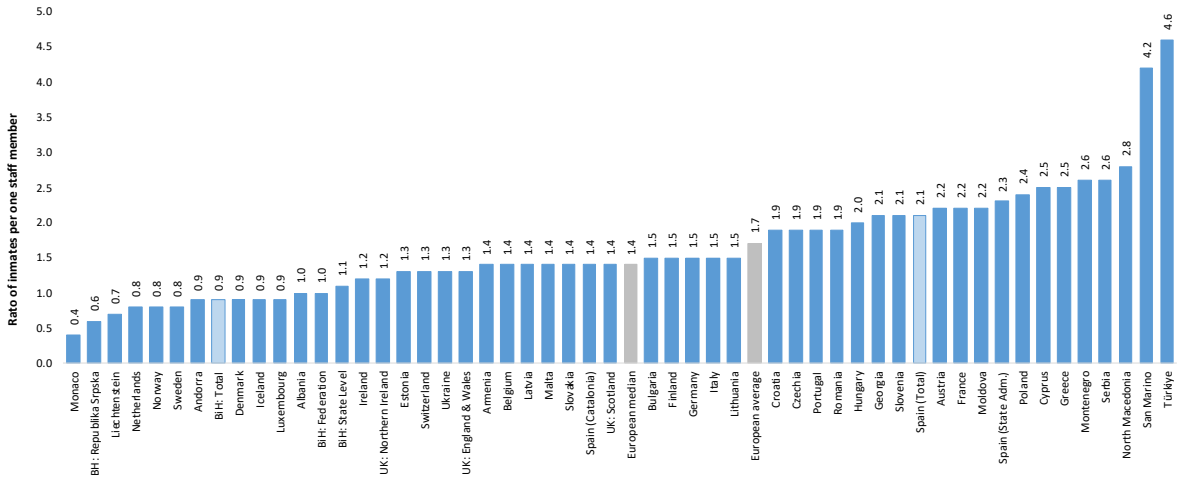


Figure 11. Rate of admissions in penal institutions, per 100,000 inhabitants, during 2024 (N= 48 PA)

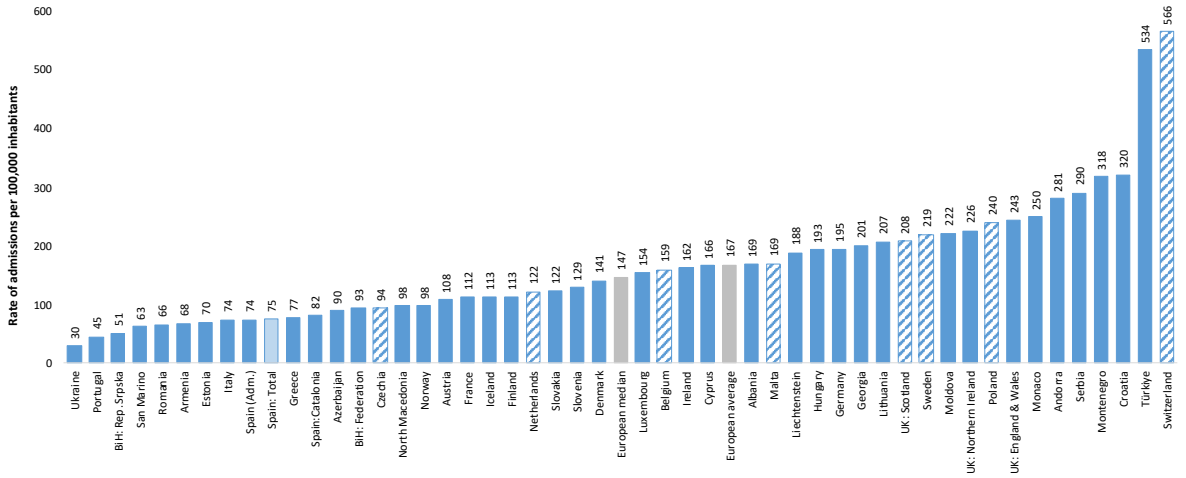
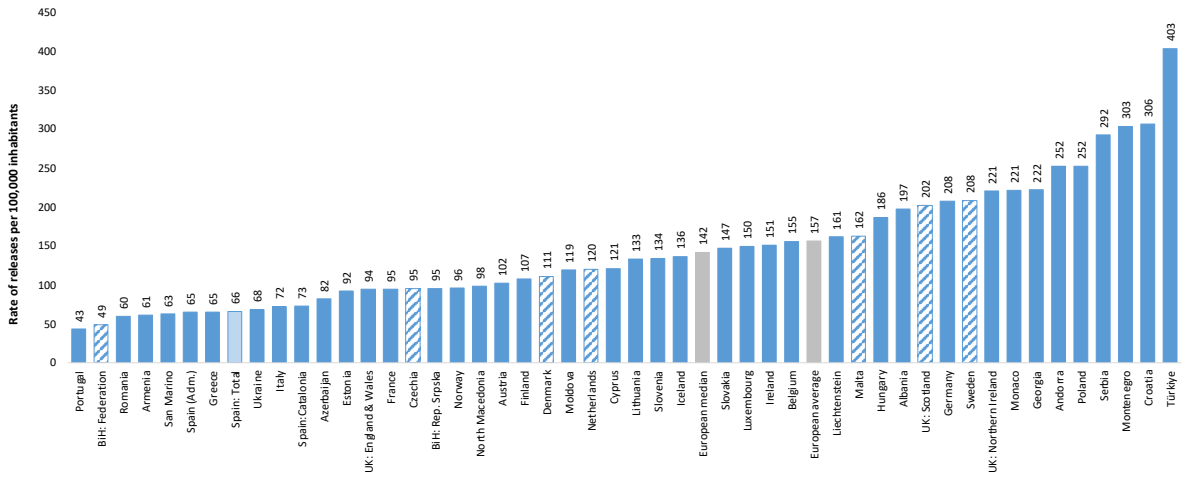


Figure 12. Rate of releases from penal institutions, per 100,000 inhabitants, during 2024 (N=48 PA)



3. Flow indicators for the year 2024

3.1. Admissions into penal institutions in 2024

Understanding prison admissions

Prison admissions reflect the number of entries into penal institutions that mark the beginning of a new detention period. This includes all individuals newly incarcerated during 2024, whether for pre-trial detention or to serve a sentence, but excludes transfers between institutions. Importantly, if a person is released and then re-admitted within the same year, each instance is counted separately. This definition, established by the SPACE I methodology, ensures consistency across countries—though some exceptions remain.

Key admission statistics (Figure 11)

A total of **1,334,404 prison admissions** were recorded across **48 prison administrations (PAs)**. The **average admission rate** stood at **167 admissions per 100,000 inhabitants**, while the **median** was **147.** The spread was significant: the lowest rate was **30** admissions per 100,000, and the highest reached **534**, indicating an **18-fold variation** across Europe.

However, **comparability is limited** in some cases. Eight PAs use definitions that diverge from the SPACE I standard, making cross-national comparison unreliable. These include Switzerland, Scotland, Sweden, Belgium, Malta, the Netherlands, Czechia and Poland. These countries are excluded from the comparative analyses and visually marked with a striped pattern in Figure 11.

At the high end of the spectrum, Türkiye reported the highest admission rate in 2024, with 534 entries per 100,000 inhabitants. This was followed by Croatia with 320, Serbia with 290, and England & Wales with 243, all showing markedly higher levels of prison entries compared to the European average. In contrast, several countries reported notably low admission rates. Ukraine registered the lowest, with just 30 admissions per 100,000 inhabitants, followed by Portugal (45), Romania (66), Armenia (68), and Estonia (70). The difference between these extremes illustrates not just diverse criminal justice policies, but broader societal, institutional, and demographic differences that shape how incarceration is used across jurisdictions.

Regional patterns and notable exceptions

A general pattern emerges where **Central and Eastern European countries** tend to report **higher admission rates**, while **Western Europe** shows **lower figures**. Still, some exceptions are noteworthy. For instance, Armenia records one of the lowest rates despite its Eastern European location, suggesting factors beyond geography are at play. Similarly, Ukraine's low rate is largely attributed to the ongoing war, which has disrupted judicial operations and slowed court proceedings.

Crime, Justice Systems, and Admissions: A Complex Relationship

- Readers must keep in mind that prison admission rates do not directly correspond to crime rates, the effectiveness of the criminal justice system, or even the size of the overall prison population. While some countries show internal consistency—such as Türkiye, with both high admissions and a high prison population, or Norway, with low rates in both indicators—others present contrasting patterns. Spain and Portugal, for example, have low admission rates but maintain above-median prison populations, possibly due to longer average sentence lengths or restricted use of alternatives to imprisonment.

  The COVID-19 lockdowns underscored the potential of prison admissions to reflect broader crime trends—but only under extreme conditions. During the 2020 lockdown periods, the sharp decline in street-level crime[17] was mirrored almost immediately by a decrease in prison admissions, particularly among pre-trial detainees[18]. This alignment highlights how sudden and large-scale societal disruptions can directly influence the functioning of the criminal justice system.

[17] Nivette, A. E. et al. (2021). A global analysis of the impact of COVID-19 stay-at-home restrictions on crime. *Nature Human Behaviour*, *5*(7), 868-877.

[18] Aebi, M. F. & Tiago, M. M. (2020a). *Prisons and Prisoners in Europe in Pandemic Times: An evaluation of the short-term impact of the COVID-19 on prison populations*. Series UNILCRIM 2020/3. Council of Europe and University of Lausanne.

Apart from that, cross-sectional research in Europe has consistently shown a correlation between prison rates and homicide rates, which means that countries with the highest homicide rates tend to also be among those with the highest prison population rates, and vice versa. [19]

3.2. Releases from penal institutions in 2024

Understanding prison releases

In the SPACE I questionnaire, exits from penal institutions are categorized into releases, deaths, and escapes. Although these types of exits may not be recorded using the same counting unit (e.g., individual persons vs. incidents), it remains clear that deaths and escapes together account for less than 1% of all recorded exits. Practically speaking, prison exits in Europe are almost entirely composed of releases. For this reason, the following analysis focuses exclusively on this category.

Key release statistics (Figure 12)

Across the 48 participating prison administrations, the average release rate stood at 157 per 100,000 inhabitants, while the median was slightly lower at 142. These figures reflect broad variation among countries, but they also suggest relative stability in prison outflows across the continent. However, data from seven prison administrations—Switzerland, Scotland, Sweden, the Netherlands, Denmark, Malta, and Federal entity of Bosnia and Herzegovina—were excluded from comparative analysis due to incompatible definitions of prison releases (the excluded PAs differ slightly from those in Section 3.1, as non-standard definitions vary by indicator). These are indicated accordingly in Figure 12.

Balance between admissions and releases

In most countries, admission and release rates are closely aligned. This general equilibrium implies that prison populations are stable over time, with inflows effectively matched by outflows. It also suggests that many systems manage high volumes of short-term detentions, maintaining a constant population despite frequent turnover.

Discrepancies between admission and release rates can signal significant shifts in prison populations. Logically, when admissions outpace releases, the prison population tends to grow; conversely, when releases exceed admissions, the population shrinks. This dynamic was clearly observed during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdowns, when public health measures not only led to a drop in new admissions but also prompted many countries to accelerate early releases. It was not the pandemic itself, but the restrictive measures imposed in response—particularly the lockdowns—that disrupted the usual flow of inmates.

System Dynamics

The overall similarity in country rankings for both admissions and releases confirms that most European prison systems operate within a steady dynamic. Exceptions to this pattern often reflect systemic reforms, external disruptions, or shifts in sentencing and parole practices. Tracking the flow of prison entries and exits remains thus essential to understanding not just the size but the functioning and responsiveness of penal systems in Europe.

3.3. Average length of imprisonment (Figure 13)

Understanding how long individuals typically remain behind bars is essential for interpreting prison dynamics across Europe. In SPACE I, the measure used to estimate this is the **Indicator of the Average Length of Imprisonment (IALI)**, which offers insight into both sentencing practices and the overall functioning of criminal justice systems.

- Research suggests that lengthy detentions are usually correlated with the punitiveness of a criminal justice system or with its slowness. Swift criminal justice systems are characterised by short criminal procedures, while the less punitive criminal justice systems tend to impose short sentences and facilitate the liberation

Aebi, M. F. & Tiago, M. M. (2020b). *Prisons and Prisoners in Europe in Pandemic Times: An evaluation of the medium-term impact of the COVID-19 on prison populations*. Series UNILCRIM 2020/4. Council of Europe and University of Lausanne.

[19] Lappi-Seppälä, T. (2011). Explaining imprisonment in Europe. *European Journal of Criminology*, *8*(4), 303-328.
Aebi, M. F., Linde, A., & Delgrande, N. (2015). Is There a Relationship Between Imprisonment and Crime in Western Europe? *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research*, *21*(3), 425-446.

of inmates. Moreover, there is consensus that an effective approach to reducing prison population rates is to diminish the duration of incarceration.

The SPACE questionnaire asks for the *number of days spent in penal institutions* during the year of reference (2024), which corresponds to the sum of the days—in practice, most countries count the number of overnights— spent in any penal institution by every inmate. Dividing that number by 365 (366 in leap years), one obtains the *average number of inmates* during that year. Combining these two measures one can obtain an indicator or the average length of imprisonment (IALI). However, as some countries do not provide data on the number of days spent in penal institutions—or provide a figure that does not seem reliable—an alternative indicator of the average length of imprisonment can be estimated using the stationary population model applied in demography. According to the latter, the stock is the product of the flow multiplied by the length. Applying the division property of equality, this means that the length is the quotient of the stock (on 31 January 2025) divided by the flow of admissions (in 2024) and multiplied by 12 to express it in months (see SPACE I, Part E for further details). This indicator remains an estimate and must be interpreted cautiously because the counting unit for the stock is the person and that for the flow is the admission. However, it provides estimates that are usually quite close to those obtained with the original formula while allowing for the inclusion of a larger number of PAs. This year, for instance, the IALI according to the original formula indicates an average of 9.7 months (median: 7.7), against an average of 11.8 months (median: 8.8) with the formula based on the stock and flow.

Figure 13 reveals that, in 2024, the **average length of imprisonment** across Europe—calculated using the stock-flow method—stood at **12 months**. However, **the median value was considerably lower, at 8.8 months**. This discrepancy suggests a positively skewed distribution, where a small number of countries with notably long average durations of imprisonment are pulling the overall average upward. As such, the median provides a more accurate picture of the typical custodial experience across the continent.

Once again, Switzerland, Scotland, Sweden, Belgium, Malta, the Netherlands, Czechia and Poland are illustrated in a striped pattern, as their definition of flow (utilised to estimate the IALI) does not align with that of SPACE I. Consequently, their estimated imprisonment durations are not comparable with those of the other prison administrations (see SPACE I, Table 22).

The longest average detention periods—exceeding two years—were found in Ukraine (39 months), Azerbaijan (36 months), Portugal (31 months), and Romania (24 months). By contrast, several countries report short average stays below six months, including Germany (4.3), Croatia (4.8), and Northern Ireland (5.2).

No clear regional pattern emerges from this data. Countries with both short and long average detention periods are found across Central, Eastern, and Mediterranean Europe. Furthermore, neighbouring countries often display significant differences—emphasizing that national policy choices and legal traditions may matter more than geography.

- In terms of broader penal policy, the data offer an important insight: shorter average detention periods tend to correlate with lower prison population rates. This is not a strict rule—exceptions exist—but the relationship highlights the importance of sentence duration as a lever to manage prison overcrowding. Reducing sentence lengths, especially for non-violent and low-risk offenders, can be a powerful tool for lowering incarceration rates.

  Ultimately, the average length of imprisonment reflects both the punitiveness of a criminal justice system (in terms of sentencing severity) and its efficiency (in terms of how quickly cases are resolved). Countries looking to improve penal outcomes or alleviate overcrowding must therefore address both aspects—sentencing frameworks and procedural speed—if meaningful reform is to be achieved.

3.4. Turnover ratio

Understanding turnover ratios (Figure 14)

The prison turnover ratio provides insight into the fluidity of a prison system. It measures the percentage of potential releases—defined as the sum of the stock on 31 January 2024 and all admissions throughout the year—that actually occurred during 2024. In other words, it reflects how effectively the system processes the prison population.

In 2024, the average turnover ratio in Europe stood at 52.4%, while the median was nearly identical at 52.1%. These figures suggest that, across the continent, prison systems released approximately half of the individuals who were present or admitted during the year.

Interpreting the results

A turnover ratio above 50% typically indicates a dynamic system with relatively short stays and efficient case processing. High-turnover countries tend to experience fewer pressures related to overcrowding, as the prison population is constantly refreshed.

Conversely, ratios below 50% signal slower throughput. These systems may be characterized by longer average stays, delays in court procedures, or restrictive release policies. Over time, low turnover can lead to an accumulation of inmates, resulting in overcrowding and reduced system responsiveness. In this context, the turnover ratio functions as an early warning sign for capacity strain.

Cross-national comparisons reinforce this interpretation. Countries with the lowest turnover ratios often correspond to those with the highest prison population rates. This relationship highlights how extended lengths of imprisonment, more than admissions, are a key driver of high incarceration rates in certain jurisdictions.

Methodological considerations

For the sake of accurate cross-national analysis, countries using non-standard definitions for admissions or releases were excluded. These jurisdictions are marked in the Figures with striped patterns, maintaining consistency with other sections of the report.

3.5 Towards an integrated analysis of flow indicators

The flow equation

Understanding the dynamics of a prison population requires considering three core elements: how many individuals enter the system (admissions), how long they remain incarcerated (length of stay), and how many are released (releases). The interaction of these elements determines whether a prison population grows, shrinks, or remains stable.

This relationship can be expressed through simple formulas:

- **Prison population** = Admissions × Average length of stay
- **Turnover ratio** = Releases ÷ (Stock + Admissions)
- **Balance** = Admissions − Releases

Typologies of prison systems

Based on these indicators, European prison systems can be classified into several operational types:

- **High-flow systems**, such as those in Germany and Croatia, combine high admission and release rates with short average stays. These systems are fluid and maintain a high turnover, allowing for effective population management even with limited capacity.
- **Low-flow systems**, including Portugal and Romania, exhibit low admission and release rates but much longer stays. Their populations are more static, and their turnover is significantly lower, increasing the risk of overcrowding over time.
- **Imbalanced systems** show discrepancies between admissions and releases, leading either to a gradual expansion or reduction of the prison population. These imbalances may reflect policy shifts, administrative delays, or the effects of external shocks like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Policy implications

The analysis of flow indicators offers insights for prison reform. Countries aiming to reduce their prison populations have three primary levers at their disposal: lowering admissions (e.g., through diversion or decriminalization), shortening sentence lengths (by reforming sentencing laws or improving case resolution times), and increasing releases (via parole or conditional release programs).

In operational terms, monitoring turnover ratios provides an early signal of system health. Ratios trending downward may warn of future overcrowding, while high ratios are generally indicative of a well-managed prison

Figure 13. Average length of imprisonment in 2024, based on the stock and flow of inmates (N=48 PA)

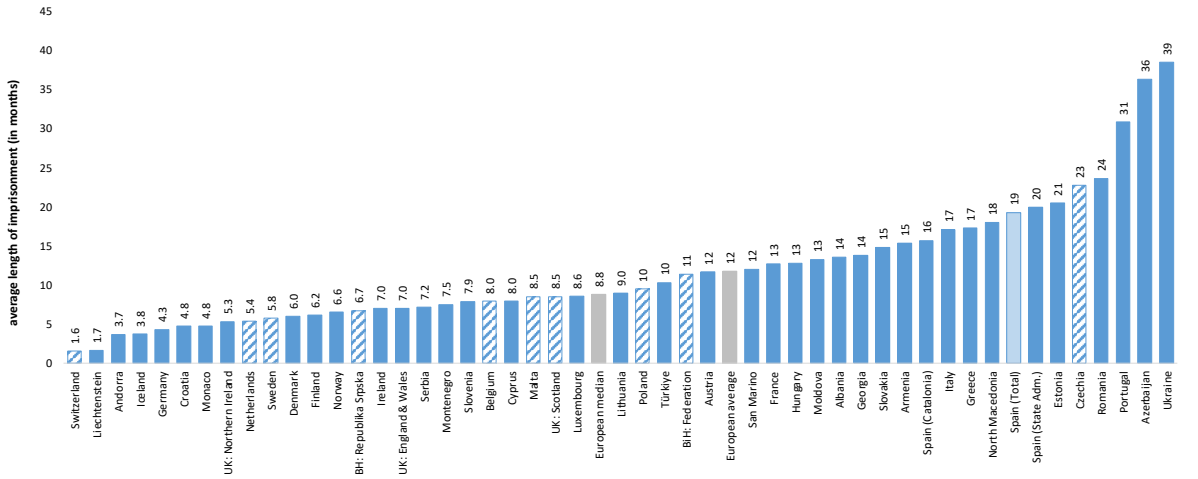


Figure 14. Turnover ratio in 2024 (N=47 PA)

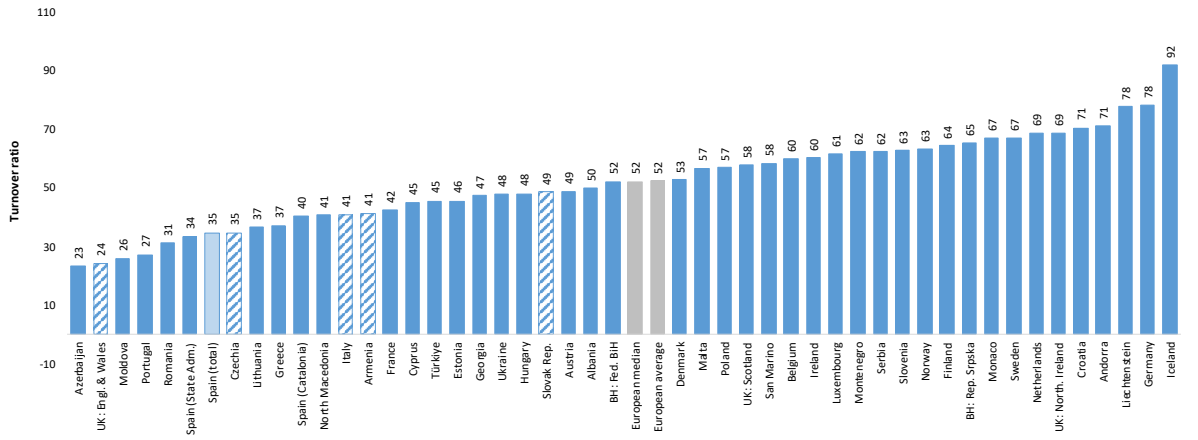
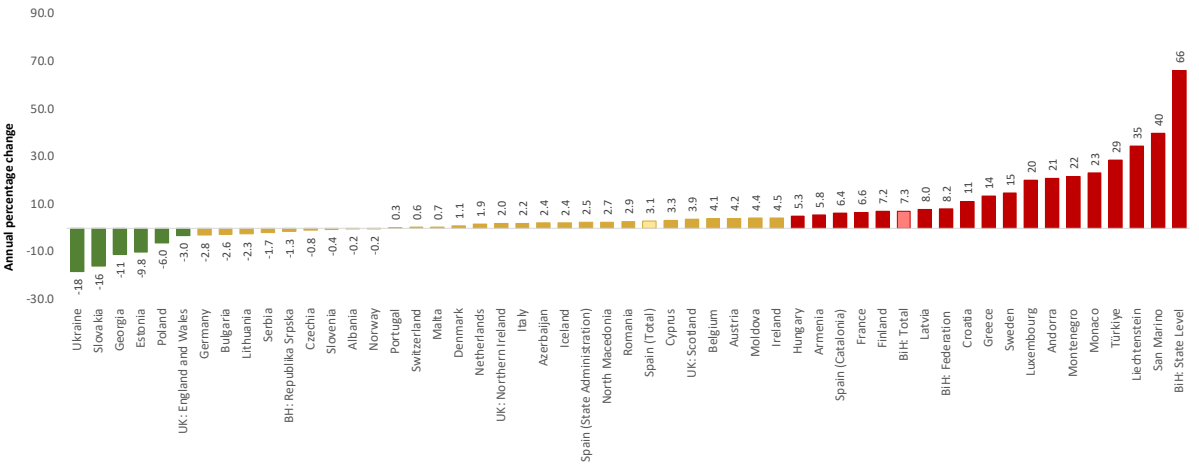


Figure 15: Annual percentage change in prison population rates: 2025 compared to 2024 (N=51 PA)



flow. Among these levers, reducing the average length of imprisonment stands out as particularly effective for decreasing overall population levels.

Using flow to understand system dynamics

The 2024 data reveal wide disparities in how European countries manage the movement of individuals through their prison systems. Admission rates vary by more than eleven-fold across countries. Yet, most systems maintain a rough balance between entries and exits, suggesting relative stability.

The average length of imprisonment remains the central factor influencing population levels, with values ranging from less than two months to over two and a half years. Turnover ratios below 50% reliably predict overcrowding pressures and highlight the need for system-level interventions.

Ultimately, these dynamic indicators offer a deeper understanding of prison operations than stock data alone. By examining how individuals move through the system—not just how many are present at a given time—countries can better identify where their challenges lie and which reforms are most likely to yield results.

4. Trends in incarceration: Short-term shifts and long-term transformations

4.1 Short-term changes (2024-2025): A year in context (Figure 15)

As shown in Figure 15, a comparison of prison population rates on **31 January 2025 versus the same date in 2024** reveals an increasingly diversified landscape across Europe. Out of 51 prison administrations, just over half (26) reported relatively stable rates, while **18 recorded substantial increases** exceeding 5%. Only **six** administrations registered **notable decreases** greater than 5%.

These annual fluctuations must be interpreted within the broader context (see Section 4.2). The **COVID-19 lockdowns** of 2020 created unprecedented conditions that led to a **sharp drop in incarceration rates** across Europe, due to both reduced admissions and temporary release measures. What followed appeared initially as a simple **"bounce-back"**—but with rates rising again in both 2024 and 2025, a more **persistent upward trend is becoming evident**.

Still, important exceptions remain. Six countries with populations over one million—Ukraine, Slovakia, Albania, Georgia, Estonia and Poland—reported significant decreases (above 5%) in their incarceration rates between 2024 and 2025. These cases highlight how diverging penal policies continue to shape national trajectories, even within a general trend of resurgence.

In contrast, countries with traditionally low incarceration rates—such as Finland and Sweden—have experienced significant increases over the last decades. In fact, even established models of restrained imprisonment are not immune to broader changes in crime trends, crime policy, political priorities, or growing public concern about crime.

4.2 Two decades of change: 2005–2025 (Figure 16)

When observed over the long term, prison population rates in Europe have followed three distinct phases. Figure 16 illustrates this evolution using both average and median values, based on the 49 prison administrations (PAs) that reported consistently from 2005 to 2025. These data reveal major inflection points over the past twenty years.

The first phase, from 2005 to 2011, was marked by steady growth: the average prison population rate rose from 127 to 145 per 100,000 inhabitants, reaching a historical peak. The second phase, from 2011 to 2020, brought a gradual decline, which accelerated in its later years. By January 2020, just before the COVID-19 lockdowns, the average had dropped to 118.

According to the classic predictions of the political economy of punishment (Rusche & Kirchheimer, 1939)[20], the financial crisis that began in 2008 should have led to an increase in prison populations. Yet the opposite

[20] Rusche, G., & Kirchheimer, O. (1939). *Punishment and Social Structure*. Columbia University Press.

occurred: incarceration rates declined throughout the decade that followed. This raises questions about the validity of the economic conditions–imprisonment link. One possible explanation is that much of the empirical literature supporting this thesis relies on methodologically flawed analyses of time-series data (Tiago and Aebi, 2025).[21]

The average prison population rate fell even further to 112 in 2021—the lowest level observed in two decades—largely due to emergency releases and reduced admissions during the pandemic-related lockdowns.

The third and current phase, spanning from 2020 to 2025, reveals a reversal of this trend. The average rate has climbed back to 127 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2025—reaching the level observed twenty years prior. The median rate follows a similar but slightly less pronounced pattern: 110 in 2025 versus 106 in 2019.[22]

Notably, the average prison population rate in 2025 (127 per 100,000) has returned to almost exactly the level observed twenty years earlier, in 2005 (127). A similar convergence occurred around 2015, when rates had already returned to their 2005 level after the peak of 2011—only to continue declining before reversing course again. Yet this apparent symmetry conceals a fundamental shift in the underlying dynamics. Whereas the 2005 rate was sustained by higher admission flows, the 2025 rate is driven primarily by longer average stays –a finding consistent with the declining admission rates and elevated IALI values documented in Section 3.

These increases may well signal more than a return to the pre-COVID mean. The sustained upward trajectory from 2022 to 2025 points to a structural transformation –a resurgence that seems to signal the end of the previous decade's decline and the potential beginning of a new phase in European penal policy (see also Figure 15, which shows that most countries reported an increase in 2025).

4.3 Country-specific transformations (Figure 17)

While European averages reveal broad trends, the picture becomes more nuanced when analysing country-specific evolutions. Figure 17 shows the percentage change in prison population rates between 2005 and 2025, highlighting substantial disparities across jurisdictions.

Türkiye stands out with a staggering 504% increase over the period. Significant rises were also observed in Serbia (+67%) and Croatia (+63%). More moderate but still notable increases occurred in several Central and Eastern European countries, as well as in parts of Southern Europe.

At the other end of the spectrum, a number of countries recorded major reductions in their incarceration rates. Estonia, Bulgaria, the Netherlands and Latvia each reported reductions of over 40%.

Overall, 21 of the 49 prison administrations analysed experienced a significant decrease between 2005 and 2025, while 21 saw substantial increases. Only seven remained relatively stable. Notably, no clear East–West or North–South geographical pattern emerges from these shifts: countries with both marked reductions and significant growth are found throughout the continent. This diversity underscores the influence of national criminal justice policies and socio-political choices over broad regional or cultural factors.

A noteworthy case is that of Slovenia and Sweden—countries traditionally characterised by relatively low imprisonment rates. Between 2005 and 2015, both followed moderate or declining trajectories. However, after 2015, these trends reversed or were disrupted. Sweden declined steadily from 78 (2005) to 59 (2015), then rose continuously to 106 (2025). Slovenia remained relatively stable until 2015, then experienced fluctuations and a sharp increase to 85 (2025). These inflection points suggest that even countries with long-standing traditions of low incarceration can experience upward shifts, possibly in response to political, legal, or social developments.

[21] Tiago, M. M., & Aebi, M. F. (2025). Questioning the economic conditions-imprisonment link: A methodological review of the political economy of punishment's empirical literature. *Punishment & Society*, 14624745251385945.

[22] These rates are based on the 49 PAs that provided data consistently for the period under study. This explains why they differ from the rates calculated for the 51 PAs included in this year's report.

Figure 16. Trends in prison population rates from 2005 to 2025 (N=49 PA)

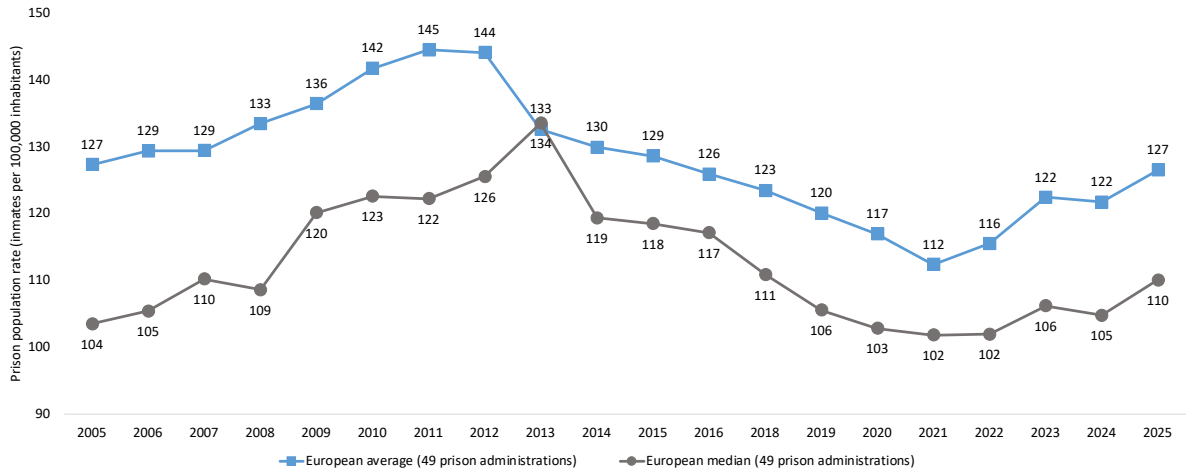


Figure 17. Percentage change in prison population rates from 2005 to 2025 (N=49 PA)

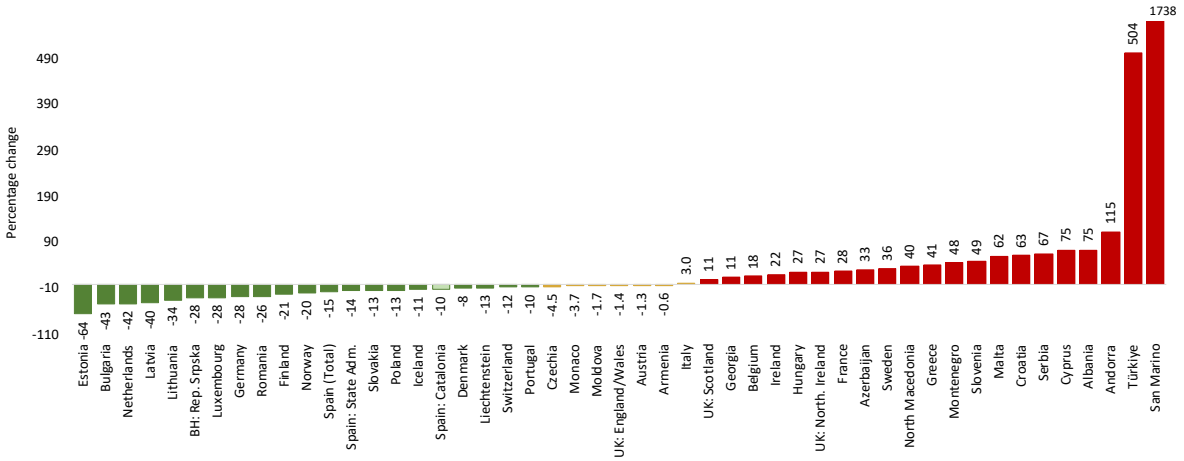
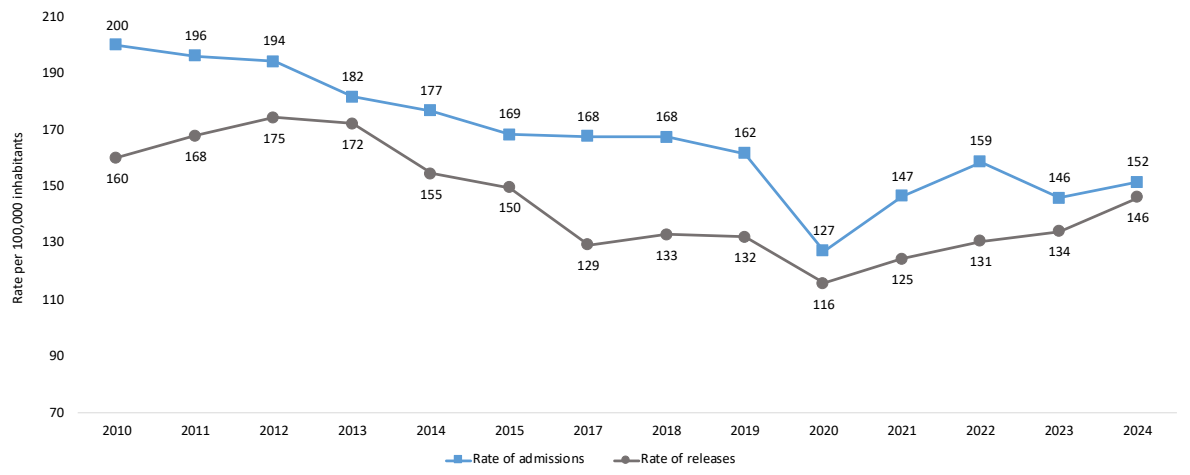


Figure 18. Trends in admissions and releases rates from 2010 to 2024 (N=38 PA): European average rate



The post-2015 period deserves closer attention in future research to identify the underlying drivers of these reversals.

4.4 Flow indicator trends: 2010–2024 (Figure 18)

The long-term analysis of flow indicators offers essential context for the rising prison population rates observed in recent years. Figure 18 tracks admissions and releases since 2010, highlighting some divergences.

Admission rates declined steadily from approximately 200 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2010 to 162 in 2019. This trend was followed by a sharp decrease, largely attributable to COVID-19 measures, with admissions reaching a record low of 127 for the period. Subsequently, the downward trajectory reversed, rising to 152 in 2024. Conversely, after a parallel decline between 2012 and 2020, release rates in 2022 and 2024 returned to levels comparable to those observed at the beginning of the 2010s.

A note of caution is warranted when interpreting these flow trends alongside the stock indicators presented in Section 4.2: the latter cover 49 prison administrations, while the flow indicators in Figure 18 are based on only 38 PAs for which consistent longitudinal data are available. This difference in coverage means that the trends in admissions and releases do not necessarily capture the full dynamics underlying the changes observed in prison population rates. Nevertheless, the available data point to the average length of imprisonment as the central factor. While admission rates have not returned to pre-2015 levels, prison populations across the broader set of 49 PAs have nonetheless surpassed their 2005 baseline. Even with fewer entries into the system, longer stays mechanically inflate the stock—a dynamic consistent with the elevated IALI values observed in several jurisdictions (see Figure 13). The cumulative result is a system that retains inmates longer, thus increasing its overall population even when inflows decline.

5. Overview of the main indicators by country

Table 1 presents the relative position of each European prison administration across a set of selected indicators. To facilitate comparison, prison administrations have been grouped into five clusters based on how their values deviate from the European median for each indicator:

1. **Very high:** Administrations whose score exceeds the European median by more than 25%.
2. **High**: Administrations with a score between 5.1% and 25% above the median.
3. **Close to the Median**: Administrations whose score is within ±5% of the European median.
4. **Low**: Administrations with a score between 5.1% and 25% below the median.
5. **Very Low**: Administrations whose score falls more than 25% below the median.

This clustering approach provides a standardized view of how each administration performs relative to the broader European context, allowing for meaningful cross-country comparisons while avoiding overemphasis on absolute values.

For each indicator, Table 1 also specifies the number of prison administrations (PAs) for which data were available. This number varies across indicators—for instance, the prison population rate is available for 51 PAs, while data on the percentage of foreign inmates is available for 50. Such discrepancies stem from differences in national data availability and reporting consistency.

It is relevant to remember that three countries—Bosnia and Herzegovina, Spain, and the United Kingdom—comprise multiple prison administrations. In these cases, each administration is listed separately in the table, unless all share the same cluster classification for a given indicator. When all fall into the same cluster, only the name of the country appears to avoid unnecessary repetition.

This clustering exercise is not intended as a ranking or performance assessment. Rather, it is a descriptive tool that helps highlight commonalities, outliers, and potential areas for further exploration among European prison systems.

Table 1. Ranking of countries according to the main prison indicators, 2025 and 2024.[23]

	Very high (the score is more than 25% higher than the European median value)	High (the score is between 5.1% and 25% higher than the European median value)	Medium (the score is close to the European median value, i.e. between-5% and +5%)	Low (the score is between 5.1% and 25% lower than the European median value)	Very low (the score is more than 25% lower than the European median value)	No data available
STOCK indicators on 31 January 2025						
Prison population rate per 100,000 habitants (51 PA)	Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Moldova, Georgia, Hungary, Montenegro, Albania, Poland, Latvia, Czechia, Serbia, Lithuania, Slovakia, UK: Scotland, North Macedonia, UK: England and Wales.	Romania, Croatia, Spain (State Administration), Malta, Estonia, France.	Portugal, Greece, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Catalonia, Sweden, Belgium, Austria, Italy.	Monaco, UK: Northern Ireland, Ukraine, Ireland, Armenia, Andorra, Slovenia, Bulgaria.	Switzerland, Denmark, Germany, San Marino, Finland, Netherlands, Norway, BIH: Republika Srpska, BIH: Fed. Bosnia and Herzegovina , Iceland, Liechtenstein, BIH: Bosnia and Herzegovina (state level).	
N	16	6	9	8	12	
% of female inmates in the prison population (51 PA)	Andorra, Iceland, Monaco, San Marino, Liechtenstein, Hungary, Czechia, Malta, Sweden, Finland, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain (State Administration), Austria, Latvia.	Cyprus, Ukraine, UK: Northern Ireland, Switzerland, Denmark, Catalonia, Croatia.	Germany, Slovenia, Greece, Poland, Moldova, Netherlands, Luxembourg.	Ireland, Estonia, Serbia, BIH: Fed. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Romania, North Macedonia, Lithuania, Türkiye, Georgia, Italy, Norway, Belgium.	UK: England and Wales, UK: Scotland, Bulgaria, France, Azerbaijan, Montenegro, Armenia, Albania, BIH: Republika Srpska, BIH: Bosnia and Herzegovina (state level).	
N	15	7	7	12	10	
% of foreign inmates in the prison population (50 PA)	Liechtenstein, Monaco, Luxembourg, Switzerland, Andorra, San Marino, Cyprus, Austria, Slovenia, Greece, Malta, Germany, Belgium, Iceland, Spain, Italy, Norway, Denmark, France, Finland, Netherlands, Croatia.		Portugal, Ireland.	Montenegro.	UK: England and Wales, Georgia, Armenia, Estonia, BIH: Bosnia and Herzegovina (state level) , Czechia, UK: Scotland, UK: Northern Ireland North Macedonia, Latvia, Slovakia, Serbia, Türkiye, Lithuania, Poland, Hungary, Albania, Bulgaria, BIH: Fed. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova, Romania, BIH: Republika Srpska.	Sweden
N	23	0	2	1	24	1
% of inmates aged 50 or over in the prison population (43 PA)	BIH: Republika Srpska, Slovakia, Italy, Croatia, Portugal, North Macedonia, Spain (State Administration), Estonia.	Norway, Latvia, Monaco, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Montenegro, Serbia.	San Marino, Catalonia, Malta, Bulgaria, UK: Scotland, Liechtenstein, Slovenia, Netherlands, Romania, Czechia, Ireland, UK: Northern Ireland, Poland.	BIH: Fed. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Austria, Belgium, Germany, Albania, Luxembourg, Türkiye, Moldova.	Finland, France, Denmark, Sweden, Andorra.	Armenia Azerbaijan, BIH: Bosnia and Herzegovina (state level), Cyprus, Lithuania, Switzerland, Ukraine, UK: England and Wales.
N	8	8	13	9	5	8

[23] Inside each cell of Table B, countries are ranked in descending order according to their rate or percentage in the corresponding variable. For example, in the first cell, Türkiye is presented first because it has the highest prison population rate (458.1 per 100,000 inhabitants), followed by Azerbaijan (270.6 per 100,000 inhabitants), Moldova (245.4 per 100,000 inhabitants) and so on.

	Very high (the score is more than 25% higher than the European median value)	High (the score is between 5.1% and 25% higher than the European median value)	Medium (the score is close to the European median value, i.e. between-5% and +5%)	Low (the score is between 5.1% and 25% lower than the European median value)	Very low (the score is more than 25% lower than the European median value)	No data available
% of inmates not serving a final sentence in the prison population (50 PA)	San Marino, Liechtenstein, Albania, Monaco, Montenegro, Armenia, Switzerland, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Andorra, Croatia, Iceland, UK: Northern Ireland, Ukraine, Malta, Slovenia.	Denmark, Belgium, Latvia.	Finland, Sweden, Cyprus, Germany, France, UK: Scotland, Norway, Greece.	Italy, Hungary, Portugal, Serbia, Catalonia, Ireland, Azerbaijan, BIH: Republika Srpska, Estonia, UK: England and Wales, Georgia, Austria	Moldova, Spain (State Administration), Türkiye, North Macedonia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Romania, Poland, Czechia, Bulgaria BIH: Fed. Bosnia and Herzegovina.	BIH: Bosnia and Herzegovina (state level).
N	16	3	8	12	11	1
Prison density per 100 places (50 PA)	Slovenia, Türkiye, France, Croatia, Italy.	Malta, Cyprus, Hungary, Belgium, Ireland, Finland, Greece, UK: Scotland, North Macedonia, Sweden, Romania, San Marino.	Portugal, Azerbaijan, UK: England and Wales, Serbia, Czechia, Netherlands, Denmark, Switzerland.	UK: Northern Ireland, Iceland, Moldova, Montenegro, Norway, Germany, Poland, Albania Spain (State Administration), Luxembourg, Latvia, BIH: Bosnia and Herzegovina (state level) , Slovakia.	Catalonia, Georgia, Lithuania, Armenia, Estonia, Liechtenstein, Bulgaria, BIH: Fed. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ukraine, Andorra, BIH: Republika Srpska, Monaco.	Austria.
N	5	12	8	13	12	1
Ratio of inmates per one staff member (48 PA)	Türkiye, San Marino, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Greece, Cyprus, Poland, Spain (State Administration), France, Moldova, Austria, Georgia, Slovenia, Hungary, Portugal, Romania, Croatia, Czechia.		Bulgaria, Italy, Lithuania, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Catalonia, Armenia, Slovakia, UK: Scotland, Belgium.	UK: England and Wales, Switzerland, Ukraine, Estonia, Ireland, UK: Northern Ireland, BIH: Bosnia and Herzegovina (state level).	BIH: Fed. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Andorra, Denmark, Iceland, Luxembourg, Norway, Sweden, Netherlands, Liechtenstein, BIH: Republika Srpska, Monaco.	BIH: Bosnia and Herzegovina (state level), Azerbaijan, Malta.
N	19	0	11	7	11	3

*When the table only indicates « Spain » it means that the classification is the same for Spain (State Administration), Spain (Catalonia) and Spain (total).

	Very high (the score is more than 25% higher than the European median value)	High (the score is between 5.1% and 25% higher than the European median value)	Medium (the score is close to the European median value, i.e. between-5% and +5%)	Low (the score is between 5.1% and 25% lower than the European median value)	Very low (the score is more than 25% lower than the European median value)	No data available
FLOW indicators for the year 2024						
Rate of admissions per 100,000 habitants in 2024 (48 PA)	Switzerland, Türkiye, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, Andorra, Monaco, UK: England and Wales, Poland, UK: Northern Ireland, Moldova, Sweden, UK: Scotland, Lithuania, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Liechtenstein.	Malta, Albania, Cyprus, Ireland, Belgium.	Luxembourg, Denmark.	Slovenia, Slovakia, Netherlands, Finland, Iceland, France, Austria, Norway, North Macedonia, Czechia, BIH: Republika Srpska.	Azerbaijan, Greece, Spain, Italy, Estonia, Armenia, Romania, San Marino, BIH: Fed. Bosnia and Herzegovina , Portugal, Ukraine.	BIH: Bosnia and Herzegovina (state level), Bulgaria, Latvia.
N	18	5	2	11	12	3
Rate of releases per 100,000 habitants in 2024 (47 PA)	Türkiye, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, Poland, Andorra, Georgia, Monaco, UK: Northern Ireland, Sweden, Germany, UK: Scotland, Albania, Hungary.	Malta, Liechtenstein, Belgium.	Ireland, Luxembourg, Slovakia.	Iceland, Slovenia, Lithuania, Cyprus, Netherlands, Moldova, Denmark.	Finland, Austria, North Macedonia, Norway, BiH: Republika Srpska, Czechia, France, UK: England and Wales, Estonia, Azerbaijan, Italy, Ukraine, Spain, Greece, San Marino, Armenia, Romania, BIH: Fed. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Portugal.	BIH: Bosnia and Herzegovina (state level), Bulgaria, Latvia, Switzerland.
N	14	3	3	7	20	4
Suicide rate per 10,000 inmates in 2024 (45 PA)	Andorra, Iceland, Lithuania, Denmark, France, Slovenia. Latvia, Italy, Norway, Bulgaria, Catalonia, Belgium, Austria, Estonia, UK: England and Wales, Ukraine, Czechia.	Croatia, Montenegro, Spain (State Administration), Portugal.	Netherlands, Serbia, Moldova.	Finland, Romania.	Georgia, Poland, Switzerland, Slovakia, Hungary, Albania, Azerbaijan, Sweden, Greece, Türkiye, Armenia, Cyprus, Ireland Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, North Macedonia, San Marino.	BIH: Fed. Bosnia and Herzegovina, BIH: Bosnia and Herzegovina (state level), BIH: Republika Srpska, Germany, UK: Northern Ireland, UK: Scotland.
N	17	4	3	2	19	6
Rate of escapes per 10,000 inmates in 2024 (46 PA)	Switzerland, Monaco, Finland, France, Sweden, Austria, Luxembourg, North Macedonia, Denmark, Norway, BIH: Fed. Bosnia and Herzegovina , Belgium, Slovenia, Croatia, Italy, Ireland, Spain (State Administration), Greece, Lithuania, Portugal, Ukraine, Armenia, Serbia.		Slovakia, Romania.		Moldova, UK: England and Wales, Poland, Türkiye, Albania, Andorra, Azerbaijan, BIH: Republika Srpska, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Georgia, , Hungary. Iceland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Malta, Montenegro, Netherlands, San Marino, Catalonia.	BIH: Bosnia and Herzegovina (state level), Bulgaria, Germany, UK: Northern Ireland, UK: Scotland.
N	23	0	2	0	21	5
Average length of imprisonment, in months [based on the stock and flow] (48 PA)	Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Portugal, Romania, Czechia, Estonia, Spain, North Macedonia, Greece, Italy, Armenia, Slovakia, Georgia, Albania, Moldova, Hungary, France, San Marino, Austria, BIH: Fed. Bosnia and Herzegovina.	Türkiye, Poland.	Lithuania, Luxembourg, UK: Scotland, Malta.	Belgium, Cyprus, Slovenia, Montenegro, Serbia, Ireland, UK: England and Wales, BIH: Republika Srpska, Norway.	Finland, Denmark, Sweden, Netherlands, UK: Northern Ireland, Croatia, Monaco, Germany, Iceland, Andorra, Liechtenstein, Switzerland.	BIH: Bosnia and Herzegovina (state level), Bulgaria, Latvia.
N	21	2	4	9	12	3

*When the table only indicates « Spain » it means that the classification is the same for Spain (State Administration), Spain (Catalonia) and Spain (total).

6. Annual Variation in the Median Rates of Stock (2024-25) and Flow (2023-24) Indicators

Table 2 presents the annual variations in selected stock and flow indicators. Stock indicators compare data from 31 January 2024 to 31 January 2025, while flow indicators compare full-year data from 2023 to 2024. The analysis is limited to prison administrations (PAs) in countries with populations exceeding one million and for which comparable data were available across the relevant years (see Section 4 of this report).

As a result, the figures shown may differ slightly from those presented elsewhere in this document or in the SPACE I report, which includes data from a broader set of PAs. For example, while SPACE I contains admission and release data for 48 PAs in 2024 (see Figure 11), only 39 of these are in countries meeting the population and consistency criteria necessary for year-on-year comparison. The number of PAs included in each indicator is shown in brackets alongside the respective variable.

Table 2. Annual variations in the median rates of stock (2024-2025) and flow (2023-2024) indicators in Prison Administrations of countries with over one million inhabitants

	2024	**2025**	**% change 2024-2025**
Stock indicators			
Prison population rate per 100,000 inhabitants (42 PA)	114.6	115.0	0.3
% of female inmates in the prison population (41 PA)	4.8	5.2	8.9
% of foreign inmates in the prison population (40 PA)	9.4	11.1	18.6
Of which: % of foreign inmates from EU countries (36 PA)	28.1	25.6	-8.8
% of inmates not serving a final sentence in the prison populations (41 PA)	22.8	22.0	-3.7
Prison density per 100 places (41 PA)	94.7	95.2	0.5
Number of overcrowded prison administrations (more than 100 inmates per 100 places) (41 PA)	14	14	0.0
Ratio of inmates per one staff member (41 PA)	1.5	1.4	-3.4
Ratio of inmates per custodian solely dedicated to custody (34 PA)	3.2	3.2	0.8
Sentenced prisoners by offence			
% of prisoners sentenced for drug offences (35 PA)	18.0	17.1	-5.1
% of prisoners sentenced for theft (36 PA)	12.5	12.9	3.0
% of prisoners sentenced for homicide (36 PA)	12.6	11.5	-9.1
Sentenced prisoners by length of sentence imposed			
% of prisoners sentenced to less than one year (37 PA)	12.5	12.7	1.4
% of prisoners sentenced from 1 to less than 3 years (33 PA)	25.2	24.3	-3.5
% of prisoners sentenced from 3 to less than 5 years (35 PA)	18.0	16.6	-7.7
% of prisoners sentenced from 5 to less than 10 years (35 PA)	22.7	22.2	-2.1
	2023	**2024**	**% change 2023-2024**
Flow indicators			
Rate of admissions per 100,000 inhabitants (39 PA)	136.8	122.3	-10.6
Rate of releases per 100,000 inhabitants (38 PA)	110.1	109.0	-1.0
Average length of imprisonment in months (based on the stock and flow) (39 PA)	11.5	11.4	-0.7
Cost indicator			
Total budget spent by the prison administrations (35 PA)	236 107 000.00 €	249 699 000.00 €	5.8

Notes:
PA: Prison administration.
The number between brackets indicates the number of PAs that provided data for both years.

Interpreting the Annual Changes at the European Level
Considering that annual fluctuations of up to ±5% typically indicate stability, the results show:

Stable Indicators: Several indicators remained within the stability range:
- Prison population rate per 100,000 inhabitants (0.3%)
- % of inmates not serving a final sentence in the prison populations (-3.7%)
- Prison density per 100 places (0.5%)
- Number of overcrowded prison administrations (more than 100 inmates per 100 places) (0.0%)
- Ratio of inmates per one staff member (-3.4%)
- Ratio of inmates per custodian solely dedicated to custody (0.8%)
- % of prisoners sentenced for theft (3.0%)
- % of prisoners sentenced to less than one year (1.4%)
- % of prisoners sentenced from 1 to less than 3 years (-3.5%)
- % of prisoners sentenced from 5 to less than 10 years (-2.1%)
- Rate of releases per 100,000 inhabitants (-1.0%)
- Average length of imprisonment in months (based on the stock and flow) (-0.7%)

Decreasing Indicators: A few indicators showed meaningful declines:
- % of foreign inmates from EU countries based on the total number of foreign inmates (-8.8%)
- % of prisoners sentenced for drug offences (-5.1%)
- % of prisoners sentenced for homicide (-9.1%)
- % of prisoners sentenced from 3 to less than 5 years (-7.7%)
- Rate of admissions per 100,000 inhabitants (-10.6%)

Increasing Indicators: Other metrics saw notable increases:
- % of female inmates in the prison population (8.9%)
- % of foreign inmates in the prison population (18.6%)
- Total budget spent by the prison administrations (5.8%)

The increase in the proportion of female inmates is particularly noteworthy given the historical stability of this indicator across Europe. Observed across Northern, Eastern, and Western European countries, it raises the question of whether sentencing practices, offence patterns, or the use of community-based alternatives for women are undergoing a broader shift—a development that warrants close monitoring in future editions of SPACE I.

Summary and Implications
The observed year-on-year changes offer a snapshot of short-term dynamics in European prison systems. This year, the number of overcrowded prison administrations was equal to the previous year, but with Greece entering an overcrowded situation (13.5%) while Azerbaijan managed to decrease out of it (-4.4%). The decrease from Romania is also noticeable (-14%) passing from 116 to 100 inmates per 100 places.

At the same time, a 10.6% decline in admission rates suggests that fewer individuals are entering the system — a sharp reversal from the 13.5% increase recorded the previous year. This volatility cautions against interpreting any single year's movement as a trend. In any case, the decline in admissions combined with an average length of imprisonment that remained stable produced a stable prison population rate overall for the countries with more than 1 million inhabitants.

These findings, though still unfolding, highlight the need for careful monitoring and targeted policy responses to avoid slipping into a sustained cycle of incarceration growth.

7. Tables

Table 3. Stock indicators on 31 January 2025

Country	Total number of inmates (including pre-trial detainees)	**Prison population rate per 100,000 inhabitants**	% of female inmates in the prison pop.	% of foreign inmates in the prison pop.	% of inmates aged between 50 and 64 in the prison pop.	% of inmates aged 65 or over in the prison pop.	% of inmates without a final sentence in the prison pop.	% of prisoners sentenced for homicide (including attempts)	% of prisoners sentenced for theft	% of prisoners sentenced for drug offences	% of prisoners sentenced from 1 to less than 3 years	% of prisoners sentenced from 3 to less than 5 years	% of prisoners sentenced from 5 to less than 10 years	Prison density per 100 places	Ratio of inmates per one staff member
Albania	4 530	191.7	1.6	3.4	11.4	3.8	61.9	35.0	6.8	24.9	5.2	14.4	22.2	78.8	1.0
Andorra	72	86.8	12.5	72.2	9.7	1.4	44.4	10.0	5.0	25.0	15.0	15.0	12.5	46.8	0.9
Armenia	2 686	87.3	2.6	11.6	***	***	52.2	***	***	***	***	***	***	59.8	1.4
Austria	9 693	105.4	7.0	52.8	13.4	2.9	19.6	***	***	***	29.2	16.3	13.8	***	2.2
Azerbaijan	27 673	270.6	3.1	2.2	***	***	20.8	10.9	9.7	46.3	***	***	***	98.3	***
Belgium	12 613	106.0	4.2	42.8	13.7	2.5	30.4	13.0	46.0	28.8	16.0	20.3	27.7	114.3	1.4
BIH: Bosnia and Herzegovina (Total)	1 982	58.2	2.7	3.2	***	***	9.2	***	***	16.7	***	***	***	50.7	0.9
BIH: Bosnia and Herzegovina (state level)	294	12.8	0.0	9.2	***	***	0.0	***	***	16.0	***	***	***	74.8	1.1
BIH: Fed. Bosnia and Herzegovina	1 108	48.3	4.6	2.8	13.6	3.6	5.7	13.4	18.9	17.1	29.6	14.5	15.1	50.8	1.0
BiH: Rep. Srpska	580	52.2	0.3	0.9	27.2	21.0	20.7	22.9	10.7	16.2	19.3	21.0	17.1	43.5	0.6
Bulgaria	5 404	83.9	3.9	3.1	13.4	5.2	7.0	16.8	27.9	16.1	30.9	12.1	11.8	54.9	1.5
Croatia	4 965	128.2	5.7	21.8	14.5	10.8	42.4	10.9	16.3	9.2	30.7	14.5	13.5	122.5	1.9
Cyprus	1 081	110.3	6.7	54.4	***	***	26.7	8.6	11.7	24.4	27.1	14.4	22.9	116.6	2.5
Czechia	19 430	178.1	8.6	8.2	15.4	2.2	8.2	***	***	***	37.5	15.8	14.1	95.3	1.9
Denmark	4 197	70.0	5.9	25.3	11.4	1.3	31.3	6.4	6.1	34.6	25.9	13.4	19.4	94.9	0.9
Estonia	1 637	119.5	4.7	10.6	19.5	3.4	20.2	16.4	9.5	27.9	25.2	21.8	29.3	58.4	1.3
Finland	3 282	58.2	7.7	22.9	11.5	1.8	27.0	19.2	4.7	22.7	27.7	20.1	20.6	109.8	1.5
France	81 599	118.9	3.4	24.4	10.5	2.4	26.5	8.3	13.3	13.0	39.7	14.8	12.1	130.9	2.2
Georgia	8 592	231.9	4.4	11.9	17.8	2.9	19.8	***	***	***	***	***	***	69.7	2.1
Germany	57 812	69.2	5.6	47.4	14.9	1.2	26.6	8.2	19.6	14.6	***	***	***	80.2	1.5
Greece	11 586	111.3	5.4	51.8	16.7	3.5	24.8	10.5	17.4	17.3	18.2	0.0	36.2	107.5	2.5
Hungary	19 632	205.8	8.8	3.6	17.7	2.3	23.0	8.8	19.0	8.8	31.9	20.5	25.5	114.5	2.0
Iceland	140	35.9	12.1	38.6	14.3	2.1	42.1	19.8	8.6	32.1	37.0	7.4	18.5	87.5	0.9
Ireland	5 116	94.0	5.0	17.0	13.8	3.8	21.1	11.2	14.0	11.4	24.4	23.4	22.9	111.5	1.2
Italy	61 916	105.1	4.4	31.7	24.3	5.1	24.7	15.3	5.3	31.7	17.3	22.8	30.2	120.7	1.5

COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Country	Total number of inmates (including pre-trial detainees)	**Prison population rate per 100,000 inhabitants**	% of female inmates in the prison pop.	% of foreign inmates in the prison pop.	% of inmates aged between 50 and 64 in the prison pop.	% of inmates aged 65 or over in the prison pop.	% of inmates without a final sentence in the prison pop.	% of prisoners sentenced for homicide (including attempts)	% of prisoners sentenced for theft	% of prisoners sentenced for drug offences	% of prisoners sentenced from 1 to less than 3 years	% of prisoners sentenced from 3 to less than 5 years	% of prisoners sentenced from 5 to less than 10 years	Prison density per 100 places	Ratio of inmates per one staff member
Latvia	3 505	188.8	7.0	5.4	16.9	4.5	28.6	***	***	***	14.7	16.6	30.3	76.8	1.4
Liechtenstein	11	26.9	9.1	100.0	18.2	0.0	81.8	0.0	0.0	50.0	50.0	0.0	0.0	55.0	0.7
Lithuania	4 453	154.0	4.5	3.8	***	***	13.1	24.7	12.4	21.1	21.4	15.6	23.0	66.9	1.5
Luxembourg	749	109.8	5.2	78.1	12.2	2.9	45.0	14.1	26.2	16.7	38.1	18.0	10.4	78.5	0.9
Malta	689	120.0	8.0	50.9	15.8	2.9	37.2	11.5	30.3	17.3	29.3	22.6	19.4	118.0	1.4
Moldova	5 844	245.4	5.3	1.9	9.7	4.2	19.3	21.5	14.1	8.4	10.8	15.2	33.7	86.8	2.2
Monaco	38	98.9	10.5	89.5	18.4	2.6	55.3	11.8	47.1	52.9	29.4	5.9	11.8	38.0	0.4
Montenegro	1 244	199.6	2.8	15.8	16.8	2.7	53.4	8.1	9.5	24.3	21.9	14.7	10.7	84.5	2.6
Netherlands	9 930	55.0	5.2	22.7	15.3	2.4	45.3	15.7	10.8	22.2	29.1	12.5	12.6	95.2	0.8
North Macedonia	2 668	146.4	4.5	6.0	21.9	3.1	14.3	9.8	19.2	24.2	24.1	24.2	22.9	103.7	2.8
Norway	3 020	54.0	4.3	27.2	17.7	4.4	26.0	10.2	4.5	21.3	25.3	16.2	22.6	81.1	0.8
Poland	69 137	189.4	5.3	3.7	14.5	2.8	11.0	7.0	23.5	5.3	30.0	12.7	10.2	79.0	2.4
Portugal	12 360	115.0	7.3	17.4	20.9	4.2	22.0	9.1	10.9	19.9	14.2	20.8	38.8	98.5	1.9
Romania	24 543	128.9	4.6	1.1	15.1	2.6	12.4	20.0	17.5	6.8	21.0	27.7	28.8	111.2	1.9
San Marino	21	62.6	9.5	61.9	19.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	***	***	***	100.0	4.2
Serbia	11 430	174.0	4.7	4.5	12.0	7.2	21.5	9.5	21.2	24.9	27.3	22.9	21.7	95.6	2.6
Slovak Rep.	8 169	150.7	7.3	4.6	28.0	2.2	13.0	8.1	10.8	19.5	22.7	19.4	28.0	71.0	1.4
Slovenia	1 804	84.7	5.4	52.1	12.1	5.7	34.0	8.7	10.9	14.2	52.5	14.7	10.9	134.0	2.1
Spain (Total)	59 279	120.8	7.0	32.7	19.6	3.2	17.6	6.9	4.5	15.5	20.6	20.3	25.0	77.2	2.1
Spain: State Admin.	50 627	123.6	7.2	29.4	20.3	3.2	17.0	6.5	2.2	16.1	21.0	20.3	24.8	78.6	2.3
Spain: Catalonia	8 652	106.5	5.8	52.0	15.9	2.9	21.4	9.7	18.8	11.5	18.0	20.5	26.5	70.0	1.4
Sweden	11 232	106.1	7.9	***	9.6	1.9	26.9	13.1	4.1	27.4	31.7	23.3	21.5	103.0	0.8
Switzerland	6 994	77.3	6.3	72.5	***	***	48.8	13.1	25.0	15.6	23.1	17.6	11.1	94.5	1.3
Türkiye	392 456	458.1	4.4	3.8	12.4	1.6	14.4	11.1	33.2	39.8	14.3	14.7	20.0	130.9	4.6
Ukraine	37 119	95.2	6.5	2.2	***	***	40.2	22.5	25.4	***	9.7	26.4	***	50.3	1.3
UK: England & Wales	85 372	140.7	4.0	12.1	***	***	19.9	11.7	9.1	16.7	***	***	***	96.3	1.3
UK: Northern Ireland	1 929	98.7	6.4	6.1	13.6	4.0	40.4	13.7	9.4	7.0	26.3	15.8	14.6	88.7	1.2
UK: Scotland	8 287	147.7	4.0	7.7	15.0	3.5	26.1	17.8	3.9	6.2	22.4	15.9	25.9	106.2	1.4
Average	22 153	127	5.8	26.4	15.7	3.6	30.3	12.8	14.9	20.7	25.4	16.7	20.1	89.0	1.7
Median	5 624	110	5.4	17.0	15.0	2.9	26.0	11.2	11.7	18.4	25.2	16.1	20.6	94.5	1.4
Minimum	11	27	0.0	0.9	9.6	0.0	5.7	0	0	0	5.2	0.0	0.0	38.0	0.4
Maximum	392 456	458	12.5	100.0	28.0	21.0	100.0	35.0	47.1	52.9	52.5	27.7	38.8	134.0	4.6

Table 4. Flow indicators for the year 2024

Country	Rate of admissions per 100,000 inhabitants	Rate of releases per 100,000 inhabitants	Turnover ratio	Suicide rate per 10,000 inmates	Rate of escapes per 10,000 inmates	Average length of imprisonment (based on the stock and the flow)	Total budget spent by the prison administration
Albania	168.8	197.0	49.8	2.2	0.0	13.6	80 597 444.00 €
Andorra	281.1	252.1	71.1	138.9	0.0	3.7	5 226 937.00 €
Armenia	67.9	61.4	41.4	0.0	3.7	15.4	28 143 546.00 €
Austria	108.2	102.1	48.9	12.4	175.4	12	753 800 000.00 €
Azerbaijan	89.6	82.0	23.2	1.8	0.0	36.3	113 856 661.00 €
Belgium	158.8	155.4	59.8	12.7	24.6	8.0	799 724 524.37 €
BiH: Total	***	***	***	0.0	***	***	NA
BiH: State Level	***	***	***	0.0	***	***	NA
BiH: Fed.	50.7	49.1	52.1	***	45.1	11.4	29 186 990.00 €
BIH: Rep. Srpska	93.2	95.4	65.2	0.0	0.0	6.7	14 205 093.00 €
Bulgaria	***	***	***	13.0	***	***	16 500 000.00 €
Croatia	319.6	306.1	70.5	8.1	20.1	4.8	119 258 406.00 €
Cyprus	166.2	120.7	45.1	0.0	0.0	8.0	31 333 133.29 €
Czechia	93.7	95.0	34.8	9.3	0.0	23	539 283 583.00 €
Denmark	140.8	110.6	52.7	19.1	69.1	6.0	344 200 000.00 €
Estonia	69.9	92.3	45.5	12.2	0.0	20.5	76 861 395.00 €
Finland	112.8	107.4	64.4	6.1	198.1	6.2	249 699 000.00 €
France	112.4	94.6	42.3	17.2	185.8	12.7	3 361 483 986.00 €
Georgia	201.1	221.9	47.3	4.7	0.0	14	82 381 595.38 €
Germany	194.5	207.7	78.2	***	***	4.3	NA
Greece	77.2	65.0	37.1	1.7	9.5	17.3	40 146 163.20 €
Hungary	192.9	186.4	47.9	3.1	0.0	12.8	553 852 405.00 €
Iceland	112.5	136.4	91.9	71.4	0.0	3.8	20 202 933.00 €
Ireland	162.2	151.0	60.2	0.0	17.6	7.0	529 244 000.00 €
Italy	73.8	72.2	40.9	13.4	20.0	17.1	3 348 626 567.00 €
Latvia	***	***	***	14.3	0.0	***	76 005 629.00 €
Liechtenstein	188.3	161.4	77.6	0.0	0.0	1.7	1 154 935.85 €
Lithuania	206.5	133.4	36.6	29.2	9.0	9.0	97 693 272.00 €
Luxembourg	153.8	149.7	61.4	0.0	120.2	8.6	134 129 174.00 €
Malta	169.3	162.3	56.7	0.0	0.0	8.5	35 291 815.00 €
Moldova	221.9	119.3	25.9	6.8	1.7	13.3	43 015 061.90 €
Monaco	249.9	221.2	66.9	0.0	263.2	4.8	5 016 734.84 €
Montenegro	318.1	303.1	62.3	8.0	0.0	7.5	13 810 066.21 €
Netherlands	121.9	120.3	68.5	7.0	0.0	5.4	1 088 428 363.00 €
North Macedonia	97.6	98.1	40.8	0.0	105.0	18.0	24 127 000.00 €
Norway	98.3	96.1	63.2	13.2	49.7	6.6	555 907 192.00 €
Poland	240.1	252.4	57.0	4.3	0.3	9	NA
Portugal	44.6	43.1	27.2	7.3	7.3	30.9	NA
Romania	65.5	59.6	31.2	5.7	2.4	23.6	527 114 886.09 €
San Marino	62.6	62.6	58.3	0.0	0.0	12.0	186 569.16 €
Serbia	289.6	292.0	62.4	7.0	3.5	7.2	153 565 434.00 €
Slovak Rep.	122.3	147.1	48.7	3.7	2.5	14.8	315 490 960.80 €
Slovenia	128.9	133.9	62.7	16.6	22.2	7.9	85 425 947.61 €
Spain (Total)	75.3	66.2	34.6	8.3	10.1	19	2 025 802 005.00 €
Spain: State Admin.	74.1	64.9	33.5	7.5	11.9	20.0	1 559 992 178.87 €
Spain: Catalonia	81.5	72.7	40.3	12.7	0.0	15.7	465 809 826.13 €
Sweden	219.2	208.2	66.9	1.8	178.1	5.8	1 240 403 000.00 €
Switzerland	566.1	***	***	4.3	569.1	1.6	NA
Türkiye	533.7	402.8	45.4	1.4	0.2	10.3	2 281 032 887.78 €
Ukraine	29.7	68.0	47.7	10.0	5.4	38.5	205 900 000.00 €
UK: England & Wales	243.0	94.4	24.4	10.5	0.9	7.0	5 368 135 040.00 €
UK: Northern Ireland	225.6	220.7	68.6	***	0.0	5.3	190 815 622.90 €
UK: Scotland	207.8	201.7	57.8	***	1.2	8.5	519 500 000.00 €
Average	166.8	145.8	52.4	11.3	44.2	11.8	567 951 433.90 €
Median	147.3	120.7	52.1	6.9	2.4	8.8	126 693 790.00 €
Minimum	29.7	43.1	23.2	0.0	0.0	1.6	186 569.16 €
Maximum	566.1	402.8	91.9	138.9	569.1	38.5	5 368 135 040.00 €

8. Methodology

This document reports both European average and median rates. The median is defined as the value that divides the data into two equal halves, such that 50% of the countries are above it and 50% are below. The median is preferred over the arithmetic mean (commonly referred to as the average) because the latter is highly sensitive to extreme values—technically known as outliers—which can distort the results. Outliers are relatively common in the SPACE dataset due to the inclusion of very small countries such as Andorra, Liechtenstein, Monaco, and San Marino, where a change involving a single individual can significantly alter percentages, rates, or trends. For this reason, comments are limited to countries with populations exceeding one million inhabitants.

> For example, San Marino had only one inmate on 31 January 2019. This inmate was a national citizen serving a final sentence. That individual represented 100% of both national inmates and sentenced inmates. However, the addition of just one foreign inmate not serving a final sentence would have reduced both percentages by 50%. Moreover, with a national population of just 34,590 inhabitants, this one inmate produced a prison population rate of 2.9 per 100,000. Adding a second inmate would double that rate to 5.8 per 100,000. This issue is particularly pronounced in longitudinal analysis: an increase of one inmate from one year to the next would appear as a 100% increase. When computing continental indicators, the inclusion of a country reporting 100% for a given indicator artificially inflates the European average. Similar anomalies occur with other indicators, such as the escape rate: in 2019, San Marino registered an implausible 20,000 escapes per 10,000 inmates because it had one inmate on 31 January 2019 and two escapes over the course of 2018.

The European averages and medians presented here are weighted based on the population and inmate count of each country. This means they are calculated from country-specific percentages and rates per 100,000 inhabitants, rather than from aggregated absolute values for the continent. Using total values for the continent would yield different results and obscure the variation across countries. For example, on 31 January 2025, the 51 prison administrations included in the SPACE I report had a combined total of 1,107,921 inmates across jurisdictions with a combined population of approximately 692 million. This would result in a continental prison population rate of 160 inmates per 100,000 inhabitants. However, the weighted median prison population rate—based on each country's rate—is 110 inmates per 100,000, as indicated at the beginning of this document.

To aid readability, all values equal to or greater than 10 are generally presented without decimals, while values below 10 include one decimal. Percentage changes, however, are calculated using full decimal precision, which may lead to minor discrepancies if readers recalculate those percentages using the rounded values presented here. Full decimal values can be consulted in the 2025 SPACE I report.

To avoid duplication, aggregated totals for Spain (which would combine data from the State Central Administration and the Catalan Administration) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (which would combine data from the Republika Srpska, the Federation, and the state-level prison administration, the latter also being excluded) are not included in the calculation of European averages and medians.

In cases where data validation identified unexplained inconsistencies, affected figures are presented in brackets and excluded from the calculation of European indicators.

Since the 2018 edition of the SPACE I report, stock indicators refer to the situation on 31 January of the year preceding publication. This replaces the previous reference date of 1 September used from 1983 to 2016. The change was introduced to ensure the timeliness of data. As a result, no data are available for 31 January 2017; however, data from 1 September 2016 may serve as a reasonable proxy. For flow indicators, this change also means that no data are available for the calendar year 2016. Researchers wishing to construct time series may interpolate 2016 values using figures from 2015 and 2017.

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