

European prisons are almost full, according to latest Council of Europe survey



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European prisons are on average close to full capacity, with inmates occupying over 9 out of ten available places, according to the Council of Europe Annual Penal Statistics (SPACE) for 2016, published today.

The survey shows that the incarceration rate grew from 115.7 to 117.1 inmates per 100,000 inhabitants from 2015 to 2016. This rate had previously fallen every year since 2012, when it reached 125.6 prisoners per 100,000 inhabitants.

The incarceration rate is mainly influenced by the length of the sanctions and measures imposed. In that perspective, the average length of detention, which can be seen as an indicator of the way criminal law is applied, increasing slightly to 8.5 months.

The countries where the incarceration rate grew the most were Bulgaria (+10.8%), Turkey (+9.5%), the Czech Republic (+7.6%), Serbia (+6.6%) and Denmark (+5.5%). The prison administrations where it fell the most were Iceland (-15.9%), Northern Ireland (-11.8%), Lithuania (-11.1%), Belgium (-10.1%) and Georgia (-6.7%).

On the other hand, overcrowding remained a serious problem in many countries. Thirteen out of 47 prison administrations reported having more inmates than places to host them. The highest levels of overcrowding were observed in “The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” (132 prisoners per 100 places available), Hungary (132), Cyprus (127), Belgium (120), France (117), Portugal (109), Italy (109), Serbia (109), Albania (108), the Czech Republic (108), Romania (106) and Turkey (103).

The [SPACE](#) survey is conducted for the Council of Europe by the University of Lausanne. The [SPACE I](#) 2016 survey contains information from 47 out of 52 prison administrations in the 47 Council of Europe member states (see the [executive summary](#)). The [SPACE II](#) contains information from 47 out of 52 probation agencies.

- Relevant website: [Prisons and Community Sanctions and Measures](#)