

PRESS RELEASE

EuroPris Publishes Comprehensive Mapping Report on Prison Overcrowding Across Europe

The [European Organisation of Prison and Correctional Services \(EuroPris\)](#) recently published *From Challenges to Solutions: Mapping European Strategies on Prison Overcrowding*, a new report analysing the scale, nature, and what prison administrations in Europe are doing within their legal mandates to tackle prison overcrowding and keep operations running. The report brings together data and insights from 33 national and regional prison administrations, representing around 80% of EuroPris members. Overcrowding remains one of the most persistent and systemic challenges facing European prison administrations. The report shows that overcrowding cannot be understood solely through numerical occupancy rates: it also manifests in reduced access to services, increased strain on staff, and compromised conditions that threaten safety, dignity, and compliance with international standards.

Conducted between April and September 2025, the mapping exercise was based on self-reported information from prison administrations and should be understood within the context of each country's national legal and political context.

Rising Populations (2020–2025): Between 2020 and 2025, 24 out of 33 administrations reported rising prison populations, five remained stable, and only four recorded decreases. Significant increases were observed in **France** (from 70,651 in 2020 to 81,559 in 2025), **Sweden** (+55% over five years, affecting both remand and sentenced populations), **Ireland** (+27%), **Northern Ireland** (+42.7%, driven largely by remand), and **Croatia** (+31% between 2020 and 2024, with some facilities reaching 190% occupancy). In contrast, sustained reductions in **Estonia**, **Georgia**, **Lithuania**, and **Slovakia** were linked to long-term reforms and strengthened alternatives to custody.

Prison administrations highlighted that overcrowding is not solely a matter of bed spaces: even below 100% occupancy, limited access to healthcare, education, reintegration activities, or mental health support can create significant pressure, leading to staff fatigue and safety concerns. The report also outlines the range of measures currently used across Europe, grouped into three levels: immediate operational steps such as emergency transfers, shared cells, and temporary capacity increases; medium-term estate-level approaches including allocation strategies, non-custodial sanctions, progressive execution, and structured temporary or early release; and long-term strategic actions focused on forecasting, infrastructure planning, collaborative governance, and contributing to broader penal policy.

The report highlights that there is no single solution to prison overcrowding. Sustainable progress depends on combining multiple measures in parallel. Infrastructure expansion, while often necessary, is insufficient without proportional investment in staffing, activity spaces, and reintegration programmes.

Several administrations are now using 10-year forecasts for population and staffing needs, strengthening anticipatory governance and long-term planning.

The report does not prescribe policy but provides an overview of current practice within existing mandates. Strategies vary across Europe depending on available resources, legal frameworks, and political context. The aim is to support shared learning and facilitate informed dialogue among prison administrators, policymakers, and partners across the justice chain.

EuroPris encourages all stakeholders to engage with the findings and contribute to broader discussions on reforms that support sustainable and humane prison capacity management.

The full *From Challenges to Solutions: Mapping European Strategies on Prison Overcrowding* report is available on the EuroPris website, [see here](#).

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