

*Data extracted in April 2025.
Planned article update: April 2026.*

Highlights

"In 2023, the number of prisoners was higher than the official prison capacity in 13 countries. "

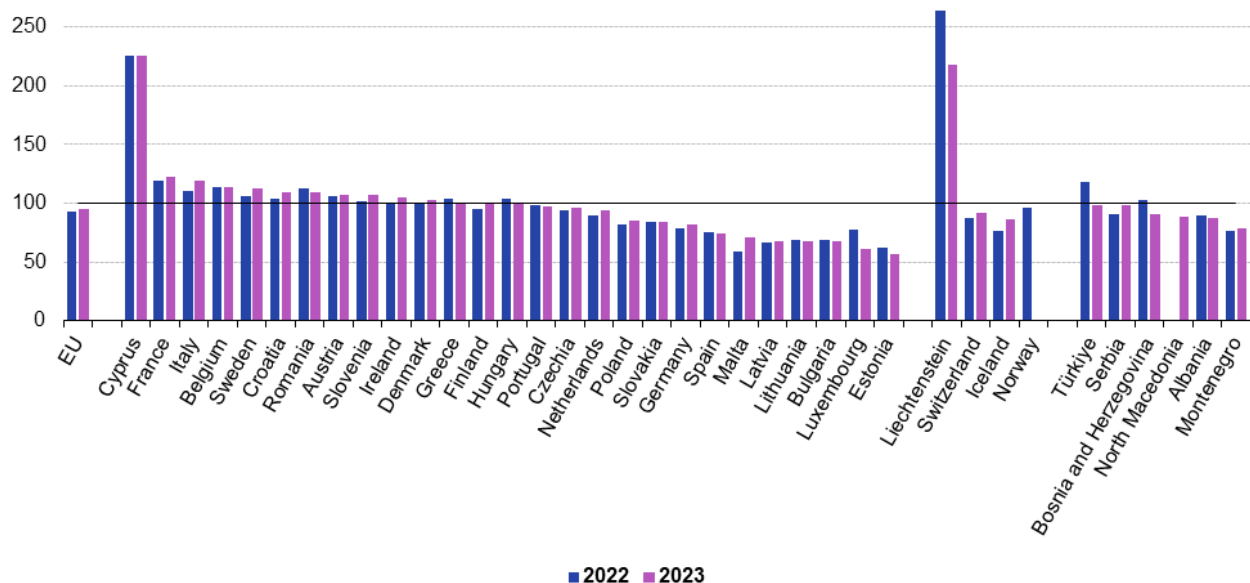
"In 2023, there was 1 prison employee per 1.9 adult prisoners in the EU. "

This article presents European statistics on [prison](#) occupancy.

13 countries had overcrowded cells in 2023

In 2023, 14 countries had some extra capacity, or "empty cells", while 13 countries had overcrowded cells. The highest overcrowding EU rates in 2023 were observed in Cyprus (226.2), France (122.9), and Italy (119.1), followed by Belgium (113.2) and Sweden (112.6). The lowest rate was found in Estonia (56.2), Luxembourg (60.8) and Bulgaria (67.7) (Figure 1).

Prison occupancy rate, 2022-2023



Notes: In the EU total, Cyprus capacity is estimated with last available year, due to missing data. For Liechtenstein, longer term imprisonments are usually carried out in Austrian penal institutions.

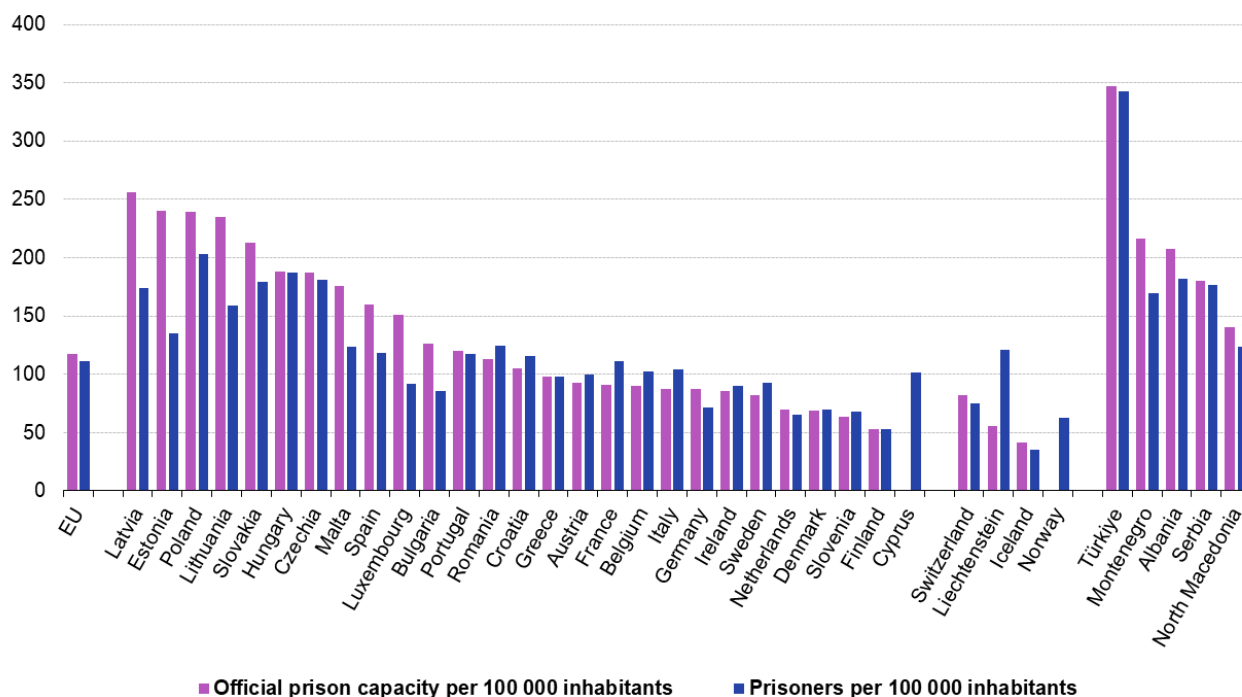
eurostat 

Figure 1: Prison occupancy rate, 2022-2023 Source: Eurostat (crim_pris_cap)

1 prison place per 849 inhabitants in the EU in 2023

In 2023, there was 1 prison place per 849 inhabitants in the EU, or 118 places in prison per 100 000 inhabitants. This value varies considerably from one EU country to another. It is higher in Eastern and Baltic countries especially in Latvia (256.1), Estonia (240.0), Poland (239.2), Lithuania (234.9), and Slovakia (212.9). Prison places per 100 000 inhabitants are much lower in Finland (53.2), Slovenia (63.5), and Denmark (68.4) (Figure 2).

Prison capacity per 100 000 inhabitants, 2023



Note: In the EU total, Cyprus capacity is estimated with last available year, due to missing data.

Source: Eurostat [crim_pris_cap]

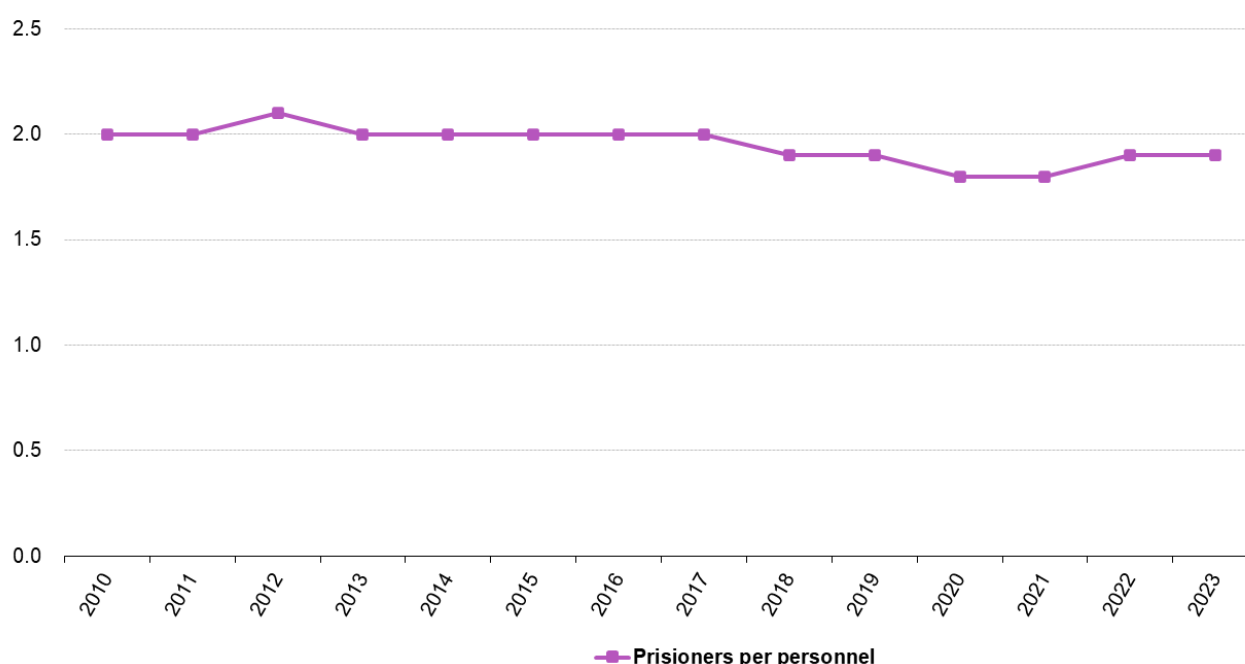
eurostat 

Figure 2: Prison capacity per 100 000 inhabitants, 2023 Source: Eurostat (crim_pris_cap)

1.9 prisoners per prison personnel in the EU in 2023

Between 2010 and 2017, there were, on average, about 2 prisoners for every prison employee in the EU. In 2018, this ratio dropped slightly to 1.9, mainly because the number of prison personnel increased. During 2020 and 2021, the ratio fell further to 1.8, likely due to COVID-19 measures that reduced the prison population. However, by 2022 and 2023, the ratio returned to 1.9 (Figure 3).

Number of prisoners per prison personnel in adult prisons, 2010-2023



Note: Adjusted sum for prisoners and personnel, due to occasionally missing figures.

Source: Eurostat [crim_pris_age], [crim_just_job]

eurostat 

Figure 3: Number of prisoners per personnel in adult prisons, 2010-2023 Source: Eurostat (crim_pris_age) (crim_just_job)

Source data for tables and graphs

- [Prison occupancy statistics figures](#)

Data sources

The occupancy rate for a prison is the number of prisoners relative to the official capacity (design capacity) of that prison, multiplied by 100. Overcrowding can be formally defined as any occupancy rate exceeding 100. However, practical adaptations in the prison can make the safe operational capacity higher than the official capacity. On the one hand, a minor or temporary excess does not necessarily indicate an overcrowding problem. On the other hand, measuring overcrowding in a country with several different prisons may hide local overcrowding.

Data sources for prison statistics are national authorities such as prison administration or the national statistical institute. Eurostat collects prison data together with the yearly UN global crime statistics. All results presented in this article are based on official figures.

When EU totals are calculated to indicate an overall trend, missing figures for countries are estimated with the last available year (of the same country). However, the EU totals presented in this article are not disseminated in the Eurostat database. The national figures are presented in the [web database](#) as reported (no adjustments).

Eurostat updates the web database when countries send new figures, but [older statistical articles](#) may refer to previously reported figures.

Context

In general, each country is responsible for its own criminal laws, criminal justice policies, as well as specifications for relevant statistics. Typically, official statistics on crime and criminal justice are made for administrative purposes and used by national authorities.

Prison statistics are part of official statistics on crime and criminal justice, relating indirectly to crime occurrence and the performance of the criminal justice system.

The number of prisoners (counted at the end of a year) depends on:

- the number in previous year
- how many were convicted and actually imprisoned during the year
- how many left prison during the year: released, pardoned, died, escaped, etc.

The trend in prisoner number depends on:

- how many crimes are brought to court
- how many are convicted, and actually sentenced to prison
- length of sentences received, and the actual duration
- alternative sanctions, early release, amnesties, pardons, etc.
- law changes, for which types of crime imprisonment is prescribed, and for how long

Notes

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