



Présidence de / Presidency of
MONACO
Conseil de l'Europe / Council of Europe
05/2026 - 11/2026



Ending prison overcrowding European perspectives and solutions

European Conference, 13 October 2026
Room 10, Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg

*Conference organised by the Directorate General
Human Rights and Rule of Law of the Council of Europe,
within the framework of the Presidency of Monaco of the Committee of Ministers*

The persistence of prison overcrowding in many member states of the Council of Europe is a major structural challenge, compromising respect for human rights and putting in danger the functioning of prison systems and their rehabilitation objectives. Despite the existing standards and efforts made at national and European levels, overcrowding rates remain high, revealing profound problems linked to criminal justice policies, the excessive use of pre-trial detention and the underutilisation of alternatives to detention.

This conference, organised by the Departments of “deprivation of liberty” and of execution of judgments of the European Court of Human rights (ECHR), aims to provide a platform for dialogue between public authorities responsible for tackling prison overcrowding (such as criminal justice administrations, prosecutors, judges, prison and probation services) and relevant experts. The objective is to discuss the challenges and structural causes of overcrowding, share best practices and identify concrete solutions in line with Council of Europe standards, in particular the recommendations of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) and the case law of the European Court of Human Rights (the Court).

Welcoming participants | 08:45 – 09:15

European challenges regarding overcrowding | 09:15 – 10:45

- State of play of prison overcrowding in Europe and the role of the Council of Europe | *Clare Ovey, Director of Human Rights, DGI, Council of Europe*
- Intervention by the *United Nation's Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment* | *Pau PÉREZ-SALES*
- Causes, consequences and solutions to prison overcrowding | *Benjamin Monnery, Lecturer in Economics at Paris-Nanterre University, Founder of the [French Observatory of Disparities in Criminal Justice](#), France*
- Causes and factors of capacity problems in the Dutch prison system – lessons from the past, current challenges and structural measures for the future | *Maaïke DE BOOIS, Ministry of Justice and Security, the Netherlands*

Discussion with the audience | 30 minutes

Coffee Break and Group Photo | 10:45 – 11:15

Examples of prison deflation | 11:15 – 12:30

- The Spanish experience | *Borja IBANEZ FERNANDEZ, Deputy Inspector, General Secretariat of Penitentiary Institutions*
- The German experience | *Jochen GOERDELER, Federal Ministry of Justice and Editor-in-chief of [Forum Strafvollzug](#) on prison law and affairs*
- The Bulgarian experience | *Maria DIMITROVA, Agent of the Government before the European Court of Human Rights, Ministry of Justice*

Discussion with the audience | 30 minutes

Lunch Break | 12:30 – 14:00

Parallel session 1: pre-trial detention: too frequent? too long? Which alternatives? | 14:00 – 15:30

Discussion led by Marie-Aude Beernaert, Professor of Criminal Procedural Law at the University of Louvain-la-Neuve, Chair of the Belgian Prison Council and member of the Belgian Commission on the Enforcement of Sentences

- Case study from Portugal | *Catarina OLIVEIRA, Consultant, Ministry of Justice, Legislative Policy and Strategic Planning*

- Case study from Poland | *Maria EJCHART, Deputy Minister of Justice responsible for the prison system*
- Case study from Germany | *Simon PSCHORR, State Attorney, Spokesperson of the penal branch of the New Judges' association Germany*

Parallel Session 2: the determination of sentences and their length and alternatives to imprisonment: which challenge(s)? which effective solution(s)? | 14:00 – 15:30

Discussion led by Sofia Ciufoletti, Academic researcher, member of the Altro Diritto at the University of Florence and Secretary General of the European Prison Litigation Network

- Case study from France | *Céline FILLIOL, Magistrate, Directorate of Criminal Affairs and Pardons, Ministry of Justice*
- Case study from Estonia | *Rait KUUSE, Deputy Secretary-General for Prisons, Ministry of Justice*
- Case study from Norway | *Gisle JOHNSON, Magistrate of a Court of appeal*

Parallel session 3: Enforcement of sentences and releases from prison: which challenge(s)? which lasting solution(s)? | 14:00 – 15:30

Discussion led by Benjamin Monnery, Lecturer in Economics at Paris-Nanterre University and Founder of the French Observatory of Disparities in Criminal Justice

- Case study from Romania | *Ioana MORAR, Deputy Director of the Prison Administration*
- Case study from Lithuania | *Ervin ZAKREVSKI, Senior adviser, Criminal justice group, Ministry of Justice*
- Case study from Finland | *Aki SAARINEN, Prison and Probation Service*
- Case study from Italy | *Adriana CARAVELLI, Sentence enforcement judge of Bologna*

Coffee Break | 15:30 – 16:00

Conclusion: Solutions do exist: how to implement them? | 16:00 – 17:30

- Debriefing of the three parallel sessions | 30 minutes
- Discussion with the audience | 30 minutes
- Closing remarks by *Alan MITCHELL, President of the CPT* and *Samuel Vuelta Simon, Secretary of State for Justice, Monaco*

Objective: The conference aims to provide a forum for experts to share the challenges they face, their experiences and good practices, whilst offering concrete and useful guidance. This space for dialogue is designed to support the search for effective short-, medium- and long-term solutions, at every stage of the criminal justice process, with a view to curbing the rise in prison population and tackling prison overcrowding.

It is envisaged to organise a follow-up event before the end of 2027, for example an online roundtable to keep participants informed of the measures taken and progress made following the conference.

Target audience: The conference aims to bring together practitioners from member states, representing the prison administration, rehabilitation and probation services, criminal law or criminal policy departments, the judiciary (judges, prosecutors), as well as the academic community and Council of Europe experts, in order to create opportunities for exchange.

Organisation: As the fight against prison overcrowding requires a systemic approach and concerted action by all stakeholders, national delegations are invited to bring a variety of experts to the conference (prosecutors, judges, criminal justice administration, prison and probation services and/or parliamentarians).

In the morning, the conference will be held in a plenary session. In the afternoon, it will continue with three parallel working sessions on more specific topics to enable participants to discuss, in greater detail, the measures that can be taken at the various relevant stages of the criminal justice system (pre-trial detention, sentencing, enforcement of sentences and releases from prison). The results of these discussions will be presented at the conference's closing session. Simultaneous interpretation in French and English will be provided throughout the conference. Passive online participation will also be possible.