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# Ending prison overcrowding – European perspectives and solutions

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

*Conference organised by the Directorate General of Human Rights and the 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 and effective short, medium and long term solutions, at every stage of the criminal justice process, 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), in order to curb the rise in prison population, reduce and eliminate prison overcrowding in Europe.

## 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*
- Overcrowding: cumulative Harm and Torture - Rethinking the threshold of ill-treatment in detention | *Pau Pérez-Sales*, *Special Rapporteur on Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, United Nations*
- 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 | *Maaike 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*