KEY OBSERVATIONS Prison

PRIORITY TOPICS

CONDITIONS OF DETENTION – Accelerate the implementation of the set of measures stipulated by the so called *Piano Carceri* aimed at the reduction of prison overcrowding

SECURITY – Effectively implement a real dynamic security approach in the supervision of inmates by prison staff

CONDITIONS OF DETENTION – Improve the conditions of detention, including access to purposeful activities, in the prisons visited, and provide clear information on the plans for Florence Sollicciano Prison

WOMEN – Develop a gender-specific approach towards women in prison

CHRONIC ISSUES

SEGREGATION AND ISOLATION MEASURES – Abolish the measure of court imposed solitary confinement for lifers or *"isolamento diurno"* enshrined in Article 72 of the Criminal Code

HEALTHCARE – Address the regional disparities in the provision of prison healthcare

GOOD PRACTICES

PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE AND INDEPENDENCE – Promotion of opportunities for work in prison by attracting external actors and investors, through a system of fiscal relaxation (*Legge Smuraglia*)

HEALTHCARE – Good provision of prison healthcare at Florence Sollicciano and Genoa Marassi Prisons in terms of screening upon admission, psychiatric care and substance use

THE CPT AND ITALY

Italy ratified the ECPT in 1988, and the Committee's first visit took place in 1992.

Since ratification, the CPT has carried out 17 country visits to Italy– 8 periodic and 9 ad hoc – including 75 visits to police establishments, 56 to prisons, 17 to psychiatric institutions, 4 social welfare and educational-correctional establishments and 23 to immigration detention facilities.

All the visit reports have been published. Italy did not accept the automatic publication of the visit reports.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of the September 2025 ad hoc visit to Italy was to examine the treatment and conditions of detention of persons held in a number of prison establishments and to assess the way the Italian authorities are tackling the serious challenges facing the prison system, notably prison overcrowding, staff numbers and training, the high number of deaths in prison, and the quality of healthcare provided to prisoners.

The overwhelming majority of the prisoners met by the CPT stated that they had been treated correctly by prison staff. However, a few allegations of ill-treatment were received, notably at Florence Sollicciano, Foggia and Genoa Marassi Prisons consisting of punches, kicks and slaps to various body parts by members of the penitentiary police in the context of critical events (such as episodes of self-harm, prison riots, inter-prisoner violence). The DAP and the senior management in each prison should remain vigilant and ensure that custodial staff understand that all forms of ill-treatment are illegal and will be dealt with accordingly.

The report notes that the phenomenon of inter-prisoner violence and intimidation remains a persistent feature within the Italian prison system. In principle, inmates involved in episodes of inter-prisoner violence were promptly separated by prison staff, received adequate medical care, were swiftly accommodated in another section under Article 32 of the Penitentiary Regulations (R.P.) and, in many cases, transferred to another prison establishment for reasons of order and security. However, issues such as the lack of presence of call bells in most cells, the consistent shortage of custodial officers present on the modules are identified as key contributing factors to inter-prisoner violence. The Italian authorities should put in place a comprehensive strategy for preventing inter-prisoner violence and intimidation through the promotion of a real dynamic security approach by prison staff.

Prison overcrowding represents another feature of the Italian prison system. At the time of the visit, nearly one quarter of inmates were being accommodated in cells affording them only between 3 and 4 m2 of living space each. The Italian authorities should ensure that the CPT minimum standard of 4 m2 of living space in multi-occupancy cells per person is met in practice. Further, the CPT emphasises the importance of promoting the full range of non-custodial measures available to reduce the number of persons held in prisons while also recognising the necessity to invest in upgrading the prison infrastructure.

In terms of material conditions of detention, these varied in the establishments visited and even within each prison, notably in light of the level of prison overcrowding. The poorest conditions were found in the so-called “Article 32 Sections” as well as in those accommodating prisoners under protection. The situation at Florence Sollicciano Prison is particularly dire, with its extremely serious structural deficiencies and continual maintenance challenges resulting from constant water ingress, with high levels of humidity and consequent damp, mould on walls, flaking ceilings and detaching plaster. The Committee invites the Italian authorities to consider the long-term viability of any refurbishment and wishes to be informed about the operational plans for the Florence Sollicciano Prison.

With regard to the regime, the report acknowledges the efforts being made by the Italian authorities to promote additional work opportunities provided by external investors within prison establishments (in accordance with the principles of the so-called Legge Smuraglia). Nevertheless, the Italian authorities need to develop further the range of programmes offered to prisoners to ensure that they can offer a structured day of activities is on offer in the prisons visited. The report emphasises the importance of a programme of customised activities for prisoners subject to a separation measure under Article 32 of the R.P., with the aim of facilitating their transition into ordinary sections. The CPT again reiterates the need to reform the harsh, restrictive measures applied to inmates subject to the so-called regime of "sorveglianza particolare" under Article 14bis of the R.P. (specifically, being accommodated in cells devoid of furniture, absence of treatment activities and the lack of proactive and regular psychological support on offer). It also calls for the anachronistic punitive nature of the so-called court-imposed solitary confinement for lifers, or "isolamento diurno", to be addressed, as it lacks a penological justification.

Despite the clear commitment and constructive working culture of custodial staff, the findings of the 2025 visit reveals that Italian prisons continue to lack a functioning dynamic security approach in the supervision of inmates as set out in the European Prison Rules. Custodial staff in principle remained inclined to a static security approach whereby they remain in their offices outside the sections and only react to incidents. A more operational approach for preventing incidents and maintaining order based on proactive communication, trust-building and daily engagement with prisoners as a means to reduce tension and improve safety needs to be introduced. In this respect, the Committee takes positive note of the DAP Circular of 13 October 2025, which stresses the importance of ensuring a stronger presence of custodial staff and educators within the accommodation areas of prisons and recommends the promotion and implementation of a real dynamic security approach.

As regards the quality of prison healthcare provided to prisoners, the report identifies significant regional disparities noting particular deficiencies in the prison establishments visited in the regions of Campania and Puglia (in particular in terms of inadequate staffing levels and facilities, delays in the access to psychiatric care and in the review of fitness for detention of vulnerable inmates). This was in contrast to the situation observed at Florence Sollicciano and Genoa Marassi Prisons, where there was an excellent provision in terms of facilities, staffing levels and appropriate governance of healthcare. In the course of the visit, the CPT also conducted an assessment of the measures adopted in relation to the prevention of suicides in the prisons visited and concluded that there was a robust multi-disciplinary approach on the screening of prisoners, with examples of comprehensive risk assessment procedures, risk stratification, involvement of custodial staff and emergency protocols. However, the CPT found that the effectiveness of such anti-suicide protocols could be undermined by a combination of prison overcrowding, poor healthcare staffing and the lack of a national strategy for the reduction and removal of ligature points within prisons (notably those on windows, beds, cell gates and light fittings), and the continued absence of call bells within the majority of prison cells.

With regard to women in prison, the CPT reiterates the need for the Italian authorities to incorporate a specific gender-based approach towards female prisoners and the need for women's sections within large male establishments to have a distinct prison management of women prisoners. Further issues raised in the report concern a more thorough compilation of reports on the use of force by staff against inmates, a review of the expediency and proportionality of strip-searches and a review of the use of pepper spray in prison, notably within confined spaces with insufficient ventilation. The Italian authorities should also ensure that all prisoners can make a short phone call to a family member upon admission to prison. Finally, the capabilities of supervisory judges to deal with their workload, notably in terms of processing of requests for alternative measures and complaints from prisoners, need to be increased.