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Meeting of the SPACE National Correspondents

Improving Data Quality and Shaping the Future of the Council of Europe Penal Statistics (SPACE)

Programme

Monday 14 September 2026

Room G03
Agora Building
Council of Europe, Strasbourg

Organised by the Council for Penological Co-operation (PC-CP)
and the University of Lausanne

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Background

The SPACE I survey has achieved two consecutive years of 100% participation across all 51 prison administrations of the 46 Council of Europe member states. This milestone creates an opportunity to move beyond data collection and toward data quality improvement and strategic development. This meeting aims to bring together the national correspondents who make SPACE possible, to discuss practical challenges, share solutions, and shape the survey's future direction.

Practical information

Languages: English and French (simultaneous interpretation)

Pre-meeting materials: Each correspondent will receive their country's "anomaly profile" (Session 3) two weeks before the meeting, along with a brief questionnaire on data collection practices (to inform Sessions 1 and 2).

Post-meeting deliverables: Summary report with action points, revised questionnaire guidance where applicable, and updated timeline for data gap closure.

Agenda

9.00 - 9.15	**Welcome and opening**
9.15 - 10.00	**Reshaping SPACE**
SESSION 1: DEFINITION HARMONISATION	
10.00 - 11.00	**The admissions puzzle: Toward a common counting standard**
11.00 - 11.30	***Coffee Break***
11.30 - 12.30	**Classifying inmates: Pre-trial, sentenced, and everything in between**
12.30 - 14.00	***Lunch Break***
SESSION 2: CLOSING DATA GAPS	
14.00 - 14.45	**Foreign inmates: Closing the legal residence gap**
14.45 - 15.30	**Age data: Building the longitudinal foundation**
15.30 - 16.00	***Coffee Break***
SESSION 3: DATA QUALITY AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS	
16.00 - 16.45	**Catching errors before publication: Anomaly review as part of the validation procedure**
16.45 - 17.15	**Looking ahead: New indicators and emerging needs**
17.15 - 17.30	**Closing remarks and next steps**

9.00 - 9.15 | Welcome and opening

- Welcome by Hugh Chetwynd
- Overview of the day's objectives by Marcelo F. Aebi
- Brief presentation of the 2025 Key Findings: what the data tell us, where the gaps remain

9.15 - 10.00 | Reshaping SPACE

Chairs: Marcelo F. Aebi / Louise Riondel

Problem: The data published each year is approximately 16-18 months old (e.g. the 2025 SPACE I report published in May 2026 provides data on prison populations as of 31 January 2025 and prison movements throughout 2024). This creates an impression that the information is “outdated” and reduces the timeliness and impact of the publication.

Format: Structured discussion

1. *What are the barriers to the timely communication of key indicators?*
2. *Which indicators could be collected by the end of Q1*?

Desired outcome: Identification of key indicators from 31 January of year of publication which could be published by end of Q2 of the same year. The statutory deadline for publication is 31 July, as set by the Committee of Ministers.

SESSION 1: DEFINITION HARMONISATION

10.00 - 11.00 | The admissions puzzle: Toward a common counting standard

Chair: Marcelo F. Aebi

Problem: Eight prison administrations currently use definitions of “admissions” that diverge from the SPACE I standard, requiring their exclusion from comparative flow analyses every year. This reduces the analytical power of the dataset and limits the policy conclusions that can be drawn from flow indicators.

Format: Structured discussion

1. *What SPACE asks for* - Brief recap of the standard definition
2. *What the non-standard PAs actually count* - Short presentations by correspondents from Switzerland, Scotland, Sweden, Belgium, Netherlands, Czechia, Poland, and Malta explaining their national counting rules and why they differ (3 min each)
3. *Bridging the gap* - Facilitated discussion: Are there practical adjustments that could bring more PAs into alignment? Could supplementary data fields allow estimation of the standard indicator?

Desired outcome: Identification of PAs where alignment is feasible, and a concrete action plan for achieving it. Where alignment is not possible, agreement on supplementary data that would allow estimation.

11.30 - 12.30 | Classifying inmates: Pre-trial, sentenced, and everything in between

Chair: Edoardo Cocco

Problem: Countries differ significantly in how they classify inmates as “pre-trial” or “sentenced”. Some reclassify detainees as sentenced immediately after first-instance conviction; others wait until final judgment. This variation directly affects the comparability of pre-trial detention rates, which is a politically sensitive indicator.

Format: Working groups by legal tradition
- Group A: Countries using the “final sentence” criterion
- Group B: Countries using the “first conviction” criterion
- Group C: Countries with other systems

Each group maps out exactly when reclassification occurs in their system (20 min), then presents to the plenary (8 min per group). Followed by facilitated discussion on whether a harmonised definition is achievable, or whether a dual-reporting system (both classifications) is preferable (16 min).

Reference document: Table 8 of the SPACE I report (classification systems by country)

Desired outcome: A clearer mapping of national practices and, ideally, agreement on a standardised reporting protocol or a dual-classification approach

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SESSION 2: CLOSING DATA GAPS

14.00 - 14.45 | Foreign inmates: Closing the legal residence gap

Chair: Marcelo F. Aebi

Problem: Only 16 of 51 prison administrations provided data on the legal residence status of foreign inmates. This is arguably the single most important missing variable for interpreting the foreign inmate data: without it, the category “foreign inmates” conflates settled immigrants with tourists, undocumented migrants, and transnational offenders - a confusion with significant policy and political implications.

Format: Problem-solving session
1. *Why is this data missing?* - Quick poll of correspondents: Is the data not collected at all? Collected but not in a compatible format? Collected but access is restricted?
2. *Models that work* - Presentations by correspondents from PAs that do report this data: What does your system look like? How is residence status recorded at intake?
3. *Feasibility assessment* - For PAs that don't currently report: What would it take to start? What are the legal, technical, or administrative barriers?
4. *Action plan* - Identification of “quick wins” (PAs that have the data but don't report it) vs. longer-term development needs

Desired outcome: A realistic roadmap for increasing coverage from 16 PAs to at least 25-30 within two survey cycles.

14.45 - 15.30 | Age data: Building the longitudinal foundation

Chair: Edoardo Cocco

Problem: SPACE I began collecting disaggregated age data in 2020 and expanded the categories in 2024. Coverage is improving (41 PAs for average age, 44 for the 65+ category) but remains incomplete. With the aging prison population emerging as a policy concern across Europe, consistent age data will be essential for longitudinal analysis.

Format: Technical workshop

1. *Current coverage review* - Which PAs report which age categories, and which don't?
2. *Barriers to reporting* - For non-reporting PAs: Is age data simply not recorded? Recorded in incompatible categories? Available only in aggregate?
3. *Category harmonisation* - Discussion of whether the current age brackets (18–25, 26–49, 50–64, 65+) are optimal, or whether finer granularity (e.g., 65–74, 75+) would be useful for policy purposes
4. *Quality check exercise* - Review of anomalous year-on-year changes in age data across countries

Desired outcome: Agreement on target coverage levels and any needed adjustments to age categories for the 2026 questionnaire.

SESSION 3: DATA QUALITY AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

16.00 - 16.45 | Catching errors before publication: Anomaly review as part of the validation procedure

Chair: Marcelo F. Aebi

Problem: Year-on-year data anomalies (e.g., a country's female inmate share dropping from 5.4% to 2.1% then rebounding to 5.7%) sometimes reach publication before being identified as data entry errors or unexplained methodological changes. Early detection would improve both data quality and the credibility of the survey.

Format: Interactive exercise

Each correspondent receives a workbook containing sixteen indicators for their administration, covering 2020–2025 for stock indicators and up to 2024 for flow indicators. Annual changes are selected using relative and indicator-specific absolute thresholds; changes from zero, and changes measured across a missing year, are assessed on their absolute size. Deaths, suicides and escapes are reviewed as full available series. Correspondents confirm values, propose corrections or explain changes using structured response fields. The annotated files are discussed during the session, and the SPACE team validates proposed corrections before updating the data.

Desired outcome: Immediate identification of data anomalies for correction in the 2025 dataset, and establishment of an annual “anomaly review” step in the SPACE workflow.

16.45 - 17.15 | Looking ahead: New indicators and emerging needs

Chairs: Marcelo F. Aebi & Edoardo Cocco

Open discussion on potential additions or modifications to the SPACE questionnaires, guided by three questions:

1. **What should we start collecting?** Are there indicators that would be valuable for policy or research but are not currently covered? Possible candidates include: mental health prevalence, educational programmes, digital monitoring (electronic tagging), recidivism proxies, or cost per inmate breakdowns.
2. **What should we stop asking?** Are there questions in the current questionnaire that are consistently unanswered, poorly understood, or no longer relevant?
3. **What should we change?** Are there questions that are frequently misinterpreted or where the wording could be improved?

Desired outcome: A shortlist of proposed changes for consideration in the 2027 questionnaires revision.

17.15 - 17.30 | Closing remarks and next steps

- Summary of action points from each session
- Timeline for follow-up
- Closing by the Council of Europe