

26th Council of Europe Conference of Directors of Prison and Probation Services  
20-21 September 2021 | Funchal

# Prisons and Prisoners in Europe in Pandemic Times: An evaluation of the short-term impact of the COVID-19 on prison populations

Mélanie M. Tiago (MLaw)

# Background

March 2020: Populations' lockdown to reduce the spread of COVID-19 pandemic



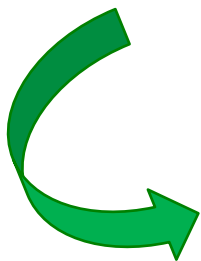
Impact on...

...the extent of crime...



... and indirectly on...

...the size of prison population...



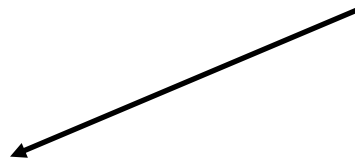
**SPACE I COVID-19 project**

# SPACE I COVID-19 project

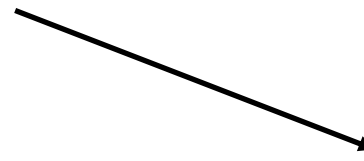
**Aim:** to measure the side effects of the pandemic on the prison populations in the Council of Europe member states

## How?

1. Addition of few extra questions to the simplified SPACE I questionnaire sent every spring
2. Two follow-up questionnaires sent in the following months



The **short-term** impact of COVID-19



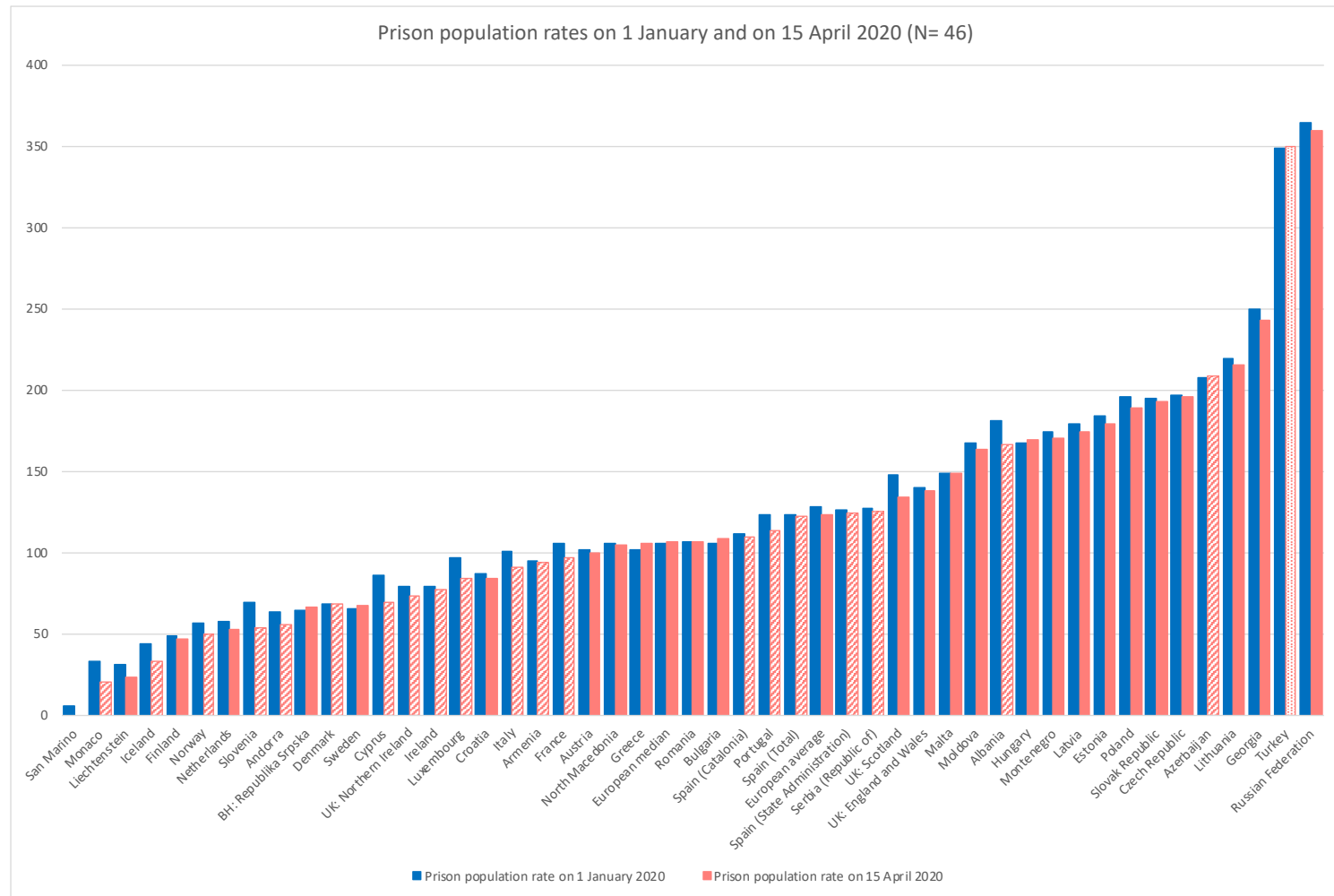
The **medium-term** impact of COVID-19

# Prisons and Prisoners in Europe in Pandemic Times: An evaluation of the short-term impact of the COVID-19 on prison populations

# The short-term impact of the COVID-19 on prison populations

- The first phase of *SPACE I – COVID-19 project*
- Comparison of the situation on 1st January 2020 to that on 15th April 2020
  - % changes that can be explained by releases related to the COVID-19 pandemic
  - COVID-19 Infections among inmates and staff
- Participation rate: 92%

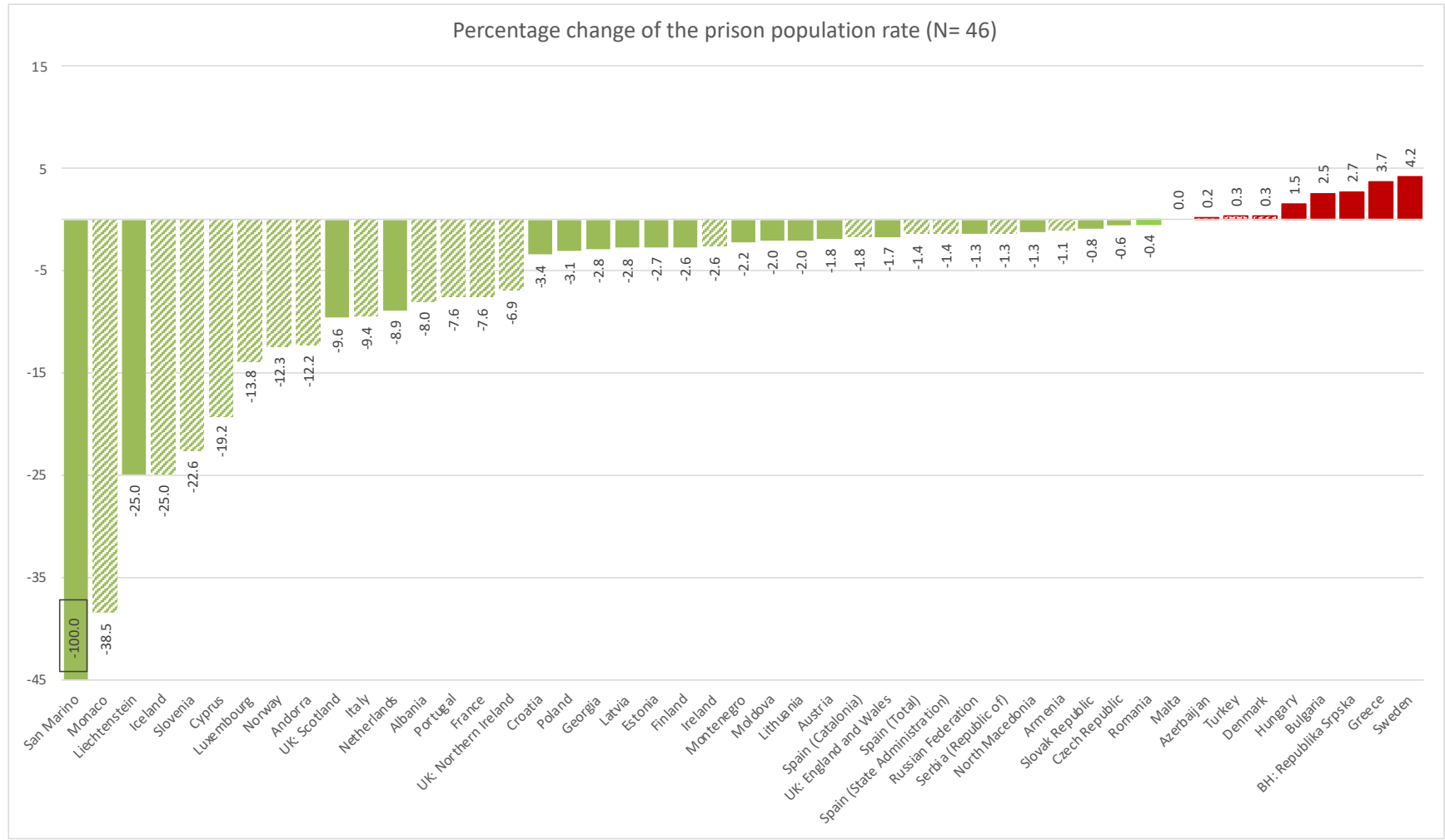
# Prisons and Prisoners on 1<sup>st</sup> January and 15<sup>th</sup> April 2020



# Prisons and Prisoners on 1<sup>st</sup> January and 15<sup>th</sup> April 2020

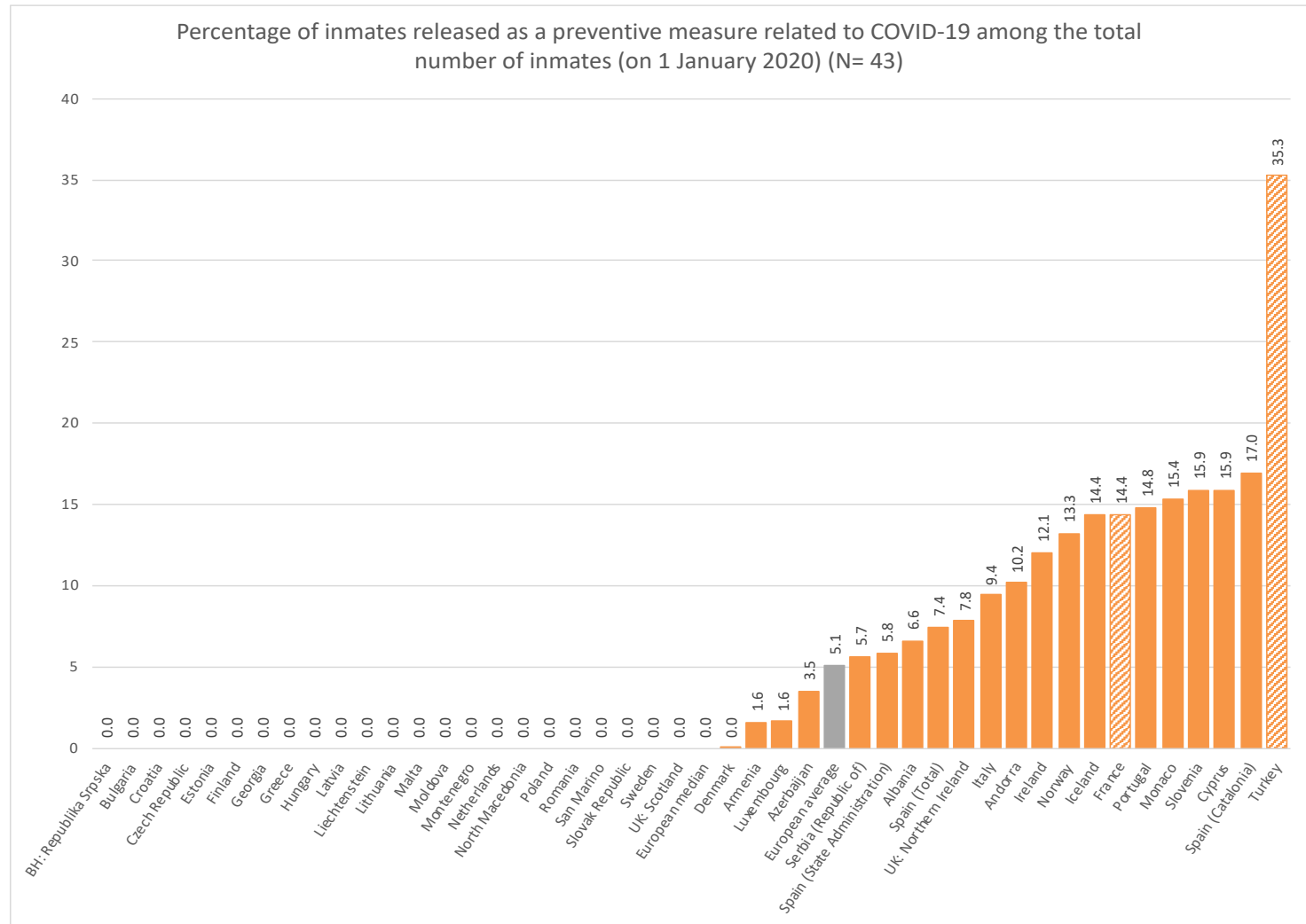
	1 <sup>st</sup> January	15 <sup>th</sup> April	
Number of inmates (n= 46 PA)	1,390,683	1,364,643	↔
Prison population rate per 100'000 inhabitants (n= 46 PA; median)	106	106	↔

# Prisons and Prisoners on 1<sup>st</sup> January and 15<sup>th</sup> April 2020

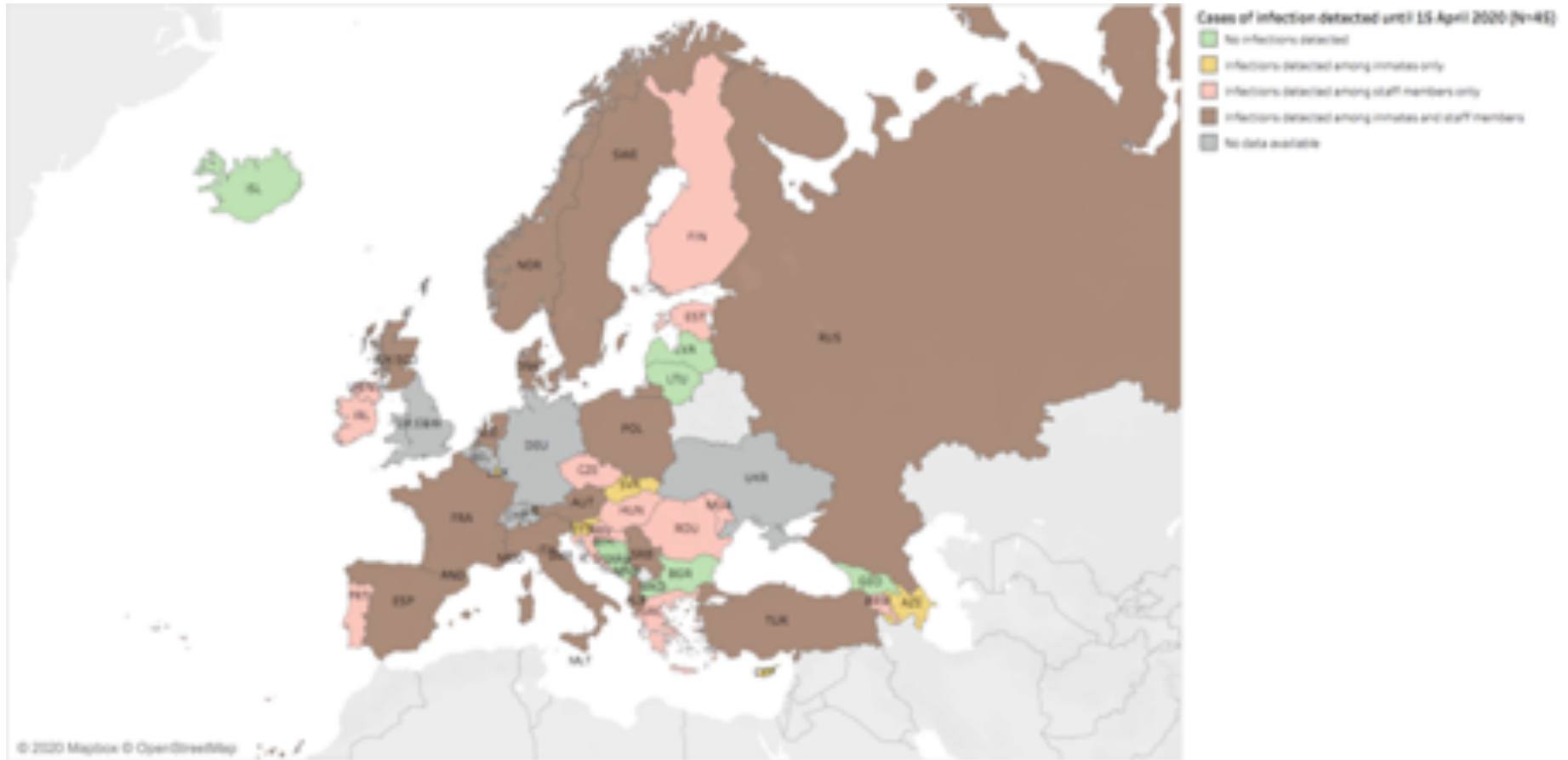




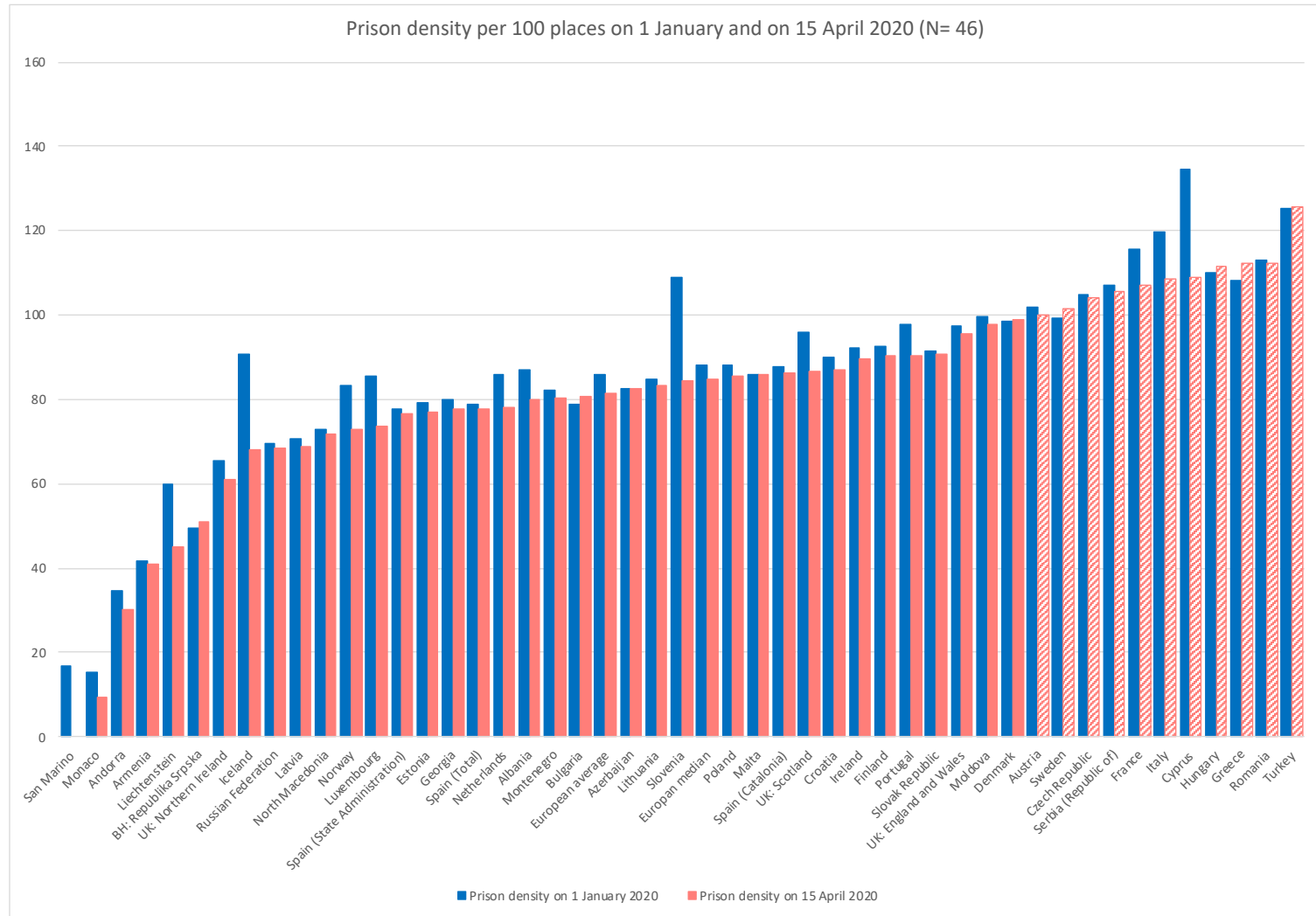
# The impact of COVID-19 on prison populations



# The impact of COVID-19 on prison populations



# Prison density and overcrowding



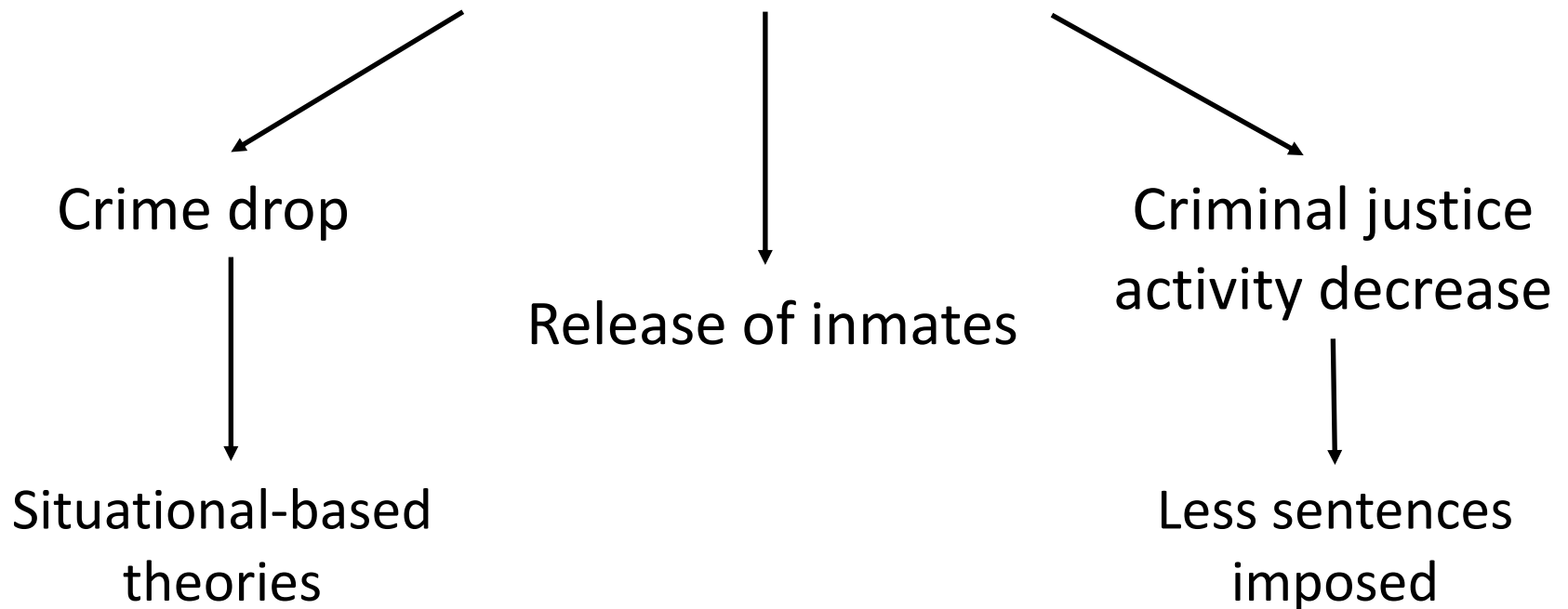
# Summary of findings: principal results

## From 1<sup>st</sup> January to 15<sup>th</sup> April:

- Decreasing or stable prison population rates;
- More than 128,000 inmates were released in 20 member states as a preventive measure to reduce the spread of COVID-19;
- Only a few prison administrations were not affected by COVID-19 infections.

# Summary of findings: Explaining trends

**How can the decreasing/stable trend be explained?**



---

# Thank you for your attention!

---



Marcelo.Aebi@unil.ch  
Melanie.Tiago@unil.ch



[www.unil.ch/space](http://www.unil.ch/space)