

# COVID-19: WHAT IS HAPPENING IN EUROPEAN PRISONS?

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The following information on prisons in different European countries has been collected in the last few weeks thanks to the work of the European Prison Observatory members. Please note that the situation is constantly changing and that this information might already be out of date.

The information published here and the upcoming updates will be available on the [European Prison Observatory website](#).

**WHO/Europe** has published an interim guidance on how to deal with the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in prisons and other places of detention, entitled "Preparedness, prevention and control of COVID-19 in prisons and other places of detention". The guidance can be found on the WHO page: [Preventing COVID-19 outbreak in prisons: a challenging but essential task for authorities](#)

**The CPT** has [published a statement](#) of principles relating to the treatment of persons deprived of their liberty in the context of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

**Penal Reform International** has issued a briefing note on the situation of the outbreak of a novel form of Coronavirus (COVID-19) and prevention measures in prisons and wider impacts of responses to

governments on people in criminal justice systems: Coronavirus: [Healthcare and human rights of people in prison](#)

Other information can be found on the following websites.

The **Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT)** has launched an [information hub](#) of news and resources, including on how different actors in the criminal justice, penitentiary, healthcare and oversight spaces are responding to the COVID-19 situation around the world.

The **European Organization of Prison and Correctional Services (EUOPRIS)** has set up a [webpage](#) where it gathers and shares all regulations/protocols/approaches European Prison Services or related organisations have drafted or taken in order to deal with the Covid-19 virus.

**Prison Insider** collected in a [webpage](#) the measures that countries around the world are taking to guarantee the safety of all prisoners and prison staff and the consequences of the pandemic on the living conditions in prisons.

**World Prison Brief** is compiling a [list](#) of news articles from around the world on COVID-19 and prisons which will be updated regularly.

## ALBANIA

Update: 4/05/20

It has been reported that the prison hospital of the Prison 313 in Tirana has now turned into a COVID-19 hospital which aim is to **treat infected inmates**. 19 people are hospitalised at the moment between detainees and prison officers. The family visits to inmates are still banned in order to avoid the spread of the virus. The first infected detainee has been an Italian male; apparently coronavirus has been transmitted to inmates by prison employees. As of May 4, **sanitation tunnels** have been placed in all the Albanian penitentiary institutions, which means that from this week every person that enters or leaves a prison will be subject to the disinfection process.

## BELGIUM

Update: 5/05/20

As of May 5, 17 Belgian inmates have **tested positive** for coronavirus: two of them are under medical observation while other 9 are on the COVID-19 section of the hospital ward of Bruges Gaol. It has also been confirmed that 62 prison staff members have tested positive for virus and 28 of them are still unable to get back to work. Despite their absence the Prison Service states that there is currently no shortage of staff. Belgian prisoners have produced 61,000 protective masks so far and, according to the Prison Service, A further 17,000 masks are in the process of being made that are intended to be used in the Belgian prisons and by several organisations and institutions. Apparently extra orders are currently being received by the some 50 prisoners that are working in nine temporary textile workshops.

## DENMARK

Update: 5/05/20

The Prison and Probation Service has declared that from May 18 it will be possible for some inmates to **receive visits**. The opening for visits will require strict measures for physical environment and cleaning. Detainees with underage children are now given the first opportunity to have one unsupervised visit every 14 days by their children accompanied by one adult. This also applies to prisoners in the age range 15-17, that can be visited by two close relatives. Inmates who are subject to visitor and letter control will still not be able to visit, even though they have minor



## FRANCE

Update: 6/05/20

As of May 6, 103 inmates and 269 prison staff members have tested positive after contracting COVID-19. Apparently before the **Covid-19 lockdown**, France had more than 72,000 people **behind bars** for a prison capacity of around 61,000, which means an all-time occupancy rate record of 119%. A month later, the prison system authority has stated that emergency measures have **reduced the prison population** by around 10,000 people. Nevertheless, the national secretary of the *Syndicat de la Magistrature*, Anne-Sophie Wallach, has affirmed that 100% prison occupancy doesn't necessarily mean single-occupancy cells. Apparently contingency measures have often aggravated overcrowding issues, in some cases causing inmates to be crammed together in specific wings, in order to create necessary space for suspected coronavirus cases that need to be isolated. There are still facilities where detainees sleep on the floor, living two or three per cell. It has been reported by the OIP (*Observatoire International des Prisons*) that basic protection measures, such as sanitation and social distancing, are almost entirely lacking inside jails and the lack of testing also casts doubt on infection data provided by the French prison authority.

See more updates [here](#).

## GERMANY

Update: 29/04/20

In the Mannheim correctional facility six inmates have [tested positive](#) for COVID-19 and are now in quarantine, isolated in a separate building from the other around 700 prisoners. The first coronavirus case in a German prison was found on April 17 and, consequently, further 44 detainees and some 12 employees have been tested. After a second detainee has tested positive, the prison management and the health department decided to test further prisoners and the prison staff. A total of 167 prisoners have been examined so far and 6 prisoners were tested positive. The inmates who have tested positive were newly detained and they are currently symptom-free and looked after by medical staff. To reduce the risk of infection, the Ministry of Justice had already limited family visits from three hours to the legal minimum of one hour a month in March. At the moment private visits are currently suspended and visits from lawyers and police are allowed only for vital issues that can't be postponed.



## ITALY

Update: 7o/05/20

On 1 May, the **detainees infected with the virus** were 159 and 215 among the penitentiary staff. The number of detainees between the end of February and the May 4th has significantly dropped to 53,139 people. Other 806 people had a leave and home detention has been given to 2,917 people since March 18; 746 of them wear an electronic monitor.

Even though the numbers of the prison population continue to fall, differences between regions (data is updated to 30 April) remain significant. At the end of April there were 53,904 prisoners, 7,326 fewer than at the end of February, a decrease of 12% in two months. Higher drops were registered in Emilia-Romagna (21%), in Lombardy (15.9%), Veneto (10.7%), and Piedmont (8%). Also, there was a significant drop in the number of people in pre-trial detention, 2,494 less than at the end of February, with a decrease of 13.2%, in proportion to the total number of prisoners. The average prison population rate in the country also fell to 107%, but situations such as those in Latina (179.2%), Taranto (187.6%) or Larino (194.7%) remain critical.

It is also interesting to briefly mention the current data on the entrances and releases to and from prison compared to the month of January.

In January, the number of entrances per day was an average of 130 while the average exits per day from prison were the following: 95 releases, 32 house arrests, 10 home detentions and 9 people on probation. In April, the **average number** of entrances per day was much lower: 58 people. The average exits per day from prison in April were higher (aside from the releases) and were the following: 72 releases, 52 house arrests, 68 home detentions and 16 people on probation. This proves that the reduction in the number of people detained is due both to exits from prison and to the lack of new entries which, since the beginning of the pandemic, have decreased considerably.

Moreover, the number of **juveniles** has decreased to 298 on April 24 and in the 17 penal institutions for minors there is at the moment no Covid case. In all of them, juveniles can keep in contact with their families via video calls and, thanks to tablets, in some institutes, educational activities have been provided via e-learning.

## SPAIN

Update: 25/04/20

As of April 25, the Penitentiary Institutions had registered 290 positive cases among Spanish prisons, 240 of them are prison staff while 50 are inmates. On April 25, a second inmate jailed in the Estremera prison in Madrid has **died after contracting COVID-19**. The prison death toll has now raised to 5 people, if we consider also the 3 prison staff members who died of Coronavirus. The inmate was 61 years old and had a serious previous pathology; he had been hospitalised from April 2 until his death. The prison of Estremera in Madrid has turned out to be the

prison center with the highest number of Coronavirus infections: 23 inmates and 8 workers, in addition to the two deceased inmates. At the end of April, the Interior Ministry has started to **mitigate prisons isolation** allowing 13 workshops in 11 prisons to resume their activity. The measure was justified by the "encouraging results" obtained by the measures of containment of the COVID-19 in jail. The textile workshops of five prisons have started to **saw sanitary masks**, but the new extreme hygiene measures will make only 160 prisoners out of the 478 assigned to work to resume their activity. Prisons have also ordered to reinforce cleaning tasks on cells and surfaces; the cleaning staff must work wearing a mask and gloves, in addition to incorporating bleach and other disinfectant products into the usual detergents.

In Spanish prisons family **videocalls** are set with inmates and the other parties are notified. The prisoner is transferred in a booth where they sit in front of a mobile, placed on a tripod. Videoconferences cannot exceed 10 minutes and the mobile phone is disinfected after each call. The first beneficiaries are prisoners with deceased in the family or births, very sick relatives, economic precariousness or other critical situations. The donation of Caritas has also helped to buy 500 euros in prepaid phone cards.

## PORTUGAL

Update: 15/04/20

According to the Superior Council for the Judiciary (CSM), Portugal has released 289 prisoners in execution of law 9/2020 approved in April, which allows courts to **temporary release inmates** in the context of the new coronavirus pandemic, to alleviate the prison system. The Porto Penal Execution Court (TEP) has released 120 detainees, Lisboa 60 inmates, Coimbra 44 others, Évora 35, Madeira 20 prisoners and the Azores 10 prisoners. At first the Minister of Justice, Francisca Van Dunem, estimated the release of approximately 1,200 prisoners from the more than 12,000 jailed in the Portuguese prison system, but later the Minister has stated that they will have to **release 2246 prisoners**. This decision was justified by the Minister with the simple statement that a positive detainee can infect up to 200 people in prisons.

## UKRAINE

Update: 14/04/20

On April 14, the **first case of Coronavirus** infection among inmates has been discovered. The positive prisoner is a woman, arriving in the Chernivtsi prison from a temporary detention facility (ITT) with evidence of an acute respiratory infection. She was immediately hospitalised and the State Criminal Enforcement Service (DCAF) has assured that the inmate did not enter the pre-trial detention center. Therefore, no other cases of coronavirus infection were detected among prisoners or DCAF staff. Prison staff is monitoring daily the actual health status of prisoners, employees, and health care workers.



## UNITED KINGDOM

Update: 27/04/20

As of May 4, 362 inmates have **tested positive** for COVID-19 across 74 English and Welsh prisons, as well as 414 prison staff working in 67 different prisons. Since the start of the coronavirus crisis, 19 prisoners and 6 prison staff members have died after contracting COVID-19. Public Health England has **published a research** where data showed that in prisons there are 1,783 “possible/probable” cases among detainees. Moreover it stated that the most likely source of an outbreak is fresh arrivals into jail; for this reason Éamonn O’Moore, the Health&Justice

director of PHE, has suggested to create special accommodations for new admissions or transfers and to set up shielding units to protect the most vulnerable inmates to be used at least until March 2021. The Ministry of Justice had decided on April 4 to free up to 4,000 detainees who had less than two months left to serve and had passed a risk assessment the justice secretary, but Robert Buckland, Secretary of State for Justice, has revealed on May 4 that only 33 prisoners had been released. In Scotland, as of April 20, a total of 11 prisoners had **tested positive** for COVID-19 and more than 85 are currently self-isolating. The **Scottish Prison Service** has stated that since the start of the outbreak, two inmates have died after contracting the virus. A 59-years-old male prisoners has died on April 13 and the previous week, a 66-years-old male prisoner, who was

being held at HMP Edinburgh, became the first Scottish prisoner to die after contracting the virus. The Government has confirmed that most of Scotland’s **suspected positive inmates** are jailed in a West Lothian prison. Richard Garside, director of Britain’s Centre for Crime and Justice Studies has launched a Europe-wide project to compare measures taken by different governments, warning that inaction by the UK government is endangering the lives of prisoners, staff and the general public.



[WWW.PRISONOBSERVATORY.ORG/](http://WWW.PRISONOBSERVATORY.ORG/)

[info@prisonobservatory.org](mailto:info@prisonobservatory.org)