

Data Visualization Pitch

Student Individual Assignment

Prison Overcrowding

Image source: Factual America. (s.d.). 8 Eye-Opening Documentaries on Prison Overcrowding - <https://images.squarespace-cdn.com/content/v1/62fbfbbed423b4f1bb8caed31/057f9c75-101a-42c9-befe-d1097d1a02a2/3.jpg?format=2500w>

Student name: **Giorgio Evola**

Student ID: **932861**

Student e-mail address: **g.evola2@campus.unimib.it**

Research questions

Which are the European countries with the highest prison overcrowding in the 2022, and how has their occupancy rate evolved over time?

- How many European countries exceed 100% prison occupancy rate in the 2022?
- Which countries have been most successful in keeping occupancy below capacity in the 2022?
- What are the regional differences (North vs South Europe) in prison overcrowding?
- Are their trends improving, stable, or worsening over the 2014–2022 period, compared to the overall European average?

About Data

Dataset

Eurostat Prison capacity and number of persons held (link [Eurostat](#), code crim_pris_cap)

https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/crim_pris_cap/default/table?lang=en

It is reused in accordance with Eurostat's licence policy: free reuse for commercial or non-commercial purposes, subject to acknowledgement of the source ("Eurostat") and indication of any modifications.

Full policy: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/help/copyright-notice> or
https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Copyright/licence_policy

About Data

Temporal coverage: 2014–2022 (9 years)

Geographic scope: 37 European countries (EU27 + Balkans + Nordic countries)

Total records: 1,454 observations

Known issues

Some small countries (Liechtenstein, Cyprus, Malta) have volatile year-to-year variations due to small prison population

Missing data for a few countries in specific years (e.g. North Macedonia: only 2016–2023)

The year 2022 best balances recency and data completeness across countries, so it serves as the reference for analyses

Methodology

Software & Libraries

- Python 3.12 (Jupyter Notebook environment)
- pandas (data manipulation, pivot tables, filtering)
- plotly (interactive visualization)

Methodology

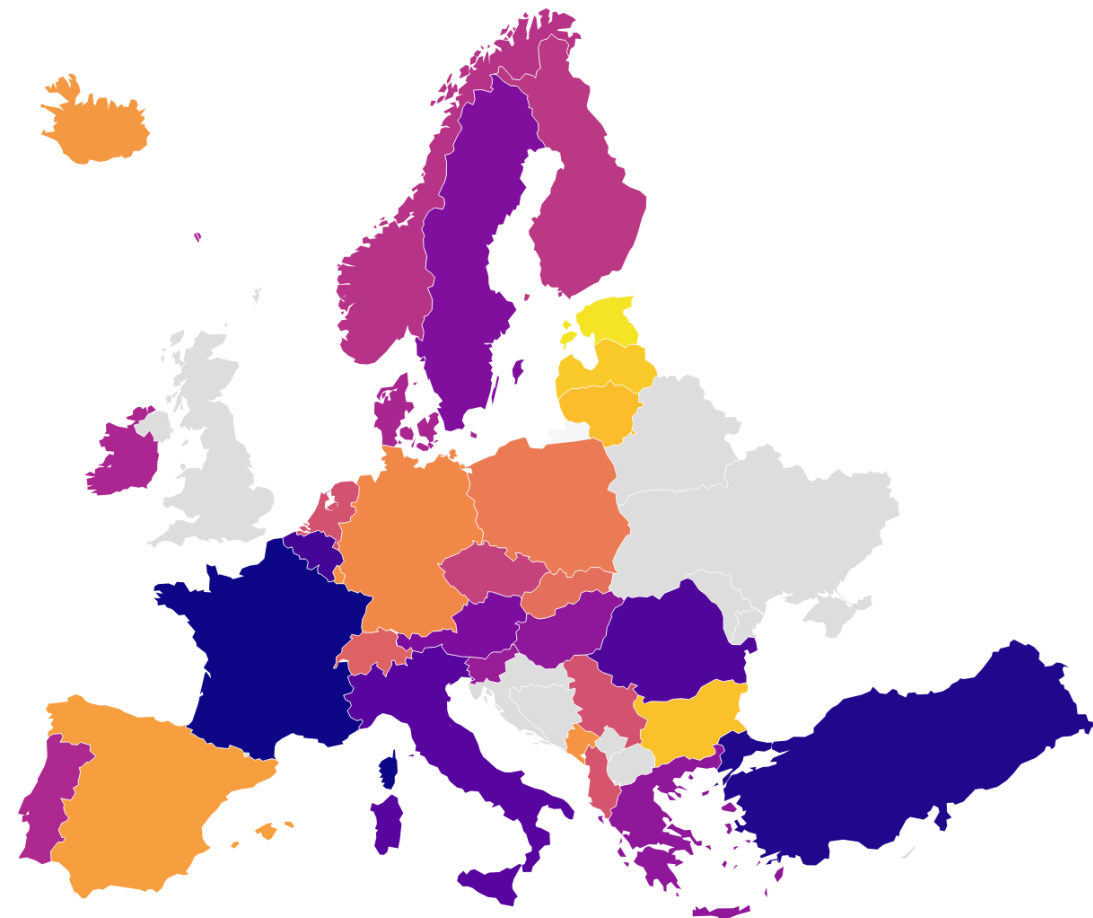
- Built a Jupyter notebook to read, standardize, and normalize prison data from CSV files using pandas
- Created reusable Python functions in dedicated modules. Each outputs intermediate CSVs for visualization and analysis.
- Generated charts directly from intermediate CSVs using Plotly
- Created a European prison overcrowding map (2022) using Data Wrapper Choropleth

Processing Steps

- Read CSV, standardized column names, and pivoted data by country/year
- Calculated occupancy rate: $(\text{prisoners}/\text{capacity}) \times 100$; normalized as percentages
- Identified top 10 overcrowded countries (2022) exceeding 100% capacity
- Segmented North/South regions with stats (mean, min, max, count)
- Created time series for low-occupancy countries (Iceland, Malta, Cyprus, Liechtenstein)
- Generated charts from intermediate CSV outputs
- Used LLM Copilot (VS Code) for code review and validation

Github repository

<https://github.com/gevola-dev/FDS02Q001>



European prison overcrowding map in 2022

Color scheme

- Orange: <80% (good, below capacity)
- Pink: 80-100% (acceptable, at capacity)
- Violet: 100-110% (overcrowded, critical)
- Blue: >110% (severe overcrowding, emergency)

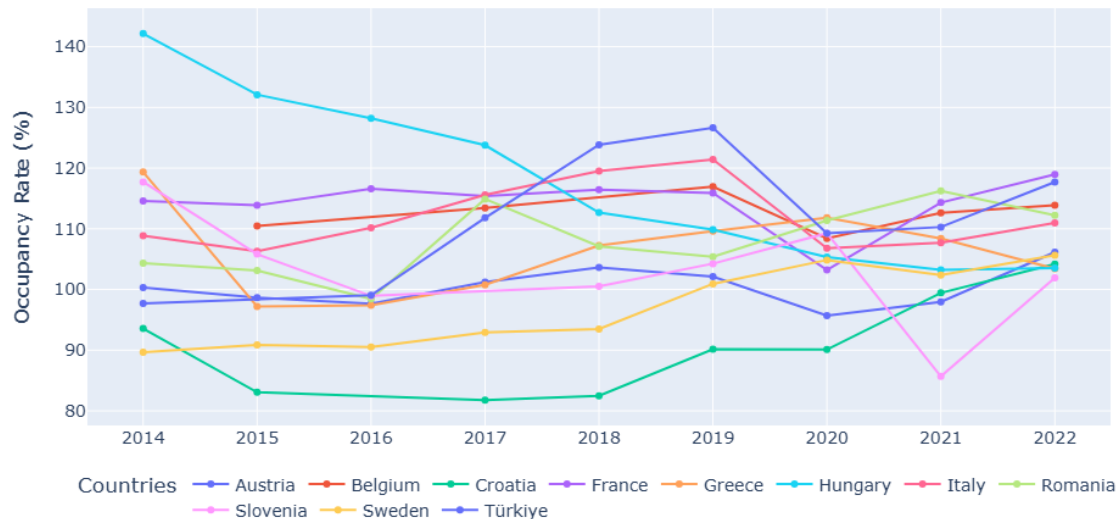
What the map shows

- 13 countries highlighted in violet/blue: Exceeding 100% capacity
- Top 3 worst: France (118.96%), Turkey (117.70%), Romania (112.21%)
- EU27 average: 95.7%
- Best performers: Estonia, Malta, Latvia, Bulgaria, Ireland (62-75%)

Key insight

Prison overcrowding is concentrated in Southern and Central Europe, not uniformly distributed. Northern European countries successfully maintain capacity well below 100%, suggesting policy/system differences.

European countries exceed 100% prison occupancy in 2022



Time series line chart (2014-2022) showing prison occupancy rate evolution across European countries exceeding 100% capacity, **excluding smaller countries.**

Key Insights

- 10-year horizon: **overcrowding is not temporary**, it's a structural issue in Southern Europe
- Regional patterns: countries like France, Belgium, Italy and Romania show sustained overcrowding, indicating systemic capacity deficits rather than cyclical pressures

Divergent trajectories

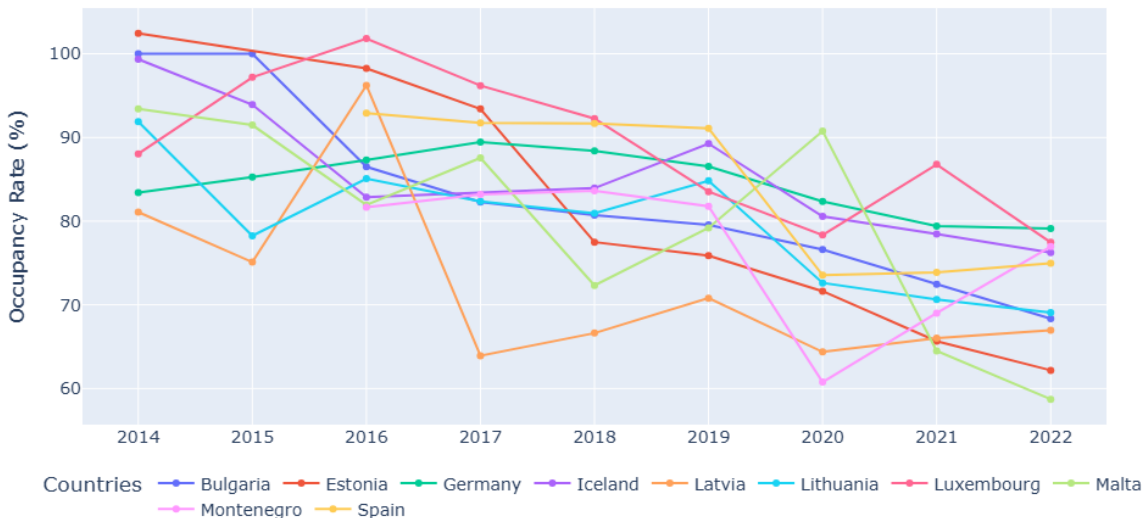
- Hungary displays a consistent downward trend**, declining from 142% (2014) to 104% (2022), suggesting successful prison decongestion policies
- Croatia shows the opposite pattern**, rising from 94% (2014) to 104% (2022), indicating worsening overcrowding despite initial lower capacity pressure

Prison capacity management success across Europe in 2022

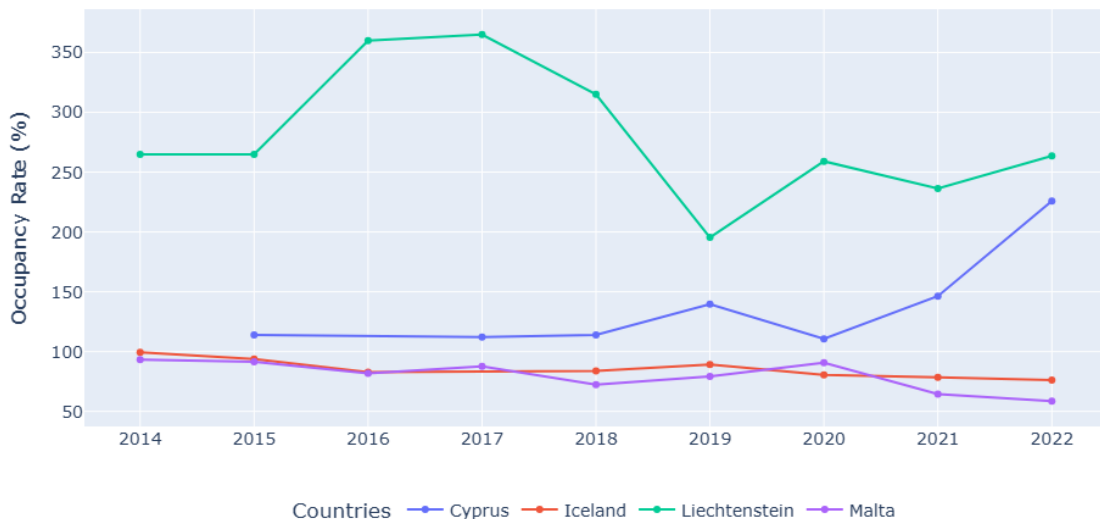
Time series line chart (2014-2022) showing prison occupancy rates for 10 European countries consistently maintaining capacity below 100%, demonstrating effective prison management systems.

Key Insights

- Consistent capacity management: countries like Estonia, Bulgaria, Malta, and Lithuania have achieved sustained occupancy rates well below 100%, with rates ranging from 58-79% in 2022
- **Diverse starting points:** while Estonia started above 100% (102.43% in 2014), it successfully decongested to 62.18% by 2022—demonstrating that capacity reform is achievable
- Stable trajectories: **Germany and Spain maintain steady, moderate occupancy rates** (79% and 75% respectively), reflecting long-term prison management sustainability
- Policy success model: These countries represent best-practice examples of prison system organization, particularly through **strategic decongestion policies** (visible in Estonia and Bulgaria)



Prison population trends in smaller European systems (2014-2022)



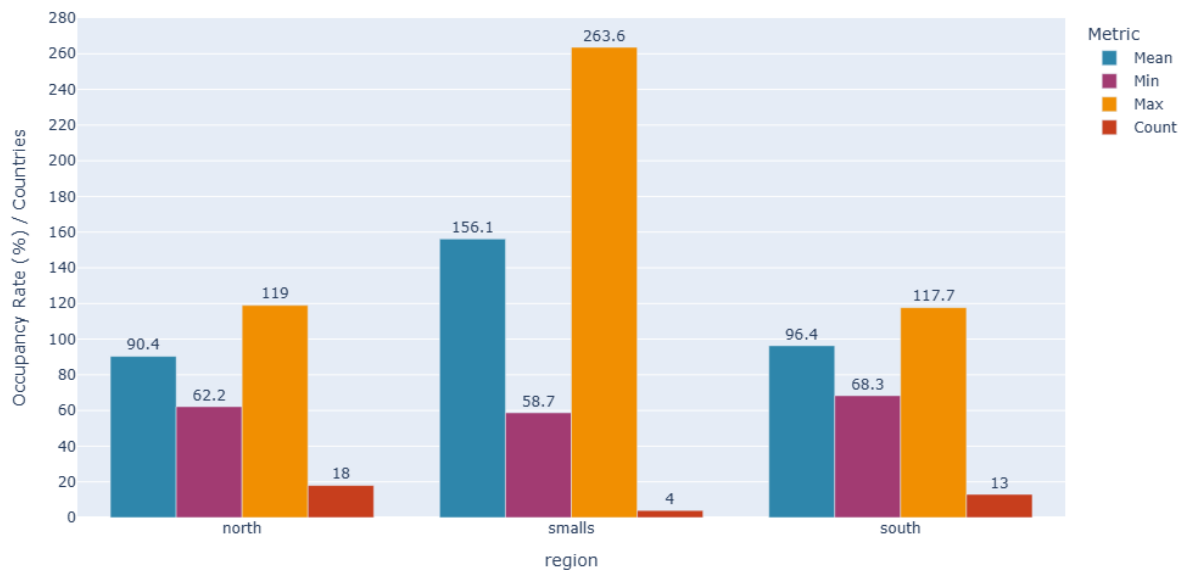
Time series line chart (2014-2022) tracking prison occupancy rates in **Europe's smallest prison systems**: Cyprus, Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Malta.

Key Insights

Extreme volatility in small populations: with absolute prison populations under 1,000, these micro-systems exhibit dramatic occupancy fluctuations. **A single admission or release represents a significant percentage change in system capacity**

- Cyprus: climbs from 114% (2018) to 226% (2022)—a 99-point surge driven by minimal absolute population changes
- Liechtenstein: Oscillates between 195-365% occupancy across the decade—reflecting its ultra-small prison population (typically <200 inmates)
- Malta & Iceland: Show more moderate volatility, with Malta achieving decongestion (93% → 59%) and Iceland maintaining steady efficiency (99% → 76%)

Prison capacity divides Europe: North vs South divergence in 2022



Bar chart comparison (2022) analyzing regional prison capacity patterns across 35 European countries, segmented into Northern Europe (18), Southern Europe (13) and smaller systems (4).

Key Insights

- **Northern Europe leads in capacity management:** mean occupancy of 90.40% indicates systematic efficiency, with controlled variance (min 62.20%, max 119%)
- Southern Europe approaches threshold: mean occupancy of 96.40% remains below 100% at aggregate level, yet proximity to capacity threshold signals structural strain, with ceiling at 117.70%
- Micro-countries exhibit extreme volatility and are therefore analyzed separately
- **Regional disparity is structural:** the 6-point gap between North (90.39%) and South (96.35%)

European Prison Overcrowding: Key Findings

- Structural overcrowding persists: 11+ European countries exceed 100% occupancy consistently across the 2014–2022 decade, indicating systemic rather than cyclical patterns
- North-South capacity buffer disparity: Northern systems operate with ~10% capacity margin above current occupancy; Southern systems operate with ~4% margin—creating differential structural resilience
- Hungary's downward trajectory: prison occupancy declined from 142.16% (2014) to 103.51% (2022) a 38.65-point reduction demonstrates long-term trend reversal is empirically possible
- Croatia's inverse pattern: prison occupancy rose from 93.56% (2014) to 104.18% (2022), indicating divergent regional trajectories despite similar geographic proximity
- Micro-systems show extreme volatility: smaller jurisdictions (Cyprus, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Malta) exhibit 50–205 percentage-point swings across the decade, reflecting the amplified impact of population-scale variations

"Prison overcrowding"

by Giorgio Evola

Developed using data from the Eurostat database, with charts and analyses produced in Python.

Dataset: Eurostat Prison capacity and number of persons held (last update 23/04/2025 11:00).

Slides are shared with the following license:

Prison overcrowding © 2025 by Giorgio Evola is licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>