

European Prison Observatory. Detention conditions in the European Union

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The European Prison Observatory

A project coordinated by the Italian Ngo Antigone. The partner organizations are:

Università degli Studi di Padova - Italy

Observatoire international des prisons - Section française - France

Special Account of Democritus University of Thrace - Department of Social Administration and Political Science (EL DUTH) - Greece

Latvian Centre for Human Rights - Latvia

Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights - Poland

ISCTE - Instituto Universitário de Lisboa - Portugal

Observatory of the Penal System and Human Rights - Universidad de Barcelona - Spain

Centre for Crime and Justice Studies – United Kingdom

More info at www.prisonobservatory.org



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PRISON CONDITIONS IN EUROPE

In describing prison conditions in Europe we tried to highlight how and to what extent the conditions in the participating countries, as conveyed by the data collected, comply with the European Prison Rules (EPR).

Health

Only in France, Italy and the UK, are the national Ministries of Health responsible for delivery in prison. Medical, surgical and psychiatric services in prison are scarce in all the countries involved.

A permanent medical practitioner is not always present in every establishment, and even when one is, demand often exceeds capacity to deliver care.



PRISON CONDITIONS IN EUROPE

Health

Despite EPR rules and national laws setting clear guidelines on this matter, acutely contagious sick prisoners are not always isolated, while risks related to solitary confinement are often overlooked (the same is true for mental illness treatment and suicide prevention, as the high number of suicides indicate).

Due to the shortage of resources, meeting the needs of all the prisoners suffering from drug addiction can be problematic, despite the provisions of EPR 42.3.

Harm reduction policies are not implemented, with the sole exception of Spain.



PRISON CONDITIONS IN EUROPE

Actions promoting rehabilitation

Visiting arrangements and the means of communication (letters and phone calls, excluding web tools) are limited and do not allow adequate contact with the outside world.

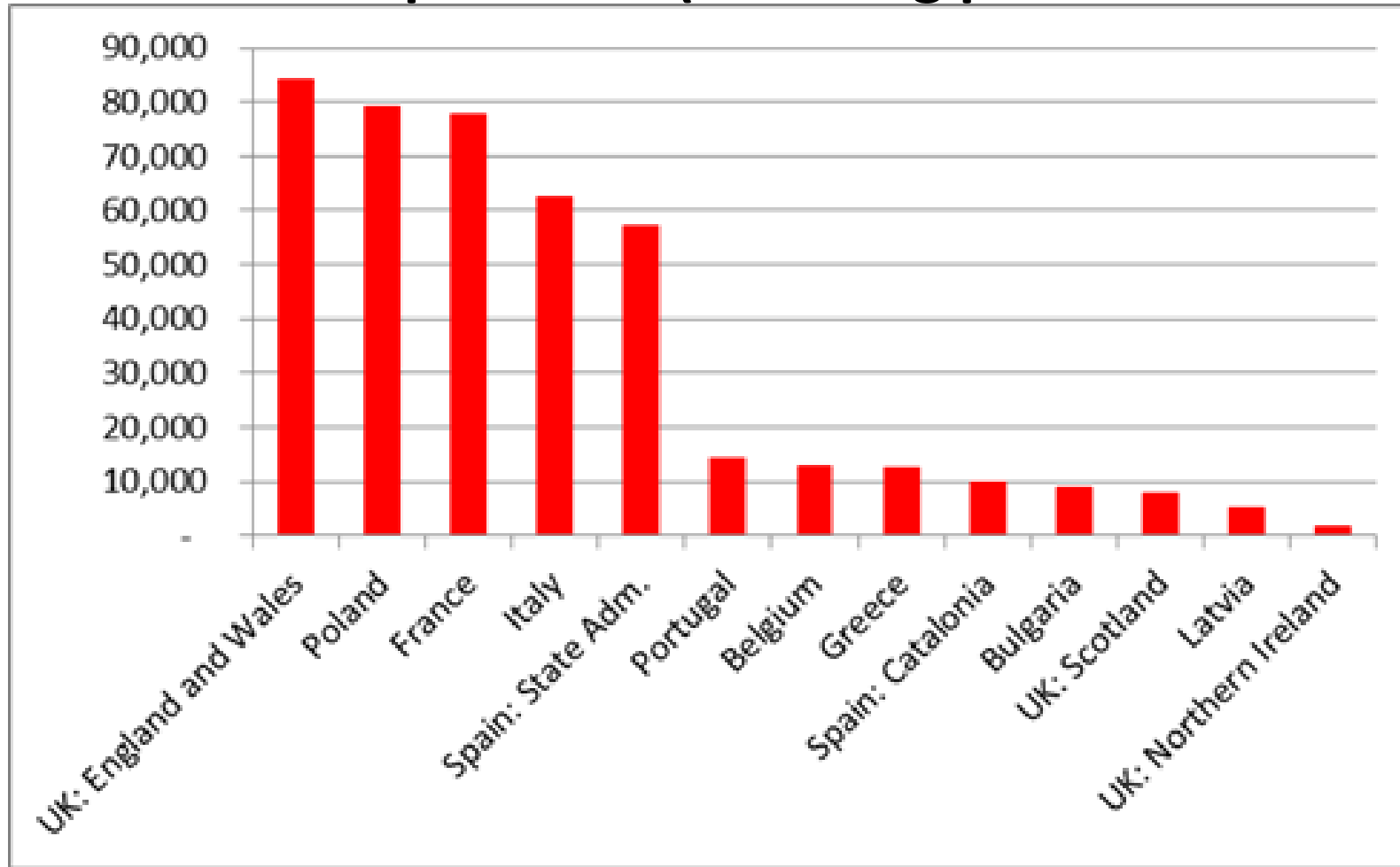
As for the prison regime, only a small number of prisoners are engaged in meaningful activities such as education, vocational training, organised physical exercise, recreational activities, and so on.

As stipulated by law in all the monitored countries, sentenced prisoners should receive individual sentence plans, but the lack of non-custodial staff, work opportunities and vocational training programmes reduces the possibilities to implement such tailored rehabilitation programmes.

After release, only in exceptional cases (Poland is a good example) are prisoners assisted in looking for suitable accommodations and a job.



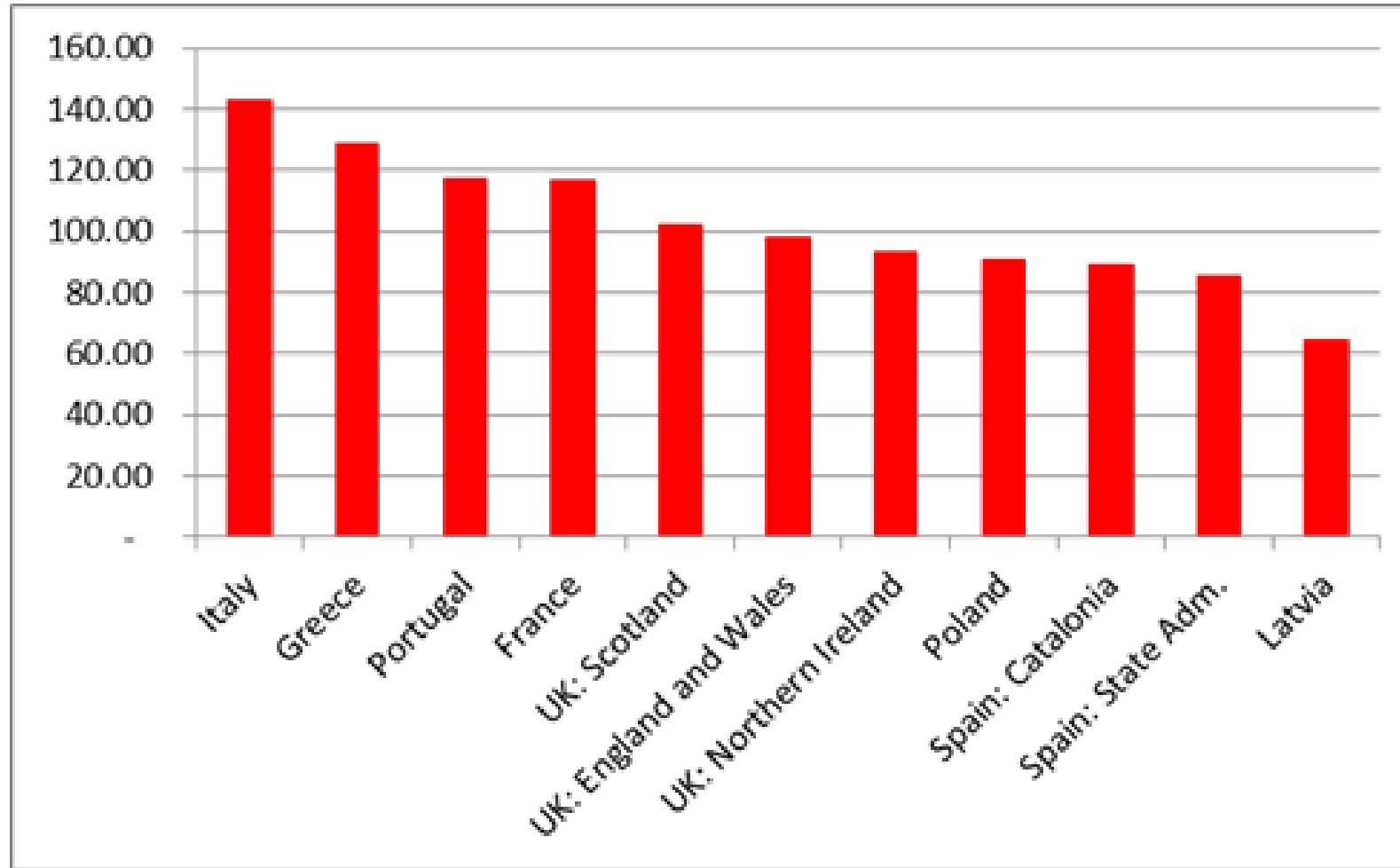
Total number of prisoners (including pre-trial detainees)



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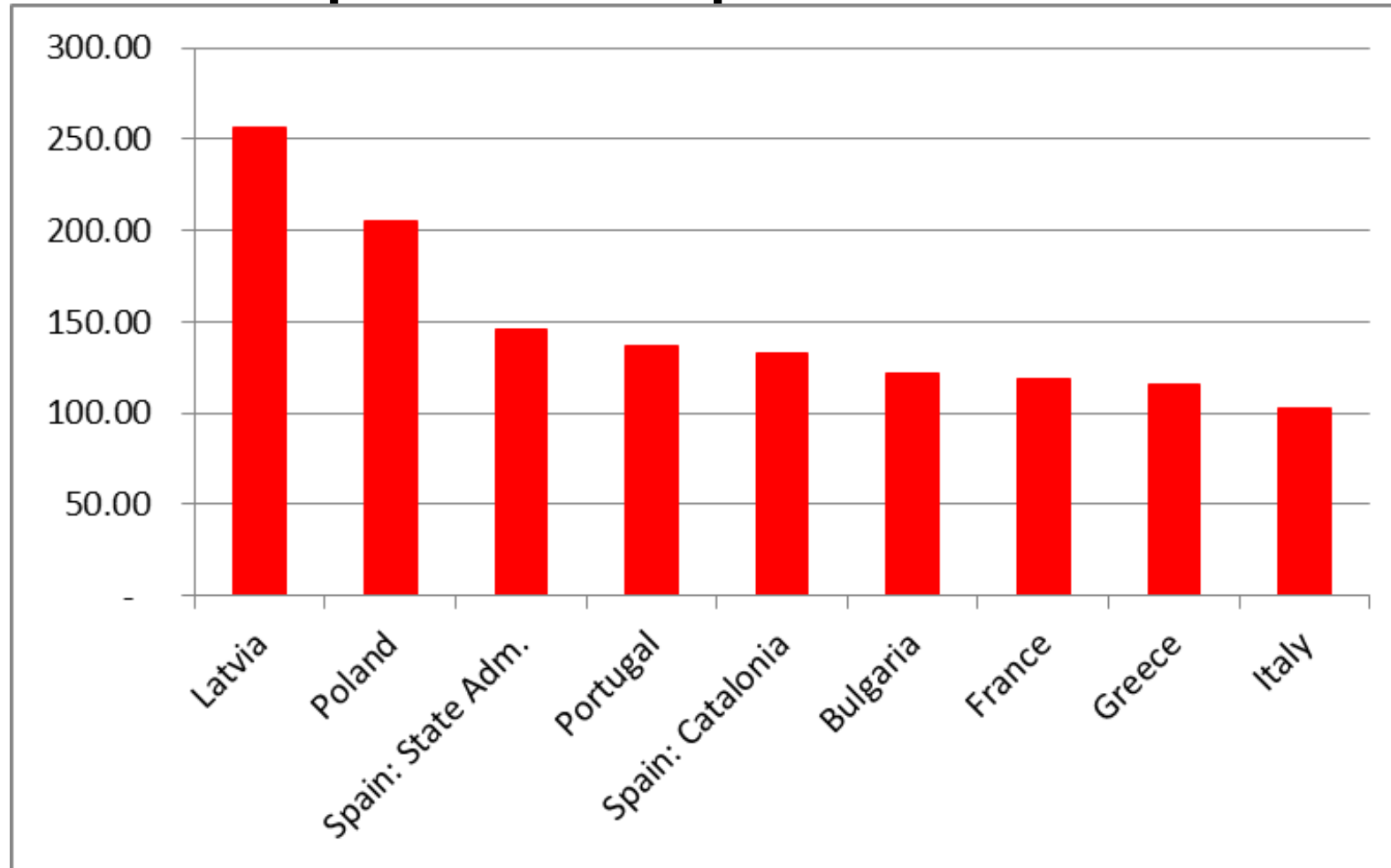
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Prison density per 100 places



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Prison Population Rate per 100.000 inhabitants



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FROM NATIONAL PRACTICES TO EUROPEAN GUIDELINES

From the examples of 'good practice' encountered in its work, the European Prison Observatory (EPO) offers ten key recommendations to improve human rights standards. They are based on the two key principles of the European Prison Rules of normalisation and responsabilisation:

1. The development of a representative **democracy inside prisons** in England and Wales has been beneficial for prisoners, staff and the wider society. Constructive dialogue helps to improve staff-prisoner relationships; it is transformative for prisoners and leads to a general reduction in tension across the institution. Prison governors across the EU must be encouraged to commit to the development of prison councils in all establishments.



FROM NATIONAL PRACTICES TO EUROPEAN GUIDELINES

7. When family members visit prisoners, the **need for privacy and the possibility of intimacy** are paramount. Research on the private visiting rooms in France show them to be of benefit to relatives and friends, and to enhance family links while not compromising security.

The French Familial Visit Unities (UVF) system should be implemented in all French prisons and trialled in prisons in every EU country.



FROM NATIONAL PRACTICES TO EUROPEAN GUIDELINES

8. Digital technology offers the possibility of maintaining contact with family and friends even if travel is not possible.

Across the EU, those who are unable to travel to visit prisoners would benefit from the adoption of the **video visits** schemes as developed by APEX and the Scottish Prison Service.

The technology required is low cost and secure as demonstrated in Scotland.



Thank you for your attention

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