



## **End-of-Year Report 2024**

**by the Antigone Association**

### **Inmates Increase and Overcrowding Worsens**

The prison population continues to grow. As of December 16, 2024, there were 62,153 inmates in Italy, against a regulated capacity of 51,320 places. Of these places, however, 4,462 were actually unavailable due to unsuitability or maintenance, thus reducing the effective capacity to about 47,000 places, and the effective overcrowding rate reached 132.6%.

The growth rate of the prison population is becoming unsustainable. A year ago, at the end of 2023, there were 60,166 inmates, which is about 2,000 fewer than the current number. However, as we will discuss in more detail below, the number of available detention spaces has significantly decreased. Continuing on this trajectory is unthinkable. Will we have 64,000 inmates by the end of next year? Or could it be even more? And what will the conditions in our prisons be like by then?

As mentioned, the average overcrowding rate has now reached 132.6%, but this is an average overcrowding rate. In San Vittore in Milan, the actual overcrowding reached 225%, in Brescia Canton Monbello 205%, in Como and Lucca 200%, in Taranto 195% and in Varese 194%. There are now 59 prisons with an overcrowding rate exceeding 150%, mainly large metropolitan prisons, those with the highest number of admissions and the greatest tensions. Structures where the wear and tear of places and people make the situation more critical every day that passes.

### **While detention places decrease**

Governments have always responded to overcrowding by proposing the construction of new prisons. But they were lying, knowing they were lying. Essentially, the officially available

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detention spaces have always been the same: they were 50,228 at the end of 2016, and they are 51,320 on December 16, 2024. About 1,000 more, but in the meantime, the number of inmates has increased by about 8,000. Since this government took office, capacity has decreased further. Not so much the official one, which has remained substantially unchanged, but the effective one, from which unavailable detention places must be subtracted. These were 3,665 in July 2022. Today they are, as mentioned above, 4,462. Neglect, overcrowding, and the accidents that occur continuously make the spaces increasingly uninhabitable, as we have had the opportunity to observe during many of our visits.

In the 87 prisons visited by the Antigone Observatory in the last 12 months, in 28 of them, 32%, there were cells where 3 square meters of floor space per inmate were not guaranteed.

It is no coincidence that the number of appeals by people who complained of being held in conditions that violate Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights, and which are accepted by Italian surveillance courts, has been constantly increasing since the end of the pandemic. They were 3,382 in 2020, 4,212 in 2021, and 4,514 in 2022, reaching 4,731 in 2023.

### **What about the staff?**

If we can't increase space, can we at least increase the other resources needed to manage the prison? For example, the staff? Comparing the data collected during our visits, it seems that this is indeed the case if we look at the legal and educational staff (educators). In 2022, there was on average one educator for every 87 inmates, in 2023 this ratio improved to one for every 76 inmates, and in 2024 it reached one for every 68 inmates. However, as one might expect, these numbers are still completely inadequate to guarantee effective social reintegration programs.

On the other hand, if we look at the prison police staff, we see a decrease in the ratio compared to the number of inmates. There was on average one officer for every 1.7 inmates in 2022, one for every 1.9 inmates in 2023, and one for every 2 inmates in 2024.

### **The crime rate among foreigners is decreasing**

If we measure the crime rate of foreigners by their presence in prisons (which is misleading, given that foreigners notoriously have more difficulty than Italians in accessing alternatives to detention), the first thing to say is that this has been declining for years. The percentage of foreign nationals among the prison population, which grew steadily until the mid-2000s, reaching 37.5% of the total at the end of 2007, has been declining since then, reaching 31.9% on December 13, 2024. This is despite the fact that the presence of foreign citizens in our

country has increased enormously since 2007. According to ISTAT, as of January 1, 2023, there were approximately 5 million foreign citizens residing in Italy, representing 8.7% of the total resident population. In 2007, they were less than 3 million. The incarceration rate of foreigners is therefore drastically decreasing.

However, many note that this is still higher than that of Italians, if it is true that foreigners make up 8.7% of the population and 31.9% of the prison population. But even this is a misleading comparison. The prison population is composed largely of males, young but not very young, and predominantly from the poorest areas of the country. If the incarceration rate in Italy is about one person per 100,000, this rate, if we look only at males aged 35 to 39, skyrockets to 4.5 people per 100,000. If we look only at males residing in Campania, this rate is 3.2 people per 100,000. Males, young, and poor. This profile is much more widespread among migrants than in the general population, and realistically, among people with this profile, the crime rate of foreigners is not very different from that of Italians.

### **Work, vocational training, and education**

There has been a slight increase in the number of people working in prisons under the direct employment of the prison administration. This number was 16,305 on June 30, 2023, and increased to 17,096 on the same date in 2024.

On the other hand, there has been a significant increase in the number of those working for other employers, which has risen from 2,848 on June 30, 2023, to 3,144 on June 30, 2024. The increase regarded both those working in prisons for social cooperatives (+62) or profit-making companies (+29). However, the number of those working for the latter remains quite low. On June 30, 2024, only 213 inmates were working for traditional private companies, while 899 were working for social cooperatives.

Opportunities for vocational training continue to grow. Enrolments in courses were 2,248 in the first semester of 2022, 3,359 in the first semester of 2023, and 3,716 in the first semester of 2024. However, regional disparities remain striking. While the national average is 6% of the prison population, in Lombardy, 14% of the prison population was enrolled in these courses on June 30, while in Umbria, Puglia, Sardinia, and Basilicata, the figure did not reach 1%.

The number of people involved in educational programs is also growing. There were 19,372 in the 2022-2023 school year, and 3,946 passed, and these numbers remained the same in the 2023-2024 school year.

## Dilapidated Prisons. 87 prisons visited by Antigone in the last 12 months

- 35.6% of the prisons visited were built before 1950. Most of these, 23% of the total, were built even before 1900.
- In 10.3% of the institutions visited, not all cells were heated.
- In 48.3%, there were cells where hot water was not guaranteed all day and all year round.
- In 55.2% of the institutions visited, there were cells without showers.
- In 25.3% of the institutions visited, there were no spaces for work activities.

## Suicides and Critical Incidents

According to Ristretti Orizzonti, 88 inmates have taken their own lives since the beginning of 2024. This is the highest number ever recorded, surpassing the tragic record of 2022, which with 84 cases was previously the year with the most suicides in prison. In addition to suicides, 2024 has been the year with the highest number of deaths overall. There have been 243 deaths since the beginning of January.

Of the 88 people who died by suicide, two were women. Many of the suicides were committed by very young people. In 2024, at least twenty were aged between 19 and 29. There were also many foreign nationals, at least 40. According to the NPM, more than half of the people who took their own lives in prison were involved in other critical incidents. Of these, 21 had previously attempted suicide at least once. Many had mental health problems and a history of drug addiction. At least 20 were homeless. These numbers tell a story of immense suffering and marginalization.

The institutions with the highest number of suicides are the prisons of Genoa Marassi, Naples Poggioreale, Prato, and Verona. In each of these institutions, 4 people took their own lives. This is followed by the prisons of Cagliari, Parma, Pavia, Rome Regina Coeli, Teramo, and Venice, with 3 suicides each. The sections most affected by the suicide phenomenon are those with closed custody, where almost 80% of cases occurred.

Meanwhile, during 2024, in the institutions visited by Antigone, there were on average 20.3 acts of self-harm per 100 inmates (compared to 16.3 in 2023), 2.5 suicide attempts (2.3 in 2023), 2.6 assaults on staff (2.3 in 2023), and 7.7 assaults on other inmates (4.6 in 2023).

All critical incidents are therefore on the rise, and they are increasing at a rate that is more than proportional to the prison population. The prison of closed sections, therefore, with its iron fist and muscular measures, as expected, is more conflictual and less secure. Even for those who work there.

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## **No to the Security Decree and the crime of prison riot**

The new crime of prison riot included in the Security Decree will punish with very severe penalties even those who protest without violence and with forms of non-violent passive resistance. It is impossible to know how the law will be interpreted in the future, but as of December 9, 2024, we have counted as many as 1,397 similar events in adult prisons alone. They are classified as forms of collective protest (including banging on bars and refusing to return to cells). These were events in which no one was harmed and which, until now, were punished with disciplinary sanctions.

We do not know how many inmates participated in the collective protests. Let's assume there were only three inmates protesting, and we already reach a total of 4,000 inmates involved. The new crime of prison riot, as mentioned, provides for very severe penalties. Let us assume that the 4,000 inmates are convicted, for having protested without violence, to an average of 4 years in prison each. As a result of the Security Decree, 16,000 YEARS OF PRISON ARE THEREFORE COMING for people who are already detained and who will also be excluded from alternative measures. A perfect recipe to definitively blow up our prison system and bury thousands of people in prison, selected, of course, from the most vulnerable (minors, people with mental health problems, drug addicts).

## **No to opening Italian prisons in Albania**

Faced with the difficulty of implementing the Italy-Albania Protocol, there seems to be a plan of converting the Albanian centers into full-fledged prisons to transfer Albanian nationals currently incarcerated in an Italian penitentiary. A plan of penitentiary delocalization that is profoundly contrary to the principle of non-discrimination and potentially harmful to the rights of detained persons (in particular the right to re-education, health, affective relationships, education and work). A plan that would determine an unacceptable legal uncertainty in the exercise of the penitentiary function, especially with regard to the fundamental rights of detained persons and judicial supervision. Rather than spending tens of millions of euros to open an Italian prison in Albania, such funds could be used to improve the quality of life in Italian prisons, both for prison staff and for inmates