

R04 * Beyond mass incarceration: towards a transformation of justice systems in Europe

Proposer: LJE (France)
Agenda item: 8. Resolutions

Motion text

1 This motion denounces the reality of mass incarceration in our European justice
2 systems and proposes solutions to work towards alternatives.

3 Justice lies at the core of the political project of the Federation of Young
4 European Greens (FYEG) and its member organisations. As such, prisons cannot
5 remain a political blind spot. Whether we like it or not, they are one the
6 cornerstones of our judicial systems in Europe. We believe that the way
7 societies deprive individuals of liberty reflects their understanding of
8 justice, dignity and democracy. As such, the situation is particularly worrying
9 in Europe at the moment.

10 The European Parliament has highlighted persistent shortcomings in detention
11 conditions, which may violate fundamental rights and undermine trust between
12 judicial systems. Additionally, European data shows that a significant number of
13 prison systems operate under conditions of overcrowding. ECHR decisions
14 regarding the right to dignity of prisoners periodically illustrate the
15 structural tendency of bad treatments, racist behaviours and negation of social
16 and civic rights of prisoners (Ştefănoaia, 2025). This situation reflects the
17 structural limits of a penal model that continues to rely on incarceration as a
18 primary response to social, economic and political issues that it fails to
19 resolve sustainably. FYEG already denounces through its work parts of this
20 issue, as with its continued opposition to Frontex' practices. This resolution
21 aims to deepen this commitment by developing a political analysis of the
22 European carceral system and promoting concrete and transformative alternatives,
23 as almost 500 000 people were incarcerated in Europe in 2023 (Eurostat, 2025).
24 Following Pierre Kropotkin, "You can't improve a prison." (Kropotkine, 1887).
25 The goal here is not to suggest minor changes to make it a little worse, but to
26 find another path regarding the way actions that are undermining our
27 communities' well-being must be dealt with. Indeed, some actions or deficiencies
28 done by individuals are indubitably detrimental to our communities. We can't
29 just demand the abolition of prisons without considering a serious political
30 answer beyond it.

31 The current European carceral system is shaped by political, economic and
32 institutional choices that determine who is punished, how, and why: it is not
33 neutral. As Angela Davis underlines, prisons seem to be an “inevitable and
34 permanent feature of our social lives” (Davis, 2003); it is important to
35 denaturalise this way of doing justice. Prisons are the symptom of a broader
36 failure: societies addressing social vulnerabilities through punishment rather
37 than prevention, care, redistribution and inclusion. It relies on a systemic
38 shift happening since the end of the XVIIIth Century, with the aim to discipline
39 society (Foucault, 1977). The failure is therefore systemic, not limited to the
40 prison system itself.

41 European data shows that incarceration rates vary significantly between
42 countries and do not directly correlate with crime levels. This confirms that
43 imprisonment is primarily a political choice. Carceral systems reproduce and
44 intensify existing inequalities. They disproportionately affect working-class
45 individuals, racialised communities and those facing social or psychological
46 vulnerability. An intersectional perspective reveals how these dynamics are
47 embedded in broader power structures. Furthermore, prison systems often fail to
48 achieve their stated goals. Overcrowding, poor detention conditions and
49 difficulties in reintegration highlight the structural limitations of
50 incarceration as a central policy response.

51 For young generations, this issue is critical. It raises a fundamental question:
52 whether Europe will continue to rely on punitive systems, or move towards models
53 based on prevention, social justice and human dignity. These factors can only
54 lead us to adopt a clear and radical anti-prison stance. However, our political
55 responsibility means we cannot stop at this observation alone; we must also put
56 forward concrete solutions. European prison systems are reaching a breaking
57 point. Overcrowding, degrading conditions and policy inefficiencies demonstrate
58 the limits of a punitive model.

59 We call on European institutions, governments, political actors and civil
60 society to move beyond incremental reforms and rethinking responses to harm
61 through dignity, prevention and social justice.

62 On the fringes, some experiments show that another approach is possible. For
63 instance, the Scottish Government decided to drastically reduce short prison
64 sentences, and instead focus on prevention policies to reduce reoffending. It
65 relies on Community Payback Orders and providing good health treatment and
66 accommodation to the convicted person (Freeman & Glyn, 2016). Nordic Countries
67 (Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Norway), where the imprisonment rate is the lowest
68 in Europe, have developed several alternatives to imprisonment, through
69 Community Sanctions like community service or treatment orders (Lappi-Seppälä,
70 2019).

71 While these examples still rely on the idea of governing bodies and behaviours,
72 it gets out of the prison-centric penal system, which is a first step towards a
73 prison-free Europe. For our generation, the choice is clear: building a Europe
74 that protects without reproducing inequality.

75 **We as Federation of Young European Greens call to:**

- 76 • **Clearly establish** that advocating for abolition requires thinking about
77 the after-prison realities or the alternatives to the current systems.

- 78 • **Identify** the relevant actors in instances of the European Union and the
79 European Convention on Human Rights.

- 80 • **Address** this topic on an European legislative level.

- 81 • **Train activists and political actors** of all kinds to the question of
82 incarceration and how to address its issues. In collaboration with
83 concerned collectives and participants of the political criticism of the
84 system, these trainings should aim at planning actions to gather support
85 for a positive change in our systems.

86 We propose as viable plans of actions, for:

87 Member States to:

- 88 • **Reduce reliance** on incarceration, particularly for non-violent offences;

- 89 • **Expand** and fund alternatives to detention (restorative justice, non-
90 custodial sanctions);

- 91 • **Invest** in prevention policies (mental health, housing, social support);

- 92 • ensure detention conditions comply with European standards;

- 93 • improve transparency and data collection.

94 The European Union to:

- 95 • **strengthen** its indirect role regarding detention conditions through
96 existing instruments;

- 97 • **support** the development of common standards on alternatives to
98 imprisonment;

- 99 • **fund** research and exchange of best practices;

- 100 • ensure that EU funding does not reinforce over-incarceration.

101 The Council of Europe and monitoring bodies to:

- 102 • **reinforce** monitoring of detention conditions;

- 103 • **ensure** effective implementation of existing standards;

- 104 • **document** systemic violations of fundamental rights.

105 The Green political family to:

- 106 • **integrate** a clear critique of mass incarceration into political
107 programmes;

- 108 • **promote** restorative and transformative justice approaches;

- 109 • **link** carceral issues with broader social and democratic struggles.

110 FYEG Member Organisations to:

- 111 • **develop** national advocacy strategies;

- 112 • **build** expertise on carceral issues;
- 113 • **collaborate** with civil society actors, especially those directly involving
114 prisoners or former prisoners;
- 115 • **share** best practices across Europe.

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