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Criminological Aspects of Urban Migration: Exploring Migrant Influence on City Crime Patterns

ABSTRACT: *This article examines the relationship between migration and urban crime in Europe through a comparative analysis of selected cities and national prison systems. Using quantitative correlation methods, the study explores whether higher proportions of foreign-born residents are associated with increased crime rates, measured by the Crime Index and Safety Index, and whether foreign nationals are disproportionately represented in prison populations. Drawing on data from Eurostat, Numbeo, and European prison statistics, the article challenges the widespread assumption that immigration directly leads to higher levels of urban crime. The comparative analysis reveals substantial cross-country variation: cities such as Vienna, Amsterdam, and The Hague combine high levels of migrant diversity with low crime rates, while others with lower shares of foreign-born residents display higher crime indices. Further comparison between Germany, Switzerland, and Poland demonstrates that differences in incarceration rates of foreigners are closely linked to integration models, socio-economic inclusion, and legal frameworks rather than migration volume itself. The findings suggest that urban crime patterns are shaped primarily by governance quality, social cohesion, and integration policies. The article contributes to criminological and migration studies by highlighting the limits of simplistic migration–crime narratives and emphasizing the importance of comparative, context-sensitive analysis for evidence-based public policy.*

KEYWORDS: *Migration, Urban Crime, Comparative Criminology, Foreign Prisoners, Integration Policy.*

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1.

Introduction: Migration and Urban Dynamics in Europe

In the dynamic urban landscape of Europe, cities are increasingly shaped by the intricate patterns of migration that bring both cultural richness and economic growth. However, these shifts also strain urban infrastructures and test the resilience of social cohesion. The allure of European cities as hubs of opportunity attracts global migrants, yet the anticipated prospects are often shadowed by stark realities. Many migrants encounter formidable barriers to employment and public services, conditions that may steer some towards alternative, and at times illicit, means of survival.¹

This dissonance between expectation and reality not only impedes integration but also influences social dynamics within these urban settings. This paper adopts a quantitative approach, employing statistical correlation analysis to investigate the relationships between various urban dynamics, such as crime rates, measured through indices including the Crime Index and Safety Index, and the demographic profiles of cities, specifically the proportion of foreign-born citizens and their representation in European prisons. Such a methodological choice allows for a nuanced exploration of how migration influences urban crime and safety. The study seeks to illuminate the factors contributing to urban crime, outline the typical profiles of those involved, and challenge the oversimplification of statistical data. It critically examines the mainstream media narrative that directly links immigrant numbers to urban crime rates, questioning whether this correlation holds or whether other underlying factors exert a greater influence. Integrating these analyses, the article is structured to build progressively upon each component of the study. It begins by detailing the specific characteristics and criminogenic factors of European cities and how these contribute to crime patterns. It then proceeds to a rigorous data analysis to identify or refute correlations between immigrant presence and crime rates across cities. A comparative overview of the situation in Poland provides further contextual depth, followed by a synthesis of findings into actionable recommendations aimed at enhancing public safety and social integration. Through this comprehensive approach, the study not only addresses immediate associations between migration and urban crime but also contributes to a broader understanding of the socio-economic and policy implications necessary for fostering cohesive and secure urban environments.

1 See: Dustmann and Frattini, 2011. <http://doi.org/10.62733/2025.1.5-15>

2.

Urban Specificity and Criminogenic Factors

Before we embark on an examination of the statistical landscape and its interpretations in the next section, it is crucial to consider the underlying motivations and determinants that the article's title already implies: why do cities become hubs for migrants, and what intricate dynamics shape crime rates within these urban confines? Such an inquiry not only deepens our understanding but also prepares the reader for a more nuanced engagement with the data that follows.

2.1. Aspects that Impact Migration in European Cities

In the diverse tapestry of Europe, the distribution of foreigners and immigrants is far from uniform across nations and cities. By January 2023, the European Union was home to approximately 27.3 million non-EU citizens, comprising about 6.1% of the overall EU population.² Germany, Spain, France, and Italy emerged as the principal host states, accounting for a substantial proportion of this demographic.³ Within major urban landscapes, however, the proportion of foreign residents often starkly overshadows the national averages. For instance, Brussels in 2023 counted 37.5% of its population as non-European—dramatically surpassing the Belgian average.⁴ Similarly, metropolitan centres such as Frankfurt, Munich, and Stuttgart reported foreign population percentages of 29%, 26% and 25% respectively, notably higher than the overall German figures.⁵

Why, one might ask, do these urban areas attract diverse populations? The answer often lies in the confluence of job opportunities, educational prospects, and vibrant social networks predominantly found in larger cities. These cities function not merely as geographical locations but as pulsating hubs of higher wages and opportunities that attract both skilled and unskilled workers, promising not just jobs but a pathway to improved standards of living and expanded economic horizons. Turning our gaze to the economic underpinnings that drive migration, particularly from non-European origins like Syria, Afghanistan and Venezuela, a common thread of economic instability becomes evident.⁶ Significantly lower GDP per capita afflicts these nations, frequently made worse by prolonged conflicts, serious economic mismanagement,

2 See: European Union, 2024.

3 Ibid.

4 StatBel, 2023.

5 See: Mayors of Europe, no date.

6 See: European Commission, 2023.

and hyperinflation. High unemployment looms large, reflecting a dearth of domestic opportunities propelling especially young and educated individuals to seek fortunes beyond their borders. Moreover, the high cost of living and inflation, particularly acute in Venezuela, erodes purchasing power, rendering even basic essentials unaffordable.⁷ This economic distress, coupled with sanctions and instability, paints a stark picture of the challenging conditions that drive populations towards the perceived stability and prosperity of European cities.

2.2. Analysis of General Criminological Factors Contributing to Crime in Urban Settings

However, we do not inhabit an ideal realm where every citizen receives appropriate education, engages in honest labour and remains untouched by the specter of crime. Cities, with their vibrant life and myriad opportunities, also provide fertile ground for those inclined towards illicit endeavors, drawn by the allure of rapid, albeit unlawful, gains. But what propels an individual towards such a path? Urban crime emerges from a complex tapestry of social, economic, and personal factors. Below are ten criminological factors widely recognised as directly influencing the incidence of criminal activity in urban areas:

1. **Economic disparity:** Income disparities within metropolitan regions can result in elevated crime rates, as economically disadvantaged persons may resort to stealing, burglary, and other criminal activities to meet their needs or express their frustrations.⁸
2. **Unemployment:** There is a clear correlation between high rates of unemployment, particularly among young people and minority groups, and increased crime rates, as illegal activities may substitute for earning money through legal means.⁹
3. **Urban anonymity:** Urban areas offer a level of anonymity absent in smaller towns, facilitating individuals to commit crimes with reduced fear of recognition or social repercussions.¹⁰
4. **Population density:** Increased population density can result in a higher likelihood of crime due to the presence of more potential targets (individuals and property) and offenders in close proximity.¹¹

7 Ibid.

8 McCarthy, 2000, pp. 391–410.

9 Kujala, Kallio and Niemelä, 2018, pp. 163–185.

10 Edwards and Hughes, 2013, pp. 257–259.

11 Blau and Blau, 1982, p. 114.

5. **Social disintegration:** In urban areas where there is a weak sense of community, social controls diminish. In communities lacking strong bonds, crime rates rise because individuals feel less accountable toward their neighbors or social consequences.¹²
6. **Drug and alcohol abuse:** Urban regions experience elevated levels of substance misuse correlating with a rise in criminal activity, as drugs and alcohol may serve as both incentives for engaging in unlawful behavior and hindering rational decision-making by lowering inhibitions and impairing cognitive abilities.¹³
7. **Lack of educational opportunities:** Inadequate educational resources are a contributing factor to the prevalence of criminal activity in urban areas. Individuals who do not complete their education face less employment opportunities, which may lead to engagement in unlawful behaviour.¹⁴
8. **Family structure:** There is a correlation between broken houses and dysfunctional family ties and criminal behavior. Children lacking adequate access to strong role models or parental supervision may have a higher likelihood of engagement with criminal activities growing up.¹⁵
9. **Mental health issues:** In the absence of appropriate management and treatment, mental health illnesses can play a role in the development of criminal conduct. Urban areas with insufficient mental health care resources may experience higher rates of crime linked to untreated mental health conditions.¹⁶
10. **Cultural and ethnic tensions:** Racial and ethnic tensions may lead to criminal behaviours since marginalised groups who experience discrimination or oppression as a result of these tensions. As a kind of social and economic support, these conflicts contribute to the development of gangs and the commission of crimes connected to gangs in some instances.

To sum up, within the complex interplay of urban dynamics, foreigners often find themselves at a distinct disadvantage compared to local residents. Lacking established social networks, these newcomers may struggle to integrate swiftly into the local community, leaving them vulnerable to various criminogenic pressures. Depending on personal characteristics and resilience, individuals may be more or less susceptible to influences that could lead them towards criminal behaviour. This raises a pivotal question: does an increase in immigration necessarily correlate with

12 Ibid.

13 Durrant, 2018, p. 254.

14 Ibid., p. 43.

15 Ibid., p. 45.

16 Ibid., p. 77.

a rise in crime rates? The next section will explore this issue, seeking to unravel whether the presence of foreigners in a city truly amplifies its crime rates or whether this is merely a common misconception.

3.

Methodological Framework: Navigating the Data

In the intricate weave of social research, exploring the interplay between phenomena such as immigration and crime rates is a time-intensive and complex process that often requires the collaborative efforts of numerous research teams. Each team contributes perspectives that can significantly enrich understanding of the relationships at hand. This iterative, multifaceted approach is well-documented in academic literature, with seminal works such as Bell & Machin's studies on crime-immigration nexus,¹⁷ and more recent, analyses by Kujala, Kallio & Niemelä on income inequality, poverty, and fear of crime in Europe, illustrating the depth and diversity of methodological approaches.¹⁸

In this study, our methodological framework is designed to navigate these complexities by focusing on two specific relationships. First, we examine the correlation between the percentage of foreigners in selected European cities, using Eurostat data, and the Crime Index, drawing on data from Numbeo.com. Second, we consider the proportion of foreigners within national prison populations, using insights from the study "Prisons and Prisoners in Europe 2022" by Marcelo F. Aebi, Edoardo Cocco, and Lorena Molnar. Although somewhat unconventional, this comparative approach is academically pertinent. It allows us to address both perceptions and misperceptions regarding the impact of immigration on crime, grounding the discussion in empirical data. By juxtaposing these datasets, we gain a multifaceted perspective that may reveal patterns obscured when each data source is considered in isolation. This, in turn, enables deeper exploration of how migrant populations interact with urban crime dynamics and the broader criminal justice system in Europe. Moreover, the scope of this study is carefully delineated to include a manageable yet representative selection of European cities, ensuring that our findings provide both relevance and specificity. This strategic limitation allows for a focused analysis, crucial when working with social phenomena as inherently complex as migration and urban crime.

17 Bell and Machin, 2012, pp. 48–54.

18 Kujala, Kallio and Niemelä, 2018, pp. 163–185.

3.1. Methodology and Limitations

Before turning to the statistical findings, the reader deserves clarification regarding the chosen data sources. The Crime Index provided by Numbeo, persuasive in the author's view, leverages user-contributed survey data, harnessing the perceptions of engaged respondents. This method estimates the overall crime level in a city or country through voluntary survey responses, submitted on the Numbeo website, where participants assess crime and safety on a scale from -2, (very negative experiences) to +2 (very positive perceptions).¹⁹ To ensure the credibility and reliability of the data, a filtering process is implemented to exclude spam and unreliable inputs. Following this, the Crime Index is calculated, with scores spanning from 0 to 100. Interpretation of these scores are follows:

- a score below 20 signifies a very low level of crime,
- 20 to 40 indicates low crime,
- 40 to 60 moderate crime,
- 60 to 80 high crime,
- above 80 points to a very high crime rate.

The index incorporates broad perceptions of crime levels; safety during the day and at night; concerns over crime such as mugging, robbery, and car theft; as well as personal experiences of property and violent crimes. Importantly, the index is dynamically updated: it incorporates data up to 36 months old and undergoes recalibration every six months.²⁰ This dynamic updating mechanism ensures that the index remains reflective of the current crime situation, and thus serves as a valuable tool for analysing crime patterns in urban environments.

3.2. Analysis of Crime Index and Foreign-Born Citizen Percentage

This analysis examines the correlation between the Crime Index and the percentage of foreign-born citizens across several European cities. The data suggests complex interrelations influenced by multiple socio-economic factors:

I. High Crime Index with Varied Foreign-Born Percentages

- **Marseille (12%; 65.7):** High Crime Index despite a relatively low percentage of foreign-born citizens, indicating that local socio-economic factors significantly influence crime rates.

¹⁹ See: Numbeo, no date.

²⁰ Ibid.

- **Birmingham (25.6%; 63.8):** Shows a high Crime Index with a moderate percentage of foreign-born citizens.
- **Paris (20.4%; 57.7):** Moderate percentage of foreign-born residents correlates with a high Crime Index.
- **Malmoe (34.4%; 56.8):** High foreign-born population and high Crime Index, potentially indicating challenges in social integration and economic disparities.

II. Moderate Crime Index with Higher Foreign-Born Percentages

- **Lyon (14%; 55.8):** Lower percentage of foreign-born citizens with a moderate Crime Index.
- **Manchester (31.4%; 55.2):** High foreign-born population with moderate Crime Index.
- **London (40.6%; 54.6):** Very high foreign-born population but only moderate Crime Index, indicating effective urban management despite diversity.
- **Barcelona (22.4%; 51.5):** Balanced foreign-born percentage with a moderate Crime Index.
- **Milan (10.7%; 51.5):** Lower foreign-born population with a moderate Crime Index.

III. Lower Crime Index with Significant Foreign-Born Percentages

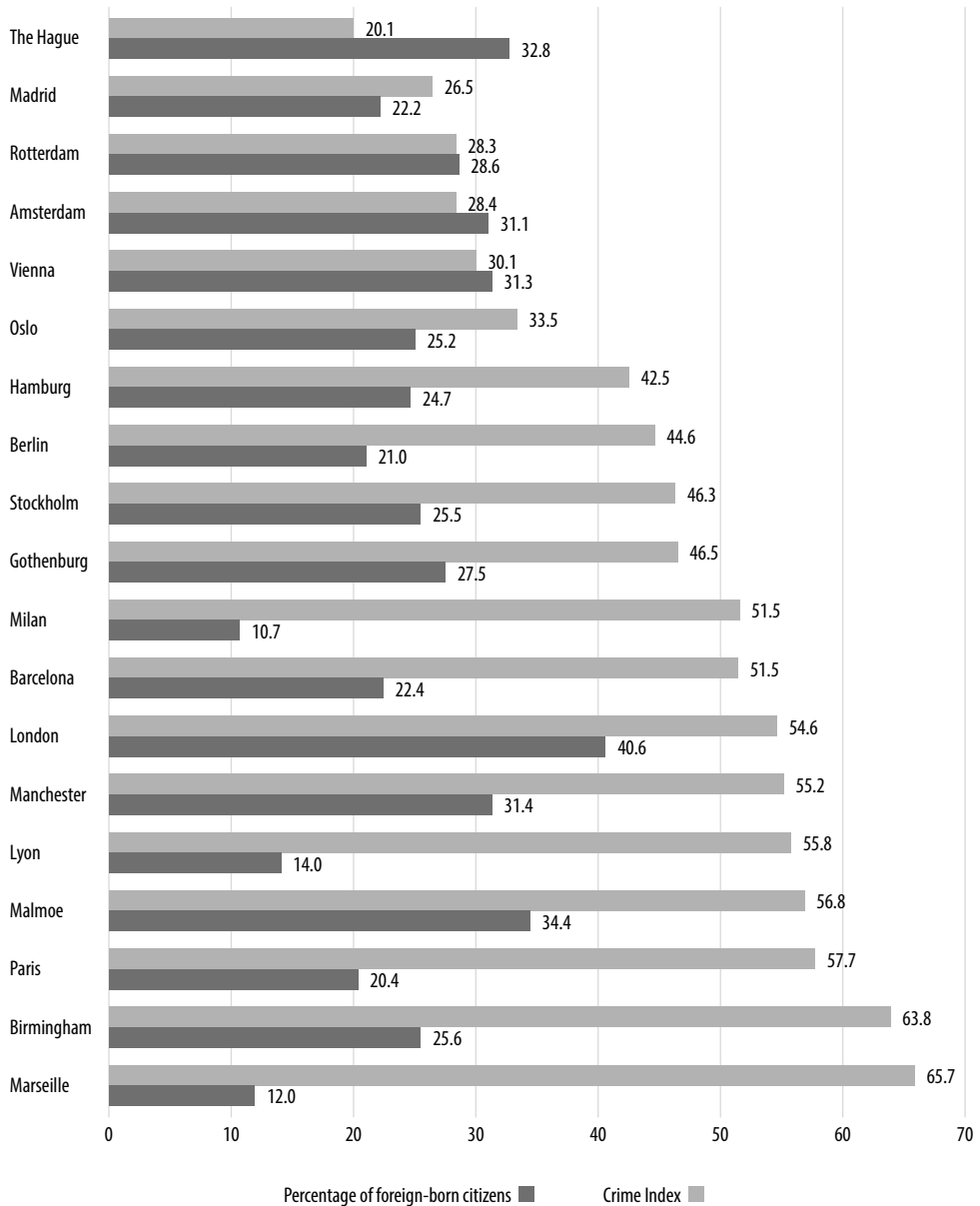
- **Gothenburg (27.5%; 46.5):** Moderate foreign-born population with a lower Crime Index.
- **Stockholm (25.5%; 46.3):** Similar to Gothenburg, indicating effective urban policies.
- **Berlin (21%; 44.6):** Lower Crime Index with a moderate foreign-born population.
- **Hamburg (24.7%; 42.5):** Moderate foreign-born population correlates with a lower Crime Index.

IV. Low Crime Index with High Foreign-Born Percentages

- **Oslo (25.2%; 33.5):** Lower Crime Index despite a moderate foreign-born population.
- **Vienna (31.3%; 30.1):** High foreign-born percentage with a low Crime Index, indicating strong social integration policies.
- **Amsterdam (31.1%; 28.4):** High foreign-born population with a low Crime Index.
- **Rotterdam (28.6%; 28.3):** Similar trend as Amsterdam.
- **Madrid (22.2%; 26.5):** Moderate foreign-born population with a low Crime Index.
- **The Hague (32.8%; 20.1):** High foreign-born population with the lowest Crime Index, suggesting highly effective integration and social policies.

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The relationship between foreigners and crime in selected cities (2023)



Source: Own elaboration based on available Eurostat data (2023) and Current Crime Index by City from Numbeo.com

The observation results reveal a nuanced and non-linear relationship between the proportion of foreign-born citizens and crime rates in European cities. Cities with high Crime Indices such as Marseille, Birmingham, and Paris do not necessarily have the highest shares of foreign-born residents. Marseille, for example, shows a Crime Index of 65.7 with only 12% foreign-born citizens. This suggests that factors beyond the foreign-born population significantly influence crime rates, such as local socio-economic conditions, historical patterns, and urban-management challenges.

Conversely, cities such as Vienna, Amsterdam, and The Hague demonstrate that high percentages of foreign-born residents do not inherently correlate with elevated crime rates. Vienna, with 31.3% foreign-born citizens, maintains a low Crime Index of 30.1. The Hague, despite 32.8% foreign-born residents, records the lowest Crime Index at 20.1. These cases illustrate the critical role of effective integration policies, robust social services, and inclusive economic opportunities.

Effective governance and proactive social policies can create environments where high diversity does not equate to higher crime rates. Further insights are drawn from cities like Malmö and Gothenburg, which show moderately high percentages of foreign-born populations (34.4% and 27.5%, respectively) and relatively high Crime Indices. These cities highlight potential challenges in social cohesion and integration, possibly exacerbated by socio-economic disparities and limited access to employment for foreign-born communities. The data suggests that the failure to integrate migrants into the socio-economic fabric of the city can contribute to elevated crime levels. Moreover, the moderate Crime Indices in cities like London and Manchester, despite their high percentages of foreign-born citizens (40.6% and 31.4%, respectively), underscore the importance of comprehensive urban policies. These cities benefit from established frameworks for migrant integration, public-safety measures, and community-engagement strategies that help mitigate potential crime risks.

In conclusion, the correlation between foreign-born populations and urban crime rates is far from straightforward. While high diversity can present integration challenges, the key determinant of crime rates appears to be the effectiveness of socio-economic policies, integration efforts, and urban governance. Cities that successfully address these aspects demonstrate lower crime rates, underscoring the importance of inclusive and proactive governance in fostering safe and cohesive urban environments. This analysis highlights the need for targeted policies that support social inclusion, economic participation, and community cohesion to effectively manage urban crime in diverse settings.

3.3. Analysis of Foreigners in European Prisons

When analysing penitentiary statistics regarding the percentage of foreigners in Europe's prisons, it is crucial to approach such data with caution for several reasons. First and foremost, the matter of statistical representation is essential. Research conducted in Italy, for instance, has revealed that while foreign nationals may represent a small proportion of the overall population, they constitute a far higher percentage within the penal system.²¹ This can foster distorted interpretations that amplify the perception of crime among immigrant groups.²² Secondly, cultural and legal differences across countries significantly influence judicial outcomes for foreigners. In France, for example, targeted enforcement strategies often disproportionately affect non-citizens, as illustrated by L. Wacquant in his examination of criminal policies and their consequences on marginalised individuals.²³ Because legal systems differ, drawing direct parallels is challenging, making it difficult to discern genuine, uniform patterns in crime. Finally, socio-economic variables play a vital role. Foreigners in several regions encounter significant economic disadvantages, which may heighten their likelihood of engaging in criminal behaviour. Sampson, Morenoff, and Gannon-Rowley's study investigates how economic and social marginalisation in urban areas correlates with higher crime rates.²⁴

From this criminological standpoint, we may now turn to the analysis of 2023 data. These statistics reveal significant disparities in the proportion of foreign nationals incarcerated across different European nations. This variety is a result of differing socio-economic circumstances, migration patterns and legal frameworks that merit explanation:

I. Low Percentages (1.3% - 10.4%)

Countries like Romania (1.3%), Latvia (1.8%), and Poland (2.4%) exhibit very low percentages of foreign prisoners. These figures may be attributed to lower levels of immigration and predominantly homogenous populations. Additionally, stringent immigration and integration policies might contribute to these outcomes.

II. Moderate Percentages (10.0% - 16.1%)

Countries such as Hungary (10.0%), Iceland (10.4%), and the United Kingdom (11.1%) show moderate levels of foreign-born inmates. These countries have experienced significant immigration but maintain robust legal systems that may influence incarceration rates. The UK, for example, has a long history of diverse immigration, contributing to its moderately high percentage.

21 See: Aebi and Tiago, 2020.

22 Ibid.

23 Wacquant, 2001, pp. 95–133.

24 Sampson, Morenoff and Gannon-Rowley, 2002, pp. 443–478.

III. Above Average Percentages (26.6% - 38.1%)

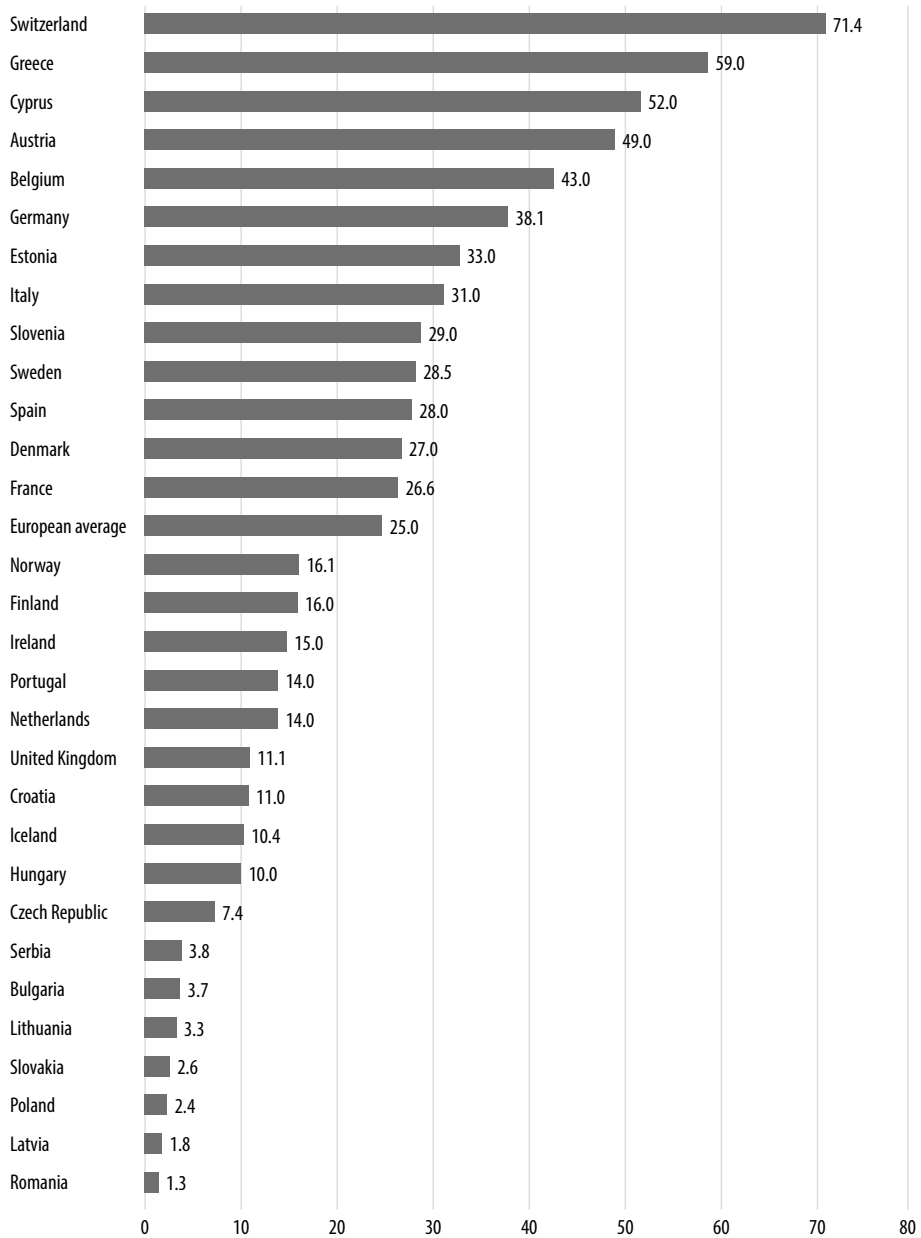
France (26.6%), Denmark (27.0%), and Germany (38.1%) exceed the European average of 25.0%. High levels of immigration, particularly from countries with different socio-economic backgrounds, may contribute to these figures. Germany, with its significant influx of refugees and migrants since 2015, showcases how socio-political dynamics can influence incarceration statistics.

IV. High Percentages (43.0% - 71.4%)

Belgium (43.0%), Austria (49.0%), and Switzerland (71.4%) show notably high percentages of foreign prisoners. These countries are major immigration hubs with high standards of living, attracting migrants from various backgrounds. However, the significant presence of foreign inmates may indicate challenges in integration and socio-economic disparities. Switzerland's exceptionally high figure may reflect its high proportion of foreign residents overall, along with strict legal enforcement policies.

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Percentage of foreigners in Europe's prisons (2022)



Source: Own elaboration based on available Eurostat data (2023)

The incarceration rates of foreigners in nations with significant immigrant populations (such as Germany, Belgium and Austria) reveal a compelling narrative. Could it be that the integration policies and socio-economic opportunities for migrants in these countries are lacking? High imprisonment rates among foreigners seem to point in this direction. Indeed, socio-economic disparities, scant employment opportunities, and widespread marginalisation can precipitate higher crime rates within these communities. Nevertheless, as noted earlier, generalisation is the weakest element of statistical interpretation.

Therefore, it would be appropriate to investigate two countries, Switzerland and Germany, in more detail, as their high levels of foreign incarceration may be attributed to several trends. Switzerland's exceptionally high rate of foreign prisoners (71.4%) results from a combination of interrelated factors. Despite its reputation for safety and order, Switzerland's wealth and central Europe location make it an attractive destination for international criminals and organised crime syndicates. These groups are frequently involved in serious offences such as drug trafficking, property crimes, and violent acts.²⁵ Switzerland's stringent legal framework and effective law enforcement agencies ensure that individuals involved in these activities are apprehended and prosecuted, leading to a high incarceration rate among foreigners.²⁶

The demographic composition of the Swiss prison population reveals significant presence of individuals from African and Balkan countries, as well as other European, American, and Middle Eastern countries.²⁷ Many of these individuals are undocumented migrants or cross-border workers without fixed residence in Switzerland.²⁸ The absence of a fixed residence generally classifies them as a flight risk, leading to confinement in secure facilities until their legal proceedings are completed. Furthermore, Switzerland's strong economy and high standard of living make it a desirable location for criminals enterprises seeking to exploit its affluence. It is a desirable market for criminal operations, especially drug trafficking and property crimes, due to the high spending power of its citizens. Consequently, Switzerland experiences a high influx of foreign criminals who deliberately visit the country to engage in illegal activities, contributing to the growing population of foreign nationals in the prison system.

This is further influenced by the Swiss judicial approach: when foreigners commit crimes in Switzerland, they are frequently deported after serving their sentences, meaning they must finish their prison time there before they may leave.²⁹ This approach guarantees that foreign criminals are held responsible for their conduct

25 See: *World Prison Brief 2024*, no date.

26 See: Islas, 2019.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

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under the legal authority of Switzerland. However, it also results in a notable proportion of the prison population being comprised of foreign nationals who are awaiting deportation.

Table 1: Crime Among Foreigners in Germany (2015-2023)

Year	Number of Suspected Foreigners	Percentage of All Suspects	Main Crimes
2015	616,230	27.6%	Thefts, drug-related crimes, violent crimes
2016	619,300	30.5%	Thefts, crimes related to illegal stay, property crimes
2017	618,000	33.0%	Thefts, violent crimes
2018	684,000	35.0%	Drug-related crimes, violent crimes
2019	700,000	36.5%	Drug-related crimes, violent crimes
2020	800,000	38.5%	Violent crimes, crimes against personal freedom
2021	850,000	40.0%	Thefts, violent crimes
2022	923,000	41.0%	Violent crimes, thefts
2023	923,000	41.0%	Violent crimes, thefts, drug-related crimes

Source: Polizeiliche Kriminalstatistik (PKS) 202330

In Germany, the incarceration rate for foreigners is nearly half that of Switzerland (38%); however, unlike Switzerland, this predominantly involves individuals who are permanent residents of Germany as a result of the unsuccessful integration policy. Most foreign prisoners in Germany belong to established migrant communities,³¹ highlighting integration difficulties and socioeconomic factors that raise immigrant crime rates. Germany has large immigrant populations from Turkey and Syria, whose long-term residency has not always translated into effective socio-economic integration.³²

Secondly, the nature of crimes committed by foreign nationals differs significantly between the two countries. In Germany, foreign prisoners are often involved in a wide range of crimes, including property crimes, violent crimes, and drug-related offenses. These crimes often have a strong correlation with socio-economic marginalisation and the complexities of assimilation.³³ In Switzerland, by contrast, the crimes committed by foreign inmates are more frequently related to organised transnational crime. Finally, Germany and Switzerland have different demographics and socioeconomic backgrounds for foreign inmates. Many foreign prisoners in Germany come from immigrant countries that have been present for decades and still

30 See: Bundeskriminalamt, 2023.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

struggle to integrate. Swiss foreign inmates come from a wider range of countries, particularly African and Balkan regions,³⁴ with many lacking stable employment or legal residency, which leads to criminal activity.

In conclusion, this analysis reveals the intricate interplay among migration, socio-economic factors, legal frameworks, and integration policies that shape the incarceration rates of foreign-born individuals across Europe. The data suggests that more effective integration strategies and equitable socio-economic opportunities are essential to mitigate the disparities reflected in these statistics. To fully grasp their meaning, further research must consider not only raw figures but also the broader socio-economic and political landscapes of each country. Only through such a holistic approach, can we understand and address the complex issues underpinning disparities in prison populations across Europe.

4.

Comparative Urban Analysis: Poland and Beyond

The incarceration of foreign nationals in Polish prisons remains a relatively marginal phenomenon despite a recent (2023) increase. While this indicates a growing pattern, the overall figures remain small in comparison with the total incarcerated population in Poland. In 2022, more than 12,000 individuals from other countries were formally accused of committing criminal offences, with Ukrainian citizens comprising more than half of this group.³⁵ By 2023, 17,000 foreign nationals had already faced charges, suggesting a growing trend.³⁶ Nevertheless, it is important to note that being charged with a crime does not necessarily mean being found guilty, and the current count of imprisoned individuals from other countries remains relatively low. The nationalities most commonly implicated in crime statistics, Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Georgians, reflect their substantial presence in Poland. One significant concern is the offence of driving vehicle under the influence of alcohol, specifically among individuals from Ukraine.³⁷ Although the number of criminal charges has increased, foreign nationals still exert relatively little influence on Poland's overall crime rate.

34 Ibid.

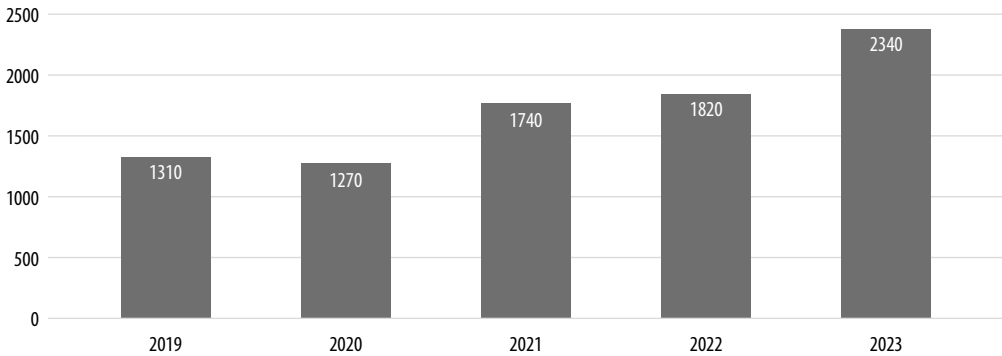
35 See: Zawadka, 2024.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

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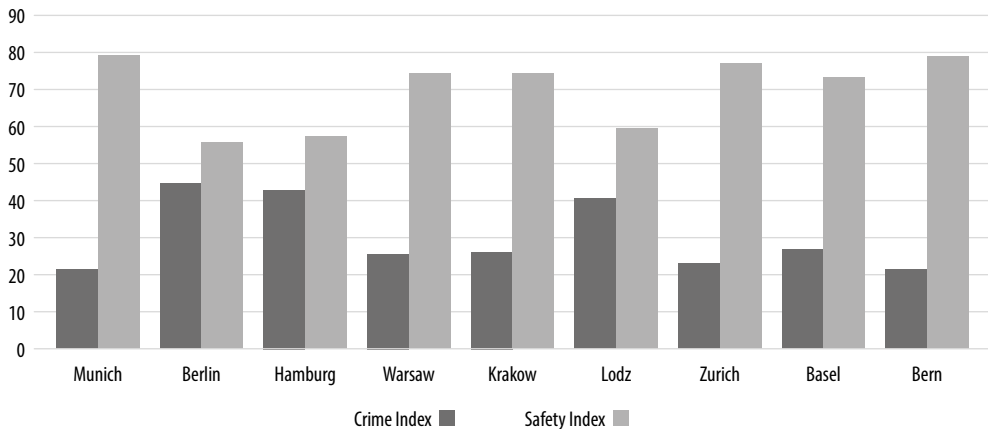
Foreign nationals incarcerated in Polish prisons (2019–2023)



Source: Statista 2024.³⁸

Despite previous concerns regarding the criminal activities of foreign nationals, European cities, particularly those in Poland, Germany, and Switzerland, are characterised by high levels of safety. A comparative analysis of Numbeo data from the three largest cities in each of these countries demonstrates no direct correlation between the number of immigrants and either crime or safety indices.

Crime and Safety Index in Germany, Poland and Switzerland (2023)



Source: Own elaboration based on Current Crime and Safety Index by City from Numbeo.com

³⁸ See: Sas, 2023.

For instance, Munich, with a crime index of 20.8 and a safety index of 79.2, is among the safest cities despite being a significant center for immigrants. Similarly, Zurich (crime index 23.0, safety index 77.0) and Bern (crime index 21.3, safety index 78.7) in Switzerland maintain high safety levels. Polish cities such as Warsaw (crime index 25.5, safety index 74.5) and Krakow (crime index 25.9, safety index 74.1) also exhibit robust safety metrics. By contrast, Berlin and Hamburg in Germany, with higher crime indices of 44.6 and 42.5 respectively, still maintain moderate safety indices of 55.5 and 57.5. This suggests that while crime exists, the overall safety perception remains stable. Similarly, Lodz in Poland has a higher crime index of 40.5 but maintains a safety index of 59.5. These statistics indicate that the influx of immigrants does not necessarily equate to higher crime rates or decreased safety. Instead, factors such as socio-economic conditions, effective law enforcement, and integration policies play a more significant role in shaping urban safety.

5.

Conclusion: Future Directions and Recommendations

The analysis of crime data and foreign nationals in European cities reveals no straightforward correlation between the number of immigrants and rising crime rates. High numbers of foreigners do not inherently render a city more or less secure, as demonstrated by the Crime Index data from various European cities, particularly in Poland, Germany, and Switzerland. The critical factor is not the quantity of immigrants but the quality and effectiveness of a country's integration strategies and social initiatives.

Effective education and thoughtful urban planning are essential to prevent the development of ghettos and marginalised areas. In areas where crime involving foreigners appears to be increasing, such as Germany and Sweden, this often stems from ineffective immigration policies, poorly conceived strategies, and ignoring social issues that drive immigrants to criminal activities. By contrast, Switzerland illustrates that a high percentage of foreign inmates can be attributed to a well-functioning state that actively fights international organised crime and prefers to detain dangerous individuals rather than deport them. The safety indices of European cities demonstrate that these cities maintain high safety standards, regardless of the proportion of immigrants. Looking ahead, strengthening integration initiatives is essential. Governments should prioritise comprehensive integration programmes, including language education, job assistance, and cultural orientation. These programmes can assist immigrants in adjusting to their new surroundings, thereby reducing the risk of social exclusion and criminal behaviour. Moreover, investing in education and social services is also paramount. Allocating resources to education

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and social services for both immigrants and native populations can alleviate the socio-economic factors that often lead to criminal behaviour. To sup up, this paper only scratches the surface of a multifaceted issue that demands further, more comprehensive analysis. Nevertheless, the author hopes to have partially convinced the reader that the world is not as black and white as the mainstream media often portrays it.

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