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World Prison Population List (third edition)

Roy Walmsley

The World Prison Population List gives details of the number of prisoners held in some 200 independent countries and dependent territories. It shows the differences in the level of imprisonment across the world and makes possible an estimate of the world prison population total.

Key points

- More than 8.75 million people are held in penal institutions throughout the world, mostly as pre-trial detainees (remand prisoners) or having been convicted and sentenced. About half of these are in the United States (1.93m), Russia (0.96m) or China (1.43m plus pre-trial detainees and prisoners in 'administrative detention').
- The United States has the highest prison population rate in the world, some 700 per 100,000 of the national population, followed by Russia (665), the Cayman Islands (600), Belarus (555), the US Virgin Islands (550), Kazakhstan (520), Turkmenistan (490), the Bahamas (480), Belize (460), and Bermuda (445).
- However, almost two thirds of countries (63%) have rates of 150 per 100,000 or below. (The United Kingdom's rate of 125 per 100,000 of the national population places it at about the mid-point in the World List. Among European Union countries its rate is the second highest, after Portugal's 130.)
- Prison population rates vary considerably between different regions of the world, and between different parts of the same continent. For example:
 - in Africa the median rate for western and central African countries is 50/55 whereas for southern African countries it is 260;
 - in the Americas the median rate for south American countries is 115 whereas for Caribbean countries it is 295;
 - in Asia the median rate for south central Asian countries (mainly the Indian sub-continent) is 55 whereas for (ex-Soviet) central Asian countries it is 425;
 - in Europe the median rate for southern European countries is 65 whereas for central and eastern European countries it is 210;
 - in Oceania (including Australia and New Zealand) the median rate is 105.
- Prison populations are growing in many parts of the world. Updated information on countries included in the previous editions of the World Prison Population List shows that prison populations have risen in 69% of these countries; a similar pattern is evident in all continents.

This third edition of the World Prison Population List has been compiled, like previous editions, from a variety of sources. In almost all cases the original source is the national prison administration of the country concerned, or else the Ministry responsible for the prison administration. Most figures relate to dates between 1997 and August 2001. Since prison population rates (per 100,000 of the national population) are based on estimates of the national

population they have been rounded to the nearest five so as to avoid the appearance of precision. In order to compare prison population rates in different regions of the world, and to estimate the number of persons held in prison in the countries for which information is not available, median rates have been used because they minimise the effect of countries with rates that are untypically high or low.

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SOURCES

C of E	Council of Europe	OIP	Observatoire International des Prisons
ILANUD	UN Latin American Institute	PRI	Penal Reform International
NPA	National prison administration	UNAFEI	UN Asia and Far East Institute

Table 1 AFRICA

	Prison population total (no. in penal institutions incl. pre-trial detainees)	Date	Estimated national population	Prison population rate (per 100,000 of national population)	Source of prison population total
Northern Africa					
Algeria	35,737	/96	28.6m	125	OIP, 1997
Egypt	c.80,000	/98	66.0m	c.120	Criminal justice expert, Egypt
Libya	c.6,750	/98	5.3m	c.125	Criminal justice expert, Libya
Morocco	48,600	/97	27.5m	175	OIP, 1998
Sudan	32,000	/97	27.9m	115	Conference paper, Jan 1998
Tunisia	23,165	31/12/96	9.2m	250	United Nations 5th Survey
Western Africa					
Benin	4,961	30/9/00	6.1m	65	NPA
Burkina Faso	6,100	31/12/94	10.2m	60	Burk. Faso human rights movement
Cape Verde	775	30/6/99	418,000	185	Criminal justice expert, Cape Verde
Côte d'Ivoire	13,670	5/11/98	14.4m	95	NPA
Gambia	478	12/7/99	1.25m	40	Ministry of the Interior
Ghana	10,444	30/6/01	20.7m	50	NPA
Guinea	4,014	31/12/96	7.25m	55	Response to UN enquiry
Mali	3,135	12/98	10.8m	30	Rept. of Spec. Rapp. on Afr. prisons
Mauritania	1,400	/97	2.4m	60	Conference paper, Jan 1998
Niger	5,263	1/10/98	10.15m	50	NPA
Nigeria	44,450	31/12/00	112.8m	40	Criminal justice expert, Nigeria
Senegal	4,653	9/97	8.8m	55	OIP, 1998
Togo	2,043	6/11/98	4.4m	45	NPA
Central Africa					
Angola	4,884	6/11/99	12.5m	40	UN mission in Angola
Cameroon	15,903	/97	13.9m	115	OIP, 1998
Chad	2,521	1/96	6.4m	40	OIP, 1997
Congo (Brazzaville)	918	/93	2.4m	40	PRI, from NPA
Sao Tome e Principe	99	/94	130,000	75	United Nations 5th Survey
Eastern Africa					
Burundi	9,411	/97	6.4m	145	OIP, 1998
Comoros	c.200	/98	658,000	c.30	Criminal justice expert, Comoros
Djibouti	384	16/12/99	629,000	60	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Djibouti
Kenya	35,340	29/6/01	30.1m	115	NPA
Madagascar	20,109	31/7/99	15.5m	130	NPA
Malawi	7,024	7/01	11.2m	65	NPA
Mauritius	1,985	23/6/01	1.2m	165	NPA
Mozambique	c.10,800	12/97	18.5m	c.60	Rept. of Spec. Rapp. on Afr. prisons
Rwanda	143,021*	30/11/98	6.9m	- *	Rwanda Human Rights League
*(Prison population total includes an estimated 135,000 held on suspicion of participation in genocide.)					
Seychelles	157	27/10/99	76,000	205	NPA
Tanzania	45,611	1/5/00	33.3m	135	NPA
Uganda	21,971	30/6/98	20.6m	105	NPA
Zambia	12,500	/99	9.0m	140	NPA
Zimbabwe	19,376	17/9/01	11.9m	165	NPA
Mayotte (France)	123	1/9/98	131,300	95	French Ministry of Justice
Réunion (France)	1,079	1/7/01	707,000	155	French Ministry of Justice
Southern Africa					
Botswana	6,339	10/8/01	1.6m	395	NPA
Lesotho	2,552	4/99	2.1m	120	NPA
Namibia	4,397	31/8/98	1.7m	260	NPA
South Africa	166,334	/00	40.4m	410	NPA
Swaziland	2,221	14/9/98	958,000	230	NPA

(No information Western Africa: Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Sierra Leone. Central Africa: Central African Republic, Congo (Kinshasa), Equatorial Guinea, Gabon. Eastern Africa: Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia.)

Table 2 AMERICAS

	Prison population total (no. in penal institutions incl. pre-trial detainees)	Date	Estimated national population	Prison population rate (per 100,000 of national population)	Source of prison population total
North America					
Canada	31,600*	/99-00	30.55m	105	Statistics Canada
*(Average daily population 1/4/99-31/3/00)					
USA	1,933,503	31/12/00	276.5m	700	US Bureau of Justice Statistics
Bermuda (UK)	286	29/12/99	64,000	445	NPA
Greenland (Denmark)	74	/00	56,000	130	Danish NPA
Central America					
Belize	1,097	30/6/99	239,000	460	ILANUD, from NPA
Costa Rica	8,526	6/99	3.7m	230	ILANUD, from NPA
El Salvador	6,914	31/12/99	6.35m	110	U.S. government report
Guatemala	8,460	9/99	11.89m	70	U.S. government report
Honduras	10,869	6/99	6.3m	175	ILANUD, from NPA
Mexico	144,261	10/99	97.37m	150	ILANUD, from NPA
Nicaragua	7,198	30/6/99	5.02m	145	ILANUD, from NPA et al
Panama	8,517	/99	2.8m	305	ILANUD, from NPA
Caribbean					
Antigua & Barbuda	186	2/98	67,000	280	NPA
Bahamas	1,401	1/98	293,000	480	Survey for UN by Wendy Singh
Barbados	772	1/98	265,000	290	Survey for UN by Wendy Singh
Cuba	c.33,000	/97	11.1m	c.295	Nils Christie, Oslo University
Dominica	298	30/6/99	71,000	420	ILANUD, from NPA
Dominican Republic	15,340	2/01	8.6m	180	NPA
Grenada	327	1/98	93,000	350	Survey for UN by Wendy Singh
Haiti	4,152	30/6/99	7.8m	55	ILANUD, from NPA et al
Jamaica	4,288	30/6/99	2.5m	170	ILANUD, from NPA et al
St Kitts & Nevis	135	30/6/99	40,000	340	ILANUD, from NPA
St Lucia	365	30/6/99	150,000	245	ILANUD, from NPA
St Vincent & Grenadines	405	30/6/99	110,000	370	ILANUD, from NPA
Trinidad & Tobago	4,794	30/6/99	1.365m	350	ILANUD, from NPA
Aruba (Netherlands)	223	11/98	94,000	235	Dutch NPA
Cayman Islands (UK)	220	24/4/01	36,600	600	NPA
Guadeloupe (France)	642	1/7/01	462,000	135	French Ministry of Justice
Martinique (France)	608	1/7/01	397,000	155	French Ministry of Justice
Neth. Antilles (Netherlands)	780	11/98	214,000	365	Dutch NPA
Puerto Rico (US)	14,691	31/12/00	3.95m	370	US Bureau of Justice Statistics
Virgin Islands (UK)	43	19/8/99	20,000	215	Prison reform co-ordinator, UK Overseas Territories
Virgin Islands (US)	518	31/12/00	94,000	550	US Bureau of Justice Statistics
South America					
Argentina	38,604	30/6/99	36.23m	105	ILANUD, from NPA et al
Bolivia	8,315	6/99	8.14m	100	ILANUD, from NPA et al
Brazil	194,074	5/99	172.25m	115	ILANUD, from NPA et al
Chile	30,852	9/99	15.02m	205	ILANUD, from NPA
Colombia	57,068	31/5/99	37.28m	155	ILANUD, from NPA et al
Ecuador	8,520	30/6/99	12.41m	70	ILANUD, from NPA
Guyana	1,507	6/7/01	861,000	175	NPA
Paraguay	4,088	/99	5.48m	75	ILANUD, from NPA
Peru	27,452	30/6/99	25.62m	105	ILANUD, from NPA
Suriname	1,933	30/6/99	442,000	435	ILANUD, from NPA et al
Uruguay	4,012	28/11/99	3.26m	125	ILANUD, from NPA et al
Venezuela	23,147	/99	23.7m	100	ILANUD, from NPA
French Guiana/ Guyane (France)	423	1/7/01	206,000	205	French Ministry of Justice

Table 3 ASIA

	Prison population total (no. in penal institutions incl. pre-trial detainees)	Date	Estimated national population	Prison population rate (per 100,000 of national population)	Source of prison population total
Western Asia					
Bahrain	911	31/12/97	589,000	155	United Nations 6th Survey
Israel	9,421	1/00	6.15m	155	NPA
Jordan	c.5,600	2/01	6.9m	80	PRI Newsletter 44, 2001
Kuwait	1,735	/97	1.7m	100	Conference paper, Jan 98
Lebanon	7,296	7/5/01	3.3m	220	UN Centre for Int. Crime Prevention
Qatar	527	31/12/93	540,000	100	UN enquiry (A/CN.15/1996/16/Add.1)
Saudi Arabia	7,939 *	31/12/93	17.2m	45 *	UN enquiry (A/CN.15/1996/16/Add.1)
			*(sentenced prisoners only)		
Syria	14,000	/97	15.0m	95	Conference paper, Jan 98
United Arab Emirates	c.6,000	12/98	2.4m	c.250	Criminal justice experts in U.A.E.
Yemen	14,000 *	/98	16.9m	85 *	PRI Newsletter 33, 1998
			*(government managed prisons only)		
Central Asia					
Kazakhstan	84,000	30/4/01	16.1m	520	Ministry of Justice, Kazakhstan
Kyrgyzstan	20,000	7/12/00	4.7m	425	Ministry of Internal Affairs, Kyrgyzstan
Tajikistan	c.11,000	5/01	6.3m	c.175	BBC, from Uzbek Radio, Tashkent
Turkmenistan	c.22,000	10/00	4.5m	c.490	BBC, from Interfax
Uzbekistan	63,900	8/00	24.3m	265	Ministry of Internal Affairs, Uzbekistan
South Central Asia					
Bangladesh	c.70,000	3/01	129.2m	55	Criminal justice expert, Bangladesh
India	381,147	/98	982.0m	40	Conference paper, Apr 99
Iran	158,000	3/01	67.7m	235	PRI, from NPA
Maldive Is.	1,098 *	/96	265,000	415 *	Ministry of Justice, Maldive Islands
			*(sentenced prisoners only)		
Nepal	5,878	/99	23.4m	25	UNAFEI, from crim. just. expert, Nepal
Pakistan	78,938	31/12/99	154.4m	50	UNAFEI, from crim. just. expert, Pak'n
Sri Lanka	16,850	mid-00	18.8m	90	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
South Eastern Asia					
Brunei Darussalam	333	mid-00	328,000	100	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Cambodia	5,502	mid-00	11.2m	50	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Indonesia	53,399	mid-00	212.1m	25	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Malaysia	25,994	mid-00	22.2m	115	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Myanmar (Burma)	53,195	31/12/93	45.0m	120	UN enquiry (A/CN.15/1996/16/Add.1)
Philippines	70,383	/99	74.5m	95	UNAFEI, from crim. just. expert, Phil's
Singapore	13,791 *	mid-00	3.6m	385 *	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
			*(does not include those in drug rehabilitation centres run by the Singapore Prison Service)		
Thailand	206,011	mid-00	61.4m	335	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Vietnam	55,000	mid-98	77.6m	70	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Eastern Asia					
China	1,427,407 *	mid-00	1,277.6m	110 *	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
			*(sentenced prisoners only)		
Japan	56,133	mid-00	126.7m	45	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Korea (Republic of)	64,038	mid-00	46.8m	135	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Mongolia	6,414 *	mid-99	2.6m	245	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
			*(sentenced prisoners only)		
Taiwan	c.31,000	mid-98	20.5m	c.150	Criminal justice expert, Taiwan
Hong Kong (China)	11,151	mid-00	6.9m	160	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Macau (China)	890	31/7/00	435,000	205	NPA

(No information Western Asia: Iraq, Oman. South Central Asia: Afghanistan, Bhutan. South Eastern Asia: Laos. Eastern Asia: Korea (Democratic People's Republic of North Korea.)

Table 4 EUROPE

	Prison population total (no. in penal institutions incl. pre-trial detainees)	Date	Estimated national population	Prison population rate (per 100,000 of national population)	Source of prison population total
Northern Europe					
Denmark	3,279	1/9/00	5.33m	60	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
Estonia	4,742	30/11/00	1.44m	330	Ministry of Justice, Estonia
Finland	2,703	1/9/00	5.17m	50	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
Iceland	82	1/9/00	281,000	30	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
Ireland	2,948	13/12/00	3.8m	80	NPA
Latvia	8,603	1/11/00	2.41m	355	NPA, C of E steering group
Lithuania	8,960	1/11/00	3.7m	240	NPA, C of E steering group
Norway	2,643	1/9/00	4.5m	60	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
Sweden	5,678	1/9/00	8.86m	65	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
United Kingdom					
–England & Wales	67,056	31/8/01	53.2m	125	NPA
–Scotland	6,172	31/8/01	5.1m	120	NPA
–Northern Ireland	863	27/8/01	1.7m	50	NPA
Faeroe Is. (Denmark)	9	/00	43,000	20	Danish NPA
Guernsey (UK)	70	19/7/01	61,400	115	NPA
Jersey (UK)	134	12/7/01	90,000	150	NPA
Isle of Man (UK)	63	9/7/01	76,000	85	NPA
Southern Europe					
Albania	2,922	1/9/98	3.35m	85	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
Andorra	20	23/8/99	66,000	30	Tribunal de Corts, Andorra
Bosnia & Herzegovina					
–Federation	1,065	30/9/00	2.5m	45	NPA, C of E steering group
–Republika Srpska	787	30/4/98	1.3m	60	NPA
Croatia	2,617	1/01	4.5m	60	NPA
Greece	8,343	1/9/01	10.6m	80	Ministry of Justice, Greece
Italy*	53,481	1/9/00	57.7m	95	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
* (by agreement with Italy, persons imprisoned by San Marino and Vatican City are held in Italian prisons.)					
Macedonia (F Yug Rep)	1,394	1/9/00	2.0m	70	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
Malta	260	1/9/98	378,000	70	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
Portugal	13,106	15/8/01	10.0m	130	NPA
Slovenia	1,136	1/9/00	2.0m	55	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
Spain	45,633	9/3/01	39.5m	115	NPA
Yugoslavia: Serbia	5,566	6/01	10.0m	55	NPA
Gibraltar (UK)	19	13/9/01	30,800	60	NPA
Western Europe					
Austria	6,896	1/9/00	8.1m	85	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
Belgium	8,671	1/9/00	10.25m	85	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
France	46,376 *	1/7/01	59.6m *	80	French Ministry of Justice
* (metropolitan France, excluding departments and territories in Africa, the Americas and Oceania)					
Germany	79,348	31/8/00	82.2m	95	German Federal Ministry of Justice
Liechtenstein	24	30/6/99	32,000	75	President of Crim. Court, Liechtenstein
Luxembourg	394	1/9/00	440,000	90	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
Monaco	13	10/98	32,000	40	French Ministry of Justice
Netherlands	13,847	1/9/00	15.9m	85	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
Switzerland	6,390	3/00	7.16m	90	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
Europe/Asia					
Armenia	7,428	1/1/01	3.5m	210	PRI Newsletter 44, 2001
Azerbaijan	24,881	2/7/97	7.7m	325	C of E report, Azerb'jan prison system
Cyprus	247 *	1/9/99	650,000 *	40	Cypriot Min. of Justice and Public Order
* (does not include the internationally unrecognised Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Including TRNC the population of Cyprus was estimated at about 750,000 in 1999, plus about 100,000 Turkish settlers.)					
Georgia	10,158	12/98	5.4m	190	C of E report, Georgian prison system
Russian Federation	962,700	1/4/01	145.0m	665	NPA
Turkey	71,860	1/9/00	66.6m	110	C of E Annual Penal Statistics

Table 4 cont. EUROPE**Central and Eastern Europe**

Bulgaria	9,424	1/9/00	8.2m	115	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
Belarus	56,000	5/01	10.1m	555	Nils Christie, Oslo University
Czech Republic	21,538	31/12/00	10.26m	210	NPA
Hungary	15,588	28/12/00	10.0m	155	NPA
Moldova	9,837 *	1/12/00	3.7m *	265	NPA

*(does not include the internationally unrecognised Transdnistria. Including Transdnistria the national population of Moldova was estimated at 4.3 millions in 1998.)

Poland	70,544	31/12/00	38.64m	185	NPA
Romania	50,710	1/6/01	22.4m	225	NPA
Slovakia	7,285	31/3/01	5.4m	135	NPA
Ukraine	219,955	1/11/00	50.5m	435	NPA, C of E steering group

(No information Southern Europe: Yugoslavia: Montenegro)

Table 5 OCEANIA

	Prison population total (no. in penal institutions incl. pre-trial detainees)	Date	Estimated national population	Prison population rate (per 100,000 of national population)	Source of prison population total
Australia	21,126	1/3/01	19.32m	110	Australian Bureau of Statistics
Fiji	1,185	mid-00	817,000	145	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Kiribati	57	mid-00	92,000	60	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Marshall Is.	23	/94	52,000	45	United Nations 5th Survey
Micronesia, Fed States of	39	/97	114,000	35	F S Micronesia Statistical Yearbook
New Zealand	5,648	mid-00	3.9m	145	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Papua New Guinea	3,566	mid-98	4.6m	80	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Samoa	176	mid-98	174,000	100	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Solomon Is.	134	mid-99	430,000	30	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Tonga	68	mid-00	108,000	65	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Tuvalu	6	mid-00	10,800	55	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Vanuatu	46	mid-99	183,000	25	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
American Samoa (US)	140	31/12/00	63,000	220	US Bureau of Justice Statistics
Cook Is. (NZ)	23	mid-00	20,000	115	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
French Polynesia (France)	275	1/7/01	239,000	115	French Ministry of Justice
Guam (US)	684	31/12/00	170,000	400	US Bureau of Justice Statistics
New Caledonia (France)	329	1/7/01	215,000	155	French Ministry of Justice
Northern Mariana Is. (US)	97	31/12/00	70,000	140	US Bureau of Justice Statistics

(No information Nauru, Palau.)

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The List has a number of weaknesses. It lacks information on 18 independent countries and figures do not relate to the same date. Comparability is further compromised by different practice in different countries, for example with regard to whether all pre-trial detainees and juveniles are held under the authority of the prison administration, and also whether the prison administration is responsible for psychiatrically ill offenders and offenders being detained for treatment for alcoholism. People held in custody are usually omitted from national totals if they are not under the authority of the prison administration.

Despite its limitations it is hoped that the World Prison Population List will be found useful by academic criminologists who are studying the use of imprisonment world-wide and by non-governmental organisations who are interested in variations in criminal justice practice. The data – for all its imperfections – may prompt fresh thought among policy makers and other criminal justice experts about the size of the prison population in their country, given the huge costs and disputed efficacy of imprisonment.

Roy Walmsley is a consultant to HEUNI (the European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control, affiliated to the United Nations) and an Associate of the International Centre for Prison Studies (King's College London). At ICPS he is research director of World Prison Brief Online, a comprehensive database of information on the prison systems of the world, which is available free of charge at www.prisonstudies.org