



International Centre for Prison Studies

ICPS NEWS DIGEST

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Welcome to the thirteenth edition of the ICPS News Digest, a selection of news items from around the world on prison and the use of imprisonment. We aim in the Digest to cover all regions and include new developments in policy and practice, as well as information from official and intergovernmental bodies. The Digest is produced bi-monthly and this issue covers the period from 1 January to 28 February 2013. Please click on the blue highlighted words to access the news reports.

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Prison populations

Figures from [Tanzania](#) show that the country's prisons hold 36,552 prisoners but only have capacity for 29,400. According to the Parliamentary Committee for Defence, Security and Foreign Affairs, poor case management and lack of communication between the prisons department, police and investigators were cited as a major factor in causing delays in court cases and leading to congestion in the prisons.

A recent report from the National Prison Administration in [Romania](#) states that there were over 31,800 prisoners in the country at the end of 2012, a figure that has been increasing since 2008. Half of the prisoners are serving sentences of one to five years, around a third are serving between five and 15 years and 150 prisoners are on life sentences.

The [Estonian](#) Justice Minister has said that the country's prison population of nearly 3,300 is still too high, despite having declined in recent years. The Minister reported that an audit of Estonian penal law had been commissioned and was nearing completion, and said that evidence shows that imprisonment is not necessarily the best option.

A new Congressional Report has found that the [US](#) federal prison population has increased by almost 790 percent since 1980, from around 25,000 to 219,000 prisoners in 2012. The

agency tasked with providing policy analysis to Congress attributes the increase to a host of tough-on-crime reforms that include mandatory minimum sentences, the elimination of parole for any federal crime committed after 1987, and increasing enforcement by federal officials.

Also in the [US](#) a report suggests that the imprisonment rate for African-Americans is six times the national average, meaning that young black men without a high school diploma are more likely to go to prison than to find a job. A Harvard sociologist stated that “prison has become the new poverty trap. It has become a routine event for poor African-American men and their families, creating an enduring disadvantage at the very bottom of American society.”

According to a newspaper report, the number of people imprisoned in [Sweden](#) in 2012 was the lowest since 2001. A representative of the Swedish Prison and Probation Service suggested that reasons for the decrease may include prosecutors deciding to drop cases or ordering that the defendant pay a fine rather than serving a prison sentence, and because suspended sentences with community service are becoming more common.

The number of people imprisoned in [Ireland](#) for non-payment of fines has risen to more than 7,400, an increase of 60 percent in three years. Despite pledges from the Government that a new computer system allowing a spaced repayments system would help drastically cut the numbers of those imprisoned, the figures have risen from 4,350 in 2009 to 7,467 in 2012. The rise comes despite the introduction of laws ensuring imprisonment is only used as a last resort. Problems with the courts service computer system have been blamed for the current situation. There is also concern in [Ireland](#) over the rising number of older prisoners, those aged over 50, which has increased by 70 percent in the past six years.

A report from the [US](#) states that more than 1,100 prisoners on long-term sentences are being held in California’s jails, which are designed for those with sentences of one year or less. The oversight of so many long-term prisoners is presenting challenges for county sheriffs as, in addition to finding adequate space to house the prisoners, they also have to provide them with education, training programmes, rehabilitation services and recreation, which adds to their costs.

The President of [Sri Lanka](#) granted amnesty to 1,200 prisoners on the country’s 65th Independence Day. Those released were serving minor sentences and some were those who had not been able to pay their fines. The release of prisoners has become an annual event in Sri Lanka, a move which has been welcomed by prison officials who have long been concerned about the overcrowding in prisons across the country.

The King of [Morocco](#) has pardoned 413 prisoners on the occasion of the Manifesto Independence Day and 753 prisoners have been released from prison in [Slovakia](#) after the President granted them amnesty to mark the 20th anniversary of the establishment of an independent Slovak Republic.

The [Turkish](#) President has approved an amendment to the Code on Criminal Procedure which means that prisoners given a six month sentence in a minimum security prison may

not have to serve the full six months. The amendment also paves the way for the release of 400 prisoners suffering from life threatening illnesses. It is anticipated that a total of 15,000 prisoners will be released as a result of the amendment.

The [Czech](#) prison authority will temporarily close three prisons due to the decreased number of prisoners arising from the President's New Year amnesty. As a result of the amnesty 6,330 prisoners (28 percent of the prison population) were released in little over a week, reducing the total from 22,640 to 16,310, and the numbers continued to fall, though only slightly, in the following weeks.

A [Cambodian](#) rights group has urged the government to investigate charges that prisoners paid bribes to be placed on a list to be released under a royal pardon. The pardon, which applied to 405 prisoners who had already served two-thirds of their sentences, was announced by the King on the occasion of the funeral of his father. But it is reported that some prisoners who were eligible for release are still in custody while others paid bribes to prison officials to have their own names placed on the release lists instead.

A new report from the [US](#) shows that the states of Connecticut, Arizona, Minnesota, Louisiana and Tennessee have all reduced their under-18 prison population by more than 50 percent since 2001 by implementing alternative measures to deal with juvenile offenders. Juvenile crime has not increased in this time.

A prison official has told the Royal Commission of Inquiry on illegal immigrants in [Malaysia](#) that there were a total of 7,140 foreigners in four prisons in the country in 2012.

The Interior Ministry in [Pakistan](#) has submitted information to the Supreme Court showing that 7,046 prisoners are awaiting execution across the country. According to the details provided by the ministry, 5,378 appeals against the death sentence are pending in the provincial high courts and 1,031 in the Supreme Court.

Health

At least three prisoners have died following a cholera outbreak at La Victoria prison in the [Dominican Republic](#). In January two prisoners died and 60 more were taken ill following an outbreak of the disease at a prison in the eastern province of La Altagracia.

The [Russian](#) government has instructed the Federal Penitentiary Service to provide prisoners and detainees with medical services outside of detention facilities in cases where detention centres are unable to provide such services.

[Japan](#)'s prisons and detention centres are experiencing a shortage of doctors, which has reduced the frequency of medical examinations and lowered the general quality of the health of prisoners, even causing the death of some, according to reports. The 188 penal institutions nationwide should have a total of 226 doctors but currently only have 187.

Federal prisoners in the [Canadian](#) correctional system receive substantially varied healthcare that is not equivalent to that received by the general population, according to

the Correctional Investigator, who said the biggest single complaint his office has received over the past decade has been lack of access to equality of healthcare, from acute mental health services to dentistry.

Human rights lawyers representing a group of HIV positive Zimbabweans imprisoned in [Botswana](#) are set to file papers in the Gaborone High Court to force the state to provide anti-retroviral treatment to foreign prisoners. The Botswana Network on Ethics, Law and HIV/AIDS says the Zimbabwean prisoners have gone without this essential medication for years because imprisoned foreigners are not allowed access to HIV treatment.

In the first state prison hospice programme in the [US](#), prisoners in the Colorado Territorial Correctional Facility are being trained to care for fellow prisoners who are dying of illnesses such as cancer, HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C. The number of prisoners aged 50 or older increased by 720 percent between 1991 and 2009 according to a report by Human Rights Watch, leading to more prisoners dying in prison.

Prisoners' rights campaigners in [Malta](#) say that the Corradino Correctional Facility, the country's only prison, is "totally unprepared" for physically disabled prisoners. The campaigners say there was no special care or nursing provision available to these prisoners and they were dependent on the goodwill of their fellow prisoners. The National Commission for Persons with Disability said the prisons director had failed to respond to concerns it had raised 18 months earlier.

Condom machines are to be installed in prisons in Northern Territory, [Australia](#). The move will bring the state into line with the rest of the country after more than two decades of debate. The provision of condoms is intended to help prevent the spread of communicable diseases.

Prisoners in [Cuba](#)'s penal system frequently harm themselves, often causing permanent physical damage, according to a press agency which has gathered evidence from prisoners and their relatives. The methods of self harming include mutilation of fingers, hands and eyes; burning and lacerating the skin; swallowing sharp objects; sewing lips shut; and injecting HIV infected blood into a vein. The report suggests some cases are genuine suicide attempts, others hope to gain release on the grounds of disability and others want to draw attention to their cases and get a review.

In the [US](#), court filings show that California suppressed a 2011 report by its own consultant which found that suicide watch practices in state prisons encouraged prisoners to take their own lives. The report found the state held suicidal prisoners, clothed only in a 'safety smock,' for long periods in dirty airless cells with unsanitised mattresses on the floor. The expert reported that such conditions only compounded the risk that the prisoners held in them would take their own lives, and concluded that prisoners would tell guards they were no longer suicidal to escape the cells, only to kill themselves hours or days later. The state asked a federal court to destroy the report after attorneys for prisoners obtained a copy, but the court refused.

Treatment of prisoners

The European Court of Human Rights has ordered the [Italian](#) government to pay compensation to seven prisoners who were held in conditions where they had fewer than three square metres of space each. The Court's judgment gave the country one year to correct the inhuman and degrading conditions in its prisons. The Italian President said Italy should be ashamed of the Court's ruling, calling it "a mortifying confirmation of the inability of our state to ensure basic rights of inmates awaiting trial and the execution of sentence."

The European Court of Human Rights has also ordered [Ukraine](#) to pay compensation to seventeen prisoners after judges accepted they had been tortured. The prisoners alleged they were brutally beaten by masked security officers and prison guards, sometimes to the point of fainting. They also say they were tightly handcuffed, ordered to strip naked and adopt humiliating poses, were transported in an overcrowded van, deprived of access to food and water, were exposed to low temperatures without adequate clothing and no adequate medical assistance was provided to them.

French Polynesia's administrative court has ordered [France](#) to pay compensation to a former prisoner who was held in inhuman conditions at Tahiti's Nuutania jail, which is among the most overcrowded prisons run by France.

Western [Australia](#)'s main remand prison, Hakea Prison, is suffering from a major infestation of rats, mice and cockroaches, according to the state's prison inspector. Other concerns raised by the inspector included a "sapping negativity" among staff, and out of date facilities.

[Mongolian](#) officials, including the Director of the Parliamentary Sub-Committee on Human Rights and several other members of Parliament, have visited four prisons to assess conditions. They concluded that human rights of prisoners are not being sufficiently respected, an assessment supported by the fact that over 20 prisoners had died in one of the prisons in the past two years due to substandard conditions. Only two of the country's prisons are believed to meet modern standards for the treatment of prisoners.

The director general of [Congo](#)'s prison service has admitted serious overcrowding in the country's prisons but does not think imminent improvements are possible. Prisons built 70 years ago, one to accommodate 150 prisoners and the other 75, currently hold 700 and 300 prisoners respectively. He said the difficulties faced were due to the age of the prisons, and that new facilities have not been built to address the growing number of prisoners. His remarks came following the publication of a report by the Congolese Observatory of Human Rights which noted appalling conditions in the prisons, including a widespread lack of adequate healthcare, sanitation and decent food.

The Deputy Master and Registrar of the High Court of [Sierra Leone](#) has said that the Pademba Road prison is unfit for prisoners. The prison, which was built to accommodate 300 prisoners, is holding more than 1,100, including juveniles. Many prisoners are subjected to long stays in holding cells, with some 60 prisoners sharing a cell measuring 25 square metres where they are locked in for 16 hours at a time with a single bucket for a toilet.

There are no beds or mattresses, and scabies and other infectious diseases are rife. There is also an acute shortage of water at the prison.

The Mayor of Kingston, [Jamaica](#), is working with the Prison Ministry to build an additional water tank facility at the Tower Street Adult Correctional Centre after visiting the prison and seeing that 212 prisoners had access to less than a dozen showers. The Mayor also said that more needed to be done about the overcrowding at the prison which means that three prisoners have to share a small cell, with one sleeping in a hammock attached to the ceiling.

A prisoners' rights NGO in [Malta](#) has deplored what it describes as degrading conditions faced by some prisoners at the Corradino Correctional Facility. Overcrowding at the prison means that 16 prisoners are housed in a dormitory just 48 square metres wide, share one toilet and are given small cupboards without locks in which to store their possessions, leading to confrontation when prisoners' belongings go missing. The NGO also found that beds were also being placed in corridors and other prisoners had to sleep on mattresses on the floor.

Inspectors from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons published a report describing [Cayman Islands](#) prisons as "barely fit for human habitation", with dark, decrepit, dirty wings with an oppressive and intimidating atmosphere and a strong smell of cannabis. Male juvenile prisoners were at risk of predatory sexual behaviour and recruitment into the gangs.

The inspector general of prisons in [France](#) has criticised poor detention conditions in the country, describing them as overcrowded, unhygienic and in contravention of international conventions. The inspector said the situation could soon become dire if urgent action is not taken. A prison escape from the 14th century Colmar prison in [France](#), where three prisoners used a table leg to pierce a hole in the roof of their cell and escape, highlighted the advanced state of disrepair at the prison.

[Kenya](#)'s only maximum security women's prison has opened a day care facility for prisoners' children under the age of four. Some were born in prison and, until now, have spent all their time with their mothers and other prisoners. The children can spend the whole day at the centre playing with the other children, and will go back to their mothers in the evening. There are currently 45 children under the age of four living at the prison.

In [Ireland](#) the prison rules have been amended to introduce new robust procedures for investigating complaints by prisoners. According to the Justice Minister, the first priority is to address the complaints which have given rise to the most concern – those alleging serious ill treatment, use of excessive force, racial discrimination, intimidation or threats. The amendments to the rules provide that prisoners' complaints will be examined by investigators outside the Prison Service to ensure an effective and impartial investigation.

[Burma](#) has promised the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) access to its prisons for the first time in seven years. The ICRC will make repeat visits to prisons and have individual and confidential discussions with prisoners. They will also monitor water, sanitation and medical issues.

A report by the Civil Society Reform Initiative in [South Africa](#) suggests that child prisoners in the country are being held in appalling conditions where they are locked up for 23 hours a day, denied an education or access to social workers and psychologists, in violation of the South African constitution and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The report studied 41 prisons and also found that 85 percent of prison officials have no training in working with children, 39 percent of the children received no visits for three months and no steps are taken by prison officials to ensure that children remain in contact with their families.

Seventy seven juvenile prisoners have gone on hunger strike in a [Yemeni](#) prison to protest about their conditions and also the sentencing to death of a fellow prisoner who was 15 years old when he committed the crime for which he was sentenced. As well as calling for the commutation of all death sentences imposed on juveniles, the prisoners are also objecting to the conditions in which they are held, which include inadequate space, a lack of windows and , in some cases, a shortage of beds. They are also calling for an immediate end to physically humiliating exercises or punishments imposed on them by the prison authorities.

Prison violence

Overcrowding has led to an increase in prison riots in [Yemen](#). The uprisings in 2011 had a large impact on prison populations as, during the revolution, courts were unable to process cases. This has led to a backlog in the courts and overcrowding in the prisons, accompanied by harsh and unhygienic conditions.

At least 26 people were injured and a number of prisoners escaped during a riot in a prison in [Argentina](#)'s Chaco province, while a riot by 650 prisoners in a prison off the northwest coast of [Mexico](#) left four guards and the prison's director injured. The prisoners rioted because they wanted better living conditions, food and leisure hours. A riot in Uribana prison in [Venezuela](#) left at least 61 prisoners dead and twice as many wounded. In 2012, 591 prisoners were killed in prison riots and other violence in [Venezuela](#).

Three separate inquiries will examine a riot at Western [Australia](#)'s only juvenile detention centre that caused millions of dollars in damage and led to dozens of juvenile prisoners being moved to an adult prison. Three prisoners climbed on to the roof of the Banksia Hill detention centre sparking a mass riot in which 60 youths armed themselves with rocks and other improvised weapons and smashed up nearly 100 cells.

In [South Africa](#), rioting prisoners set fire to the maximum security section of Groenpunt correctional centre. Police said the prisoners rioted over the quality of food and had refused to take their meal before they overpowered and attacked prison staff. Also in [South Africa](#), three prisoners were killed and 65 injured following gang-related unrest at the St Albans prison in Port Elizabeth.

The [Georgian](#) Prosecutor General has announced that an inquiry has been launched into the deaths of over 700 prisoners between 2005 and 2012, many of whom were allegedly killed.

The Prosecutor General's Office is also investigating acts of torture by prison guards on prisoners at the Gldani Prison No. 8 in Tbilisi.

[New Zealand](#) Department of Corrections figures show that the number of serious assaults on staff by prisoners has increased from 11 incidents in 2010/11 to 18 in 2011/12. Serious assaults include bodily harm requiring medical attention by medical staff following by overnight hospitalisation. Eighty eight percent of the attacks were a punch delivered to the face or head. The Corrections Department has initiated a project to enhance staff safety, which will look at direct assaults on staff and also at injuries sustained by staff while trying to break up prisoner on prisoner altercations.

A report from [Ireland](#) suggests that overcrowding, drugs and gang affiliations are behind high levels of violence in the country's prisons. A new incentivised regime is being introduced in the prisons which will reward prisoners for good behaviour. Rewards include additional phone calls to family members, being given the new cells in the renovated wings of some prisons and being offered the 'plum jobs' such as posts in the kitchen which keep prisoners occupied all day and gives them access to more food. It is hoped that this regime may help ease tensions.

Developments in rehabilitation

The [Turkish](#) company Türk Telekom is preparing to allocate micro-credit loans to 50 female prisoners in Aliğa Prison. The pilot project, in cooperation with the prison's administration, Gediz University, the Governorship of Izmir Province and other non-governmental organisations, aims to provide prisoners with the initial credit to enable them to establish a business.

Many of the job opportunities offered in [Canadian](#) federal prisons to boost prisoners' chances of finding work after their release are a waste of government resources that do little to keep the public safe, according to an analysis produced by the Public Safety Department. The report says the reason for this failure is that the work experience on offer rarely matches the skills prisoners need to get real jobs, preparing them instead for industries that are either obsolete or that have few openings when they get out of prison. A spokeswoman for the Correctional Service of Canada said they have developed a plan that will put more emphasis on programmes that respond to labour-market trends and take into account the types of jobs available to someone with a criminal record. The plan will come into effect later this year.

The [New Zealand](#) Prime Minister has announced that three prisons will be transformed into "working prisons" with 40 hour weeks of employment, training or rehabilitation for prisoners. The [New Zealand](#) Corrections Minister has also announced that more than 2,000 extra prisoners will study basic maths and reading through a partnership between the Corrections Department and the Open Polytechnic in a bid to improve their job prospects on release. Prisoners will attend two hours of classes per week and have eight hours of distance learning.

Prisoners in Bialystok prison, [Poland](#), are learning the intricate art of icon-writing as part of a social reintegration project. The prisoners are being taught by an iconographer from the Museum of Icons, and say that the lessons bring them inner peace.

In [Italy](#) there are now 110 theatre projects being run in prisons across the country. Other activities available to prisoners include restoring ancient Roman ceramics dug up near Rebibbia and cooking at the in-house restaurant open to the public at Volterra prison in Tuscany, which uses guest chefs from Michelin-starred restaurants.

Increasing numbers of low security prisoners in [Vanuatu](#) are undertaking trade training programmes. The prisoners receive training in block laying, furniture making, plastering and other skills and are presented with certificates to help them find work when they return to the community. Fifteen prisoners recently helped to build a new classroom for trainee nurses in Port Vila.

The [Uganda](#) Prisons Service has 21 farms and is among the largest producers of maize in the country. The farms are used to impart modern farming skills to prisoners, to enable them to find work on release. The farms also produce fruit and vegetables which are used to provide a balanced diet to the prisoners. In [Zambia](#) massive investment by the government and other stakeholders in the area of agriculture at Chondwe prisons has brought about commercialisation of prison farms. Chondwe Prison Farm grows maize as a major crop and is now broadening its production from cereal into leguminous crop production.

In 2012 [Bermuda](#) Department of Correction's "Giving Back to the Community Programme" oversaw a total of nineteen projects completed by prisoners from the Prison Farm. Projects completed include the cleanup of Fort St Catherine Beach; Cup Match ground preparation at Somerset Cricket Club; painting and refurbishing at the Bermuda College; and maintenance work at Lorraine Rest Home. The projects allow community organisations to redistribute funds allocated for maintenance to other important initiatives, and the work allows the men who participate an opportunity to develop skills that will aid them on their reintegration into the community and the work force.

At Boksburg Correctional Facility in [South Africa](#) prisoners can undertake rehabilitation programmes such as bakery, woodwork, steel work, upholstery, power coating and spray painting as well as agriculture. In the bakery 22 prisoners produce 2,000 loaves of bread daily, which feeds 5,000 prisoners. In the production workshop prisoners manufacture high quality office furniture, prison uniforms, curtains, fencing, security equipment and bedding. The head of the workshop said prisoners are treated as employees, leading to good working relationships.

At Wauwilermoos prison in [Switzerland](#) there are 20 types of jobs available to prisoners, including construction, work in the kitchen or on the organic farm. In order to make the working conditions as close to normal as possible the prisoners have to report for duty at 7.30am without a wakeup call. School is also part of the rehabilitation programme, and prisoners can attend class for half a day per week to learn subjects including German, mathematics and computer skills. The prisoners then receive a letter of participation to show potential employers. Vocational apprenticeships are also available.

Prisoners in [Malaysia](#) who have a year remaining of their prison sentence can apply for a seven day leave to spend time with their families or make preparations to find jobs when they are released. The Home Minister said the programme was aimed at breaking down the barriers between the prisoners and society.

In [Germany](#) the organisation Treffpunkt, which helps prisoners' families, organises group sessions in prison every two weeks for imprisoned fathers and their children , where they can talk, play and make things together in a setting more appropriate than those provided for normal prison visits. About 100,000 children in Germany have a parent in prison.

Sentencing and the law

Indigenous magistrates' courts are making progress in reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in prison in South [Australia](#), according to a study by the Queensland University of Technology's School of Justice. The study found that Indigenous defendants in the state were significantly less likely to be imprisoned, or receive penalties that often led to jail, when sentenced in courts for Indigenous offenders. The courts provide a more culturally sensitive sentencing process, involve community elders and a support network is put around the defendant.

In New South Wales, [Australia](#), the Justice Minister has announced the introduction of an early intervention programme which aims to prevent vulnerable minors who have received three or more police cautions from entering the court and potentially the prison systems. Under the Youth on Track programme, case workers will offer intensive support to children as young as ten, linking families with services that can respond to the causes of crime including substance abuse, educational disengagement, literacy and numeracy problems, anger issues, mental illness and family dysfunction.

Regulations have been put in place to allow magistrates to go to Her Majesty's Prison in [Antigua](#) to conduct weekly remands instead of having police transporting prisoners to court to do so. The aim is to cut down the risk of prisoners escaping; reduce transportation costs; save time used to round up and transport the prisoners to and from the jail and would also relieve prison personnel and police officers who are tasked with providing security when remands are done at the court.

At the end of 2011, more than 32 million cases were pending in [Indian](#) courts according to government data, and 26 percent of those were more than five years old. Lawyers say there are countless cases where litigants have died during the course of decades-long trials, and often the accused have spent more years in prison, awaiting a verdict, than they would have received in jail terms if found guilty. The [Indian](#) government has issued a directive to all states and Union territories to release all those awaiting trial who have completed half the maximum sentence they might have received if convicted of the offence for which they are on remand. They are to be freed on personal bond without seeking any surety and their cases will continue in the courts. According to government estimates, 67 percent of all prisoners are unsentenced.

A controversial bill aimed at speeding up the deportation process for foreign prisoners in [Canada](#) has cleared the House of Commons and is well on its way to becoming law, despite criticism that it is unfair and gives the minister of citizenship and immigration too much power. The Faster Removal of Foreign Criminals Act will ultimately make it easier to remove foreigners who have faced six months or more in jail for a crime committed in Canada, by barring them from appealing a removal order. Those with a foreign conviction punishable by as many as 10 years in prison would be barred from the appeal process, and serious foreign offenders will no longer be able to delay their deportation by filing an appeal on humanitarian and compassionate grounds.

Also in [Canada](#), a former justice of the Supreme Court has published a report commissioned two years ago by the Ontario government in which he concludes that aboriginals in the province aren't sufficiently represented on juries. He said that in a judicial system based on a long-standing principle that an accused person has the right to be judged by a jury of his or her peers, this shortcoming must be fixed. He said that he examined other provinces during his review and he believes the problem exists throughout the country.

The [Nigerian](#) Senate has pledged support for a Bill that would empower the Chief Justice of Nigeria and states' Chief Judges to order the monthly release of prisoners who have been unlawfully detained, as 70 percent of prisoners in the country are awaiting trial. The Bill would amend the Criminal Justice (Release from Custody) Act 2004 to make it mandatory for the Commissioner General of Prisons to send monthly details of the status of all prisoners to the Chief Justice and the Chief Judges of the relevant state who can then order the release of prisoners covered by the Act.

[New Zealand](#) Justice Ministry figures show that a significant amount of court time is taken up by minor drug cases, with nearly as many people imprisoned for possessing a small quantity of cannabis as for dealing. Among these prisoners are hundreds imprisoned for possessing a pipe or needle, an offence the Law Commission recommended legalising last year. The figures also show that fewer than one in three minor drug offenders are offered diversion, allowing them to avoid a criminal record.

[Mexico](#)'s first survey of its federal prison system has confirmed that the majority of prisoners in the country are there on drug charges. Over 60 percent of the prisoners surveyed were imprisoned for drug offences, including trafficking, sale, consumption, possession and transportation within Mexico. The report also found that 80 percent of women in the country's prisons were jailed for drug related offences.

[Colombia](#)'s Justice Minister has said a new drugs bill would decriminalise personal use of synthetic drugs such as ecstasy. Colombia's legislation is being reassessed in an attempt to tackle drug use, trafficking and related issues.

More than 50 death row prisoners at Mukobeko Maximum Security Prison in Kabwe, [Zambia](#), have petitioned the government for delaying the hearing of their appeal cases for more than 20 years since their original sentence. In a petition filed in the High Court the prisoners are asking for their unconditional release from prison, damages and costs,

complaining that their continued imprisonment without their appeals being heard amounted to psychological and physical torture.

Prison officials in [Zimbabwe](#) have said that while the country has recently appointed a hangman there are no imminent plans to utilise his services, and that the sentences of the 77 prisoners on death row will be reviewed. Prison authorities want to give prisoners facing execution a “chance to live” and all death sentences will be brought before the cabinet of ministers for a review to commute them to life imprisonment.

A report from the Asian Centre for Human Rights on “The State of the Death Penalty in [India](#) 2013” states that a total of 1,455 people were awarded the death penalty between 2001 and 2011. In the same period sentences for 4,321 prisoners were commuted from the death penalty to life imprisonment.

In the [Netherlands](#) 111 people currently held in secure psychiatric clinics may have to be released when their four year detention is up due to a ruling by the European Court of Human Rights. Justice ministry officials re-examined 2,400 cases after the court said people can only be detained in psychiatric prison longer than four years if convicted of violent offences.

Prison policy

[Iraqi](#) prison workers are undertaking training in human rights principles and standards. Five of Iraq’s prisons are taking part in the 60 day programme, in which 1,300 staff will receive two hours of training each day. The programme focuses on prisoners’ rights and the duties of prison workers and guards as set out in the Iraqi constitution and other international treaties to which Iraq is a signatory.

Prisoners in [Kenya](#) who were registered as voters before they were sent to prison will be able to take part in the national elections, after the High Court ordered the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission to allow jailed voters or those on remand to exercise their democratic right in the general election. The court however declined to order the Commission to re-open registration to enable all prisoners to register to vote saying it was impractical. In [Israel](#) 10,800 prisoners are eligible to vote in the national elections, with voting stations being set up in 31 Prison Service facilities across the country.

Convicted criminals in the [Netherlands](#) wait an average of 14 months before they actually go to prison according to justice ministry figures obtained by a news agency. After sentencing the sentenced person is sent a letter telling them when to report to prison. The news agency said some 15,000 people in the country are yet to serve their prison sentences. The justice minister said the figures quoted are preliminary and measures are being taken to reduce the amount of time between sentencing and imprisonment.

The [Sri Lankan](#) Prison Reforms and Rehabilitation Ministry is to undertake a project to interconnect all prisons and detention centres in the country to improve efficiency and share information. The aim is to have instant access to information in one place in case of

any incident anywhere in the country. They also plan to store prisoners' data such as blood groups, fingerprints and facial marks.

The [Colombian](#) President has inaugurated the first country-wide prison monitoring centre. The Strategic Prison Information Centre will allow authorities to monitor in real-time 40 prisons across the country via cameras located in the corridors and common areas of the prisons. It is also suggested that the Centre will include a crisis room for reacting to prison breaks, fights or contraband smuggling.

Following a report by the Council of Europe Committee for the Prevention of Torture which cited small cells, poor living conditions and prisoner violence in its prisons, the [Macedonian](#) government has invested 52 million Euros to reconstruct existing prisons and to build new ones. The Committee welcomed the efforts but said there is also an urgent need to address the level of the prison population by creating a variety of alternatives to imprisonment.

State penitentiary reform is not progressing as rapidly as hoped due to a lack of financing, according to the [Russian](#) Justice Minister. The government recently approved the reform concept up until 2020 but the Minister said reforms are expensive to implement, and even the prison system's daily operation is largely underfinanced.

[Zimbabwe](#) is to start building the first ever open prisons in the country, according to a senior government official. The open system allows prisoners with relatively light sentences to check in at the prisons yet be free to visit their families at weekends. In some instances prisoners may be allowed to report to the prison in the morning and go home in the evening.

The government of the state of São Paulo, [Brazil](#), visited the UK as part of its efforts to seek private investors for contracts for the construction and maintenance of three men's prisons with a total of 10,500 places. The [Uruguayan](#) government has launched a 25 and a half year tender to construct a prison for 2,000 male prisoners via a public-private partnership. The winning bidder will handle the design, construction, maintenance, cleaning, food, laundry and grocery store services, while the Ministry of Defence will remain responsible for the security, healthcare and recreational activities of prisoners.

According to the Chairman of the Texas state Senate Criminal Justice Committee in the [US](#), there are as many as 10,000 empty prison beds in state prisons, while the state pays \$123 million a year to lease beds from private prisons. The Chairman is calling for the closure of two privately run facilities. The new data comes on top of a report from last year which found that 30,000 of the state's 93,000 county jail beds were vacant because of "declining crime rates, government budget cuts and increased use of treatment programmes."

Senior government sources in Queensland, [Australia](#), have confirmed that the state government has established a task force to examine the feasibility of privatising all the state's prisons. The proposal is aimed at saving money, with privately managed prisons reportedly proving ten percent cheaper to operate than public prisons, mainly because of staffing ratios which mean fewer staff per prisoner. The move has prompted anger from the

public sector union which says privatisation would lead to more job losses and compromise public safety.

The [Irish](#) Prison Service has invited tenders for the building of a 160 cell jail beside the old Cork Prison. The Prison Service said its overall objective was to modernise the current system and to eliminate the practice of “slopping out” in jails that do not have integral sanitation facilities.

The [Libyan](#) Justice Minister has announced plans for the construction of a centralised prison near the capital, Tripoli, to replace the numerous temporary detention facilities across the country. He cited abuses and violations of law in the improvised facilities and said the government is determined to close them.

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