



International Centre for Prison Studies

ICPS NEWS DIGEST

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Welcome to the eighteenth 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 November to 31 December. Please click on the blue highlighted words to access the news reports.

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Prison populations

The total [US](#) correctional population (on probation, parole, in prison or jail) decreased for the fourth consecutive year in 2012 according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics. The majority of the decrease was due to a decline in the number of probationers and prisoners held in state or federal prisons. The parole population remained relatively stable during the year while the jail population was the only correctional population to increase in 2012.

The inspector general of the [US](#) Department of Justice has warned that the rising cost of the country's overcrowded federal prison system is an "increasingly critical threat" to the Department's ability to fulfil its other responsibilities with regards to the protection of national security, the enforcement of criminal laws and the defence of civil rights. The number of federal prisoners in the [US](#) has grown 27 percent in the last decade according to the Government Accountability Office while Justice Department spending on the federal prison system increased from just over \$5 billion in 2008 to nearly \$7 billion at the end of 2013.

The number of prisoners in [Australia](#) reached a record high of 30,775 in 2013, up five percent from 2012, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Indigenous Australians comprise 27 percent of the prisoner population.

The [Canadian](#) prison population is also at its highest level, even though the crime rate has been decreasing over the past two decades. The Correctional Investigator of Canada reported that the number of visible minorities in prison has increased by 75 percent in the last decade, while the number and proportion of Caucasian prisoners has declined significantly. More than 20 percent of prisoners are double bunked in cells designed for one person which the Investigator said was leading to growing tensions inside the prisons.

The [Cambodian](#) general department of prisons has been advised to address prison overcrowding and transportation issues between prisons and courts as it begins to tackle its 2013 to 2018 strategic plan for the country's jails. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Cambodia (OHCHR) noted the significant progress that had been made in the past five years in relation to such issues as prison staff training, health services and vocational programmes but said challenges remained regarding the transportation of prisoners to the court of appeal, prison overcrowding and the implementation of the law which they said was not comprehensive and lacks depth. The OHCHR also noted the fact that the female prison population nearly doubled between 2008 and 2013 "which has created challenges on the prison authorities to accommodate and manage the women prisoners in line with international standards." Work on the construction of two new prisons in [Cambodia](#) is due to begin in January 2014.

Sensationalised media, the rise of populist pressure groups and distrust of expert input has led to [New Zealand](#)'s high levels of imprisonment, according to John Pratt, Professor of Criminology. He noted that the crime rate had been falling for years but spending on prisons has risen to \$1.2 billion, and said constant media sensationalism of crimes had helped to create a climate of fear and anger.

In Victoria, [Australia](#), prison authorities have announced plans to house prisoners in shopping containers in order to deal with a shortage of prison beds in the state. The Corrections Commissioner said the plan was part of broader efforts to deal with the growth in the prison population, which she said was caused by changes to the parole system and reforms that have taken place.

The [Italian](#) Prime Minister has announced measures to reduce chronic prison overcrowding. The cabinet approved a decree extending the use of electronic bracelets and assigning more drug addicts to treatment centres to reduce the number of prisoners. The Justice Minister said around 1,700 prisoners would qualify for early release while other measures would be passed that would allow sentences to be reduced in some circumstances.

The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) has called on the [Portuguese](#) government to take "effective measures" to reduce prison overcrowding. The CPT's report mainly focuses on the situation at Lisbon Central Prison, which is affected by poor conditions and chronic overcrowding. The CPT delegation found damp cells, crumbling plaster, broken windows, a lack of artificial lighting and decrepit mattresses, which it considers could amount to inhuman and degrading treatment.

The Inspector of Prisons has warned that unacceptable overcrowding is the single greatest problem facing [Ireland](#)'s largest women's prison, the Dóchas Centre, which has capacity for 105 prisoners but was holding 141 in June 2013. He said the overcrowding increases tension to a level where the slightest thing could spark a major altercation. The Inspector also published figures showing that 86 percent of female committals to prison are for less than three months.

The latest white paper on crime in [Japan](#) shows that the number of female prisoners has more than doubled in the last 20 years, while a larger proportion of those women prisoners are aged over 65 than their male counterparts. While the overall prison population has continued to fall since 2006, the rise in imprisonment of women and the elderly has remained steady.

[Sweden](#) has experienced such a sharp fall in the number of prison admissions in the past two years that it has decided to close down four prisons and a remand centre. The head of the prison service said that while nobody knew for sure why prison numbers had dropped so steeply, he hoped that Sweden's liberal prison approach, with its strong focus on rehabilitating prisoners, had played a part. Sweden's surplus of prison places has prompted [Norway](#)'s justice minister to ask about the possibility of renting places in Swedish prisons for Norwegian prisoners. The request comes as Norway struggles with a shortage of cells, which police complain is forcing them to release people back onto the streets.

The [Russian](#) State Duma approved plans for a prison amnesty which covers at least 20,000 prisoners, including minors, invalids, veterans, pregnant women and mothers. The amnesty marks the 20th anniversary of Russia's post-Soviet constitution. It will take effect once published but the releases are expected to take place over six months.

Over 4,000 prisoners have been released from prisons across [Kenya](#) as part of an ongoing programme to decongest the prisons.

Reports suggest that [Kyrgyzstan](#) plans to grant an amnesty to almost one third of those held in the country's penitentiaries and detention centres. The amnesty – which will affect some 3,000 people – was announced to mark the 65th anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

The government of [Ecuador](#) has announced plans to eliminate prison overcrowding in 2014 through the construction and delivery of humane prisons, while the [Zambian](#) government has allocated K12 million in next year's budget for the expansion of prison facilities countrywide in a bid to tackle overcrowding.

A new 1,500 place prison has been inaugurated in Luanda, [Angola](#). The Secretary of State of Interior said the project is part of the government's efforts to improve conditions in the country's overcrowded prisons.

Health

Needle exchange programmes and increased access to HIV treatment are essential to curb infection rates among [Canadian](#) prisoners, says the lead author of a new study calling for immediate action. Dr M-J Milloy said other jurisdictions, including some American states, have reduced HIV rates among prisoners and protected public health in the communities they return to when they are released.

The number of deaths in [Zimbabwe](#)'s prisons has risen significantly in recent years as authorities battle to provide prisoners with adequate food. The Prison Service Deputy Commissioner told a parliamentary committee that the number of prison deaths had risen to 100 per year in recent years due to inadequate food and the HIV and AIDS pandemic. The prisons are struggling to give prisoners even one meal per day due to a shortage of funding.

Around 70 percent of prisoners in [Indonesia](#) are now drug users, which critics say shows not only how illicit drug distribution in the country has increased but also how poorly the government has tackled the problem. The Chairman of the House of Representatives' Commission III, which oversees legal affairs, said that "drug dealers, not users, should be the majority in jail" and that a change of paradigm, away from imprisoning users and toward rehabilitating them, was needed.

Prisons have become a "dumping ground" for the mentally ill who make up almost half of [Australia](#)'s prisoners, according to the chair of the National Mental Health Commission. He said the management of such people in prison is costing taxpayers millions of dollars per year and that the failure of the country's mental health services to cope with demand is absorbing as much as 50 percent of police time, with police estimated to detain a mentally ill person every two hours. The commission says 38 percent of the 29,000 people entering prison have a mental illness, and one in three prisoners with a mental illness has been in prison five times or more.

Civil society organisations in [South Sudan](#) have expressed concern that the country does not have a single psychiatric doctor in the public health sector. The director of the civil society group "Right to Good Health" said that most mentally ill people are kept in prisons, where they lack medicine and medical assistance.

Treatment of prisoners

The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) has called on [Russian](#) authorities to "strengthen action" to prevent the ill-treatment of prisoners by law enforcement officials, as well as effective investigations into allegations of suspected ill-treatment. During its visit to the Strict-Regime colony No. 1 the delegation heard a number of graphic and consistent accounts of deliberate and routine ill-treatment of newly admitted sentenced prisoners, as well as several credible allegations of physical ill-treatment by staff, including senior officials, of prisoners in disciplinary segregation.

A UN delegation investigating detention conditions in [Morocco](#) says torture occurs there but is no longer as systematic as it once was. After visiting detention centres and meeting with human rights groups and government officials the delegation head said Morocco should revise its 2003 anti-terror law to ensure precise charges and fair trials. The delegation also criticised confessions that are obtained in detention without a lawyer present.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) has called on [Tunisia](#) to amend its laws on arrests, interrogations, and initial detention of suspects, along with an improvement in prison conditions. HRW reported that “Lack of access to a lawyer during arrest and interrogation leaves people vulnerable to mistreatment, and some jails fail to meet basic standards for nutrition, shelter and hygiene.”

The [Turkish](#) Parliament’s Human Rights Research Commission’s Prisons Subcommittee has released its report on three prisons in the southern province of Antalya, highlighting the inhumane conditions faced by prisoners. The committee found food containing insects, beatings, and full body cavity searches, and also reported that gay and transsexual prisoners “suffer twice as badly for their sexual identities.” A number of prisoners in the Antalya L Type jail, where 1,600 prisoners are currently held, are forced to sleep on the floor in front of the toilet doors and stairwells. Prisoners were unable to wash their clothes due to water problems, and hygiene is a serious problem.

Conditions at [Greek](#) prisons, from overcrowded, filthy cells to restricted access to toilets, led the European Court of Human Rights to rule that Greece was responsible for “inhuman and degrading conditions” at some facilities. The judges considered two cases. In the first case a prisoner had been held at the Larissa prison where his cell was infested with cockroaches and during the night prisoners were denied access to toilets and had to use bottles. In the second case a man was held in the Aspropyrgos detention centre for illegal immigrants where 136 people lived in a 240 square metre space with poor light and miserable sanitary conditions.

Whilst prisoner numbers have decreased slightly in [Cambodia](#) in the past year, overcrowded, squalid conditions are common and corruption is widespread, according to the rights group Licadho. The group reported that for most prisoners, financial circumstances determine conditions of detention, treatment and access to basic needs such as food, water, daylight and fresh air. Those with little or no money are the most likely to be denied their basic rights and are the most vulnerable to abuse. Pre-trial prisoners are often held in worse conditions than convicted prisoners.

The head of Baidoa’s central prison in [Somalia](#) has said that more than 500 prisoners held there are at risk of starvation if the prison does not receive necessary food and medical supplies. He also said that all of the 15 soldiers who used to guard the prison have left because they had not been paid for months nor given food.

The [Zimbabwe](#) National Water Authority (Zinwa) has disconnected water supplies to Karoi prison, which houses around 300 prisoners, over a \$37,000 debt. The borehole drilled within the prison premises has dried up so prisoners are using buckets donated by the Red Cross to

get water from a borehole outside the prison, and staff fear an outbreak of cases of diarrhoea may occur.

In Victoria, [Australia](#), the Ombudsman has said that juvenile prisoners should not be put in adult prisons, where some have been held in solitary confinement for months. He said children were being put in overcrowded adult prisons because the youth correctional facilities can't manage their violent behaviour. He recommended the government remove the option to transfer children to the adult prison system once the expansion of the Youth Justice Centre becomes operational in 2015.

The Reform and Rehabilitation Directorate at the Ministry of the Interior in [Bahrain](#) has separated prisoners aged 15-18 at Jaw prison from the rest of the prisoners. The move is part of the implementation of recommendations made in a report by the Office of the Ombudsman following a visit to the prison in September.

A new jail for women has opened at Ajman Central Jail in the [United Arab Emirates](#) as part of its expansion project. The new facility includes a fully equipped medical clinic, a children's hall containing rides and toys, as well as a nursery for the prisoners' children. The Commander in Chief of Ajman Police said the new jail was established based on a study determining how best to serve prisoners and their children, and also said the police are keen to provide the best services and respect for women prisoners.

A report has found that policies and procedures at women's prisons in New South Wales, [Australia](#), could be re-traumatising victims of sexual assault. The report says 80 percent of women in jail have a history of sexual abuse and procedures such as strip searches can exacerbate their trauma. Corrective Services NSW say they are creating a framework to provide trauma training for officers and offer new counselling programmes. A review of strip searching, balanced against the requirements to control contraband, is also on the agenda.

Prison violence

Fifty nine prisoners were killed in a single northern [Brazilian](#) prison in 2013, according to a judicial report. Video taken inside the Pedrinhas prison in Sao Luis also shows the torture of one prisoner at the hands of others, and cases of beheadings. The district judge who wrote the report said the video was "the most barbarous scene" he had ever witnessed. The report describes a desperately overcrowded facility where the prison authorities have lost control and where punishment or retribution is handed out on a daily basis by gangs.

Cases of violence and prisoners controlling [Mexican](#) prisons are on the rise, symptoms of the corruption and lack of resources that plague the country's prison system, according to the National Human Rights Commission. Riots, homicides, prison escapes and other incidents increased from 52 in 2011 to 119 at October 2013. The report, based on visits and interviews at 101 Mexican prisons found that 65 of the facilities are run by the prisoners, not the authorities. The report said that in first ten months of 2013, 109 prisoners had died and 224 were injured.

At least nine prisoners died and 22 others injured during a fight at Luanda Central Prison in [Angola](#). The prisoners died after inhaling smoke from mattresses which had been set on fire. Also in [Angola](#), 52 prisoners were injured during a riot at the Viana prison. Eighteen of the prisoners were in a serious condition.

In the [US](#), county jails that account for the vast majority of local prisoners in California have seen a marked increase in violence since they began housing thousands of people who previously would have gone to state prisons. Many of the ten counties that account for 70 percent of the state's total jail population have experienced a surge in the number of prisoner fights and assaults on staff. The spike corresponds to a law which came into effect in 2011 by which lower level offenders are sentenced to county jails instead of state prisons. This realignment of the prison system was in response to federal court orders requiring the reduction of prison overcrowding.

The [New Zealand](#) Corrections Department aims to reduce assaults on prison staff in the next two years, after reported attacks more than doubled in three years. Figures show there were 354 prisoner-on-staff assaults in prisons throughout the country in 2012-13, up from 149 in 2009-10. The Department has launched a staff safety plan to help it achieve its goal of a 50 percent reduction in prisoner-on-staff assaults by 2015.

Developments in rehabilitation

A week of events aimed at rehabilitating ex-prisoners and reintegrating them back into society has been launched in Sharjah in the [United Arab Emirates](#). Events taking place include a get together party for the families of prisoners, theatrical dramas and awareness sessions held by the police. Students from local schools performed a drama highlighting the pain families endure when their loved ones were imprisoned and a number of former prisoners were honoured for their good behaviour after being released.

[Saudi Arabia](#)'s first model reformatory will be operational in Riyadh within five months, according to the Director General of Prisons. The reformatory will have capacity for 7,500 male and female prisoners and will house educational institutions, factories and workshops for vocational training, farms for the cultivation of all types of livestock, and facilities for social, cultural and recreational programmes.

Prisoners at Rebibbia prison in [Italy](#) are making clocks as part of an art project organised by designer Sara Ferrari and the Artwo gallery. The clocks, which are made from waste from leather products, are being exhibited at the Triennale Design Museum in Milan and will be sold through the Artwo gallery, with prisoners earning a percentage of the sale.

Antarkranti, a brand of products made by prisoners in [India](#), is now available online via the virtual marketplace Snapdeal. The website has partnered with Antarkranti, a programme for prisoner rehabilitation and reformation, to promote and sell the products online. Antarkranti is currently operating in 40 prisons in India and gives prisoners the chance to learn skills in prison that they can use to earn a living on release.

In July 2013 the [Irish](#) Prison Service announced that it was exploring the possibility of introducing a wireless connection to cells to allow prisoners to take courses outside of normal prison school hours. Following a feasibility study the Prison Service has said the idea has been shelved due to the structure of the prisons – particularly the thickness of the prison walls - causing difficulties in getting a strong enough signal to every cell. The Prison Service will now look into whether it is possible to provide internet access to prisoners via cabling.

Sentencing and the law

The [Maldivian](#) People's Majilis has voted unanimously to pass the landmark Anti-Torture Act, and the Prisons and Parole Act. The Anti-Torture Act declares freedom from torture as a fundamental right, penalises torture, ensures respect for the human rights of criminal suspects, and prohibits torture in state custody, detention in undisclosed locations, and solitary confinement. The Prisons and Parole Act specifies rules for the management of prisons and procedures for imprisonment, rehabilitation and parole as well as the rights and benefits due to prisoners. It also provides for the establishment of an independent Maldives Correction Service to oversee the prisons.

The [Mozambican](#) Parliament has been debating a new Penal Code which would replace the Portuguese Penal Code of 1886. The new code seeks to avoid imprisoning people for minor offences, preferring to give courts the option of non-custodial sentences. However penalties for those defined as 'heinous crimes' are greatly increased, from a maximum 24 years to 40 years without the right to parole, amnesty or pardon. A 'heinous crime' is described as one committed with great violence or cruelty where the perpetrator shows no sense of compassion or mercy, and which causes repugnance to society.

Thanks to a new article in [Costa Rica's](#) Narcotics Law, women convicted of bringing drugs into prisons will face lighter sentences. This measure will initially benefit around 100 women currently serving sentences for this crime. The legislation mandates a prison term of three to eight years for those convicted of bringing drugs into prisons. Previously it was punishable by a sentence of eight to 20 years. The change to the law also gives judges the flexibility to consider alternative sentences, such as house arrest or assignment to one of the country's ten halfway houses, where prisoners are given a place to stay and allowed to work during the day.

Drug users in [Malta](#) may be given a severe reprimand rather than face criminal action if caught in possession of illegal substances for personal use. The proposal is being considered by the government as it evaluates options for drug decriminalisation. A draft law has been presented to the government which will consider it before seeking Cabinet approval.

A new report by Human Rights Watch says the [US](#) Justice Department regularly coerces defendants in federal drug cases to plead guilty by threatening them with steep prison sentences or stacking charges to increase their time in prison. The report found that defendants who chose not to plead guilty but to take the case to trial faced prison sentences an average of 11 years longer than those who pleaded guilty. The report found that 97 percent of defendants plead guilty.

A nationwide study of prisoners in [India](#) found that less than 30 percent were granted parole in 2012, with the numbers varying greatly from state to state. Less than one percent of prisoners in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar were granted parole, while Tamil Nadu paroled around 82 percent of its prisoners in 2012. Parole in India is a legal sanction that allows the prisoner to leave the prison for a period not exceeding 30 days and is usually granted after a prisoner has served at least one year of their sentence. It is counted as part of the prisoners' sentence and allows them to maintain their links with society.

Courts in central [China](#)'s Henan province have developed a pilot scheme that would abolish the decades long court protocol of forcing defendants charged with criminal offences to wear prison uniforms and have their heads shaved at hearings. The Director of Henan High People's Court said that "before a defendant receives a sentence or is put in prison, no-one can pre-judge him as a criminal... A defendant wearing a prison suit and having a shaved head or being locked up in a cage in court are all signs of 'presumption of guilt.'" The Court has yet to set a date for the pilot scheme, which is believed to be the first on the mainland.

A committee appointed by the Justice Ministry of [Sri Lanka](#) is currently reviewing the country's Penal Code to make recommendations regarding commuting the death penalty into life imprisonment. The Justice Minister said the ten member committee, which is still at its preliminary stage, is reviewing the case records of all condemned prisoners and will make its recommendations in due course. Although Sri Lankan courts give the death penalty for serious crimes such as murder, rape and drug trafficking, no executions have been carried out since 1976.

Prison policy

The [Ghana](#) Prisons Service is to begin training programmes for officers in handling the needs of women and child prisoners. The Chief Public Relations Officer said the move forms part of efforts to improve the quality of service and stated that women and children will be catered for specially within the prison system.

A number of prison staff in [Saudi Arabia](#) have strongly criticised the Directorate General of Prisons for what they described as "outdated rules and regulations" and also their alleged failure to rehabilitate prisoners. The staff said there were former prisoners who were still registered as prisoners even though they had served their prison terms and been released. This was due to the lack of an electronic system meaning staff had to fill in and update all paperwork concerning prisoners manually. The staff also said that the unit in charge of rehabilitating prisoners only offers religious lectures and Qu'ran memorisation rings and did not initiate any social or psychological programmes to help with the rehabilitation of prisoners. They also noted that the majority of prisons in the Kingdom do not have resident psychiatrists or social workers.

Around 3,500 prison staff in [Ireland](#) are to undertake a human rights training course. The programme has been developed by the Human Rights Commission and the Irish Prison Service. In launching the course the Minister of Justice said "The protection of human rights

is not solely a matter for Government or for policy makers. In the Irish Prison Service, human rights concerns are relevant from management to staff at the front line.”

The reorganisation of the [Dutch](#) prison system is being done so quickly that it has become chaotic, according to the FNV civil service union Abvacabo. The union is urging junior justice minister Fred Teeven to slow down the process and ensure all agreements made about staff who are losing their jobs or being moved are met. Around 100 people are said to have reported problems to a union hotline about lack of leadership, random placements, the high pressure of work and broken promises. The shake-up involves closing prisons and boosting cell sharing among inmates in an effort to save €340m.

The [South African](#) Correctional Services Minister has announced the roll-out of an electronic monitoring system, which will see some prisoners tagged with GPS tracking devices. The Minister said the main purpose of implementing the tags is to reduce the prison population. The project has been budgeted for in the next year, where it is hoped that around 500 prisoners could be tagged.

Five years after ratifying the UN Optional Protocol to the Convention of Torture (OPCAT), [Cambodia](#) is not honouring some of its commitments under the treaty, according to UN representatives. Under OPCAT, Cambodia was obliged to create an independent National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) to monitor places of detention within a year of its ratification of the protocol. However some four years after the first round of spot checks of the country’s detention centres, and two years after it was admonished by the UN, Cambodia has failed to do so, relying instead on a government panel composed of the very ministries it is meant to monitor.

A vice minister of justice has said that [China](#) will make administrative information about the country’s prisons more widely available, a move which aims to support judicial reform. The minister said information concerning the rights and interests of prisoners, assessment of prisoners, punishment, parole and prison administration procedures should all be publicised. He said “China will establish an improved, rational information dissemination system to tighten prison management and bring about a system of strict, just and civilised law enforcement.”

Prison escapees should be shot on sight, according to the Commissioner General of Prisons in [Uganda](#). The order came at the urging of a warder who said escaping prisoners should be shot to prevent others from following suit. The Commissioner General added that warders were justified in shooting escaping prisoners but should aim to maim not to kill.

A [German](#) state spent €4.3 million on a prison which only had one prisoner and then closed, according to a report. The single prisoner was accompanied by 26 members of staff for a year. The prison was revamped into a therapy centre for mentally ill, violent prisoners in 2011 and closed in December 2012. It was meant to be demolished but there are now plans to turn it into a hotel for prison visitors.

The [South African](#) Correctional Services Minister has told parliament that his department now has doubts about the effectiveness of bringing in private contractors to run prisons. He

was speaking to the parliamentary portfolio committee on correctional services in the wake of allegations of torture and brutality by employees of G4S at Mangaung prison. ANC MPs said such outsourcing should be abandoned, and the committee chairman told the Minister “You can leave here knowing the sentiment of the portfolio committee is that we are not in favour [of such outsourcing.]”

A prison in [France](#) has been ordered to make halal meals available to its Muslim prisoners in a landmark legal ruling. The administrative tribunal in Grenoble ruled that the Saint-Quentin-Fallavier prison must begin serving halal meals in its canteen, citing French laws guaranteeing ‘free exercise of religion.’ It is the first time a French legal institution has ruled that a prison must provide certain food to accommodate prisoners’ religious beliefs.

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