



INTERNATIONAL PRISON NEWS DIGEST

25th Edition – January - February 2015

Welcome to the twenty fifth edition of the International Prison 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 2015. Please click on the blue highlighted words to access the news reports.

Please note that ICPR is not responsible for the accuracy of external content.

Prison populations

Prisoners in New South Wales, [Australia](#), are to be housed in portable cellblocks as the state government deals with the consequences of its decision to close three and a half prisons under the previous Attorney General, leaving a shortage of 900 beds. The cellblocks, which it is understood will have a capacity to house 40 prisoners, will be built by prisoners at Cessnock Jail as part of Corrective Services Industries. New staff are being trained to replace full-time officers who were made redundant when the jails closed. The prison officers' union has written to Premier Mike Baird warning him that the state's jails are already at full capacity of 10,800 — with the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research warning that number will rise to 12,500 prisoners by the end of March. Prison officers say plans to make every cell "two-out" — two-persons per cell — will put officers' lives at risk.

[Albania](#)'s commissioner for the prevention of torture has criticised the level of overcrowding in the country's prisons, which he says is caused in part by the government's anti-crime drive. Hundreds of Albanians have to endure insufficient space and bad conditions in pre-trial detention centres. This is creating conditions for "inhuman and degrading treatment" the commissioner said. The government has been pushing police and courts to deal more harshly with offenders found to be driving cars or riding motorbikes without proper documents or stealing electricity from the national grid. Human rights activists say the anti-crime drive has resulted in more remands into custody of people awaiting trial even for minor offences.

Prisons in [Bangladesh](#) are so overcrowded that prisoners have to sleep sitting up due to a shortage of space. The prisons, which have capacity for around 34,000 prisoners, were holding over 71,000 prisoners in February 2015. Only around a quarter of the prisoners have been sentenced. Prisoners recently released from Dhaka Central Jail said they had been forced to live in inhumane conditions without sufficient food, space or toilet facilities, with nearly 300 prisoners sharing one toilet, and five people living in a space designed for one.

Prison overcrowding in [Ireland](#) eased during 2014 despite an increase in the number of people being sent to prison by the courts. In the first half of 2014, for example, the average daily prison population was marginally above or below 4,000. However, a decline that began during the summer months has been sustained, meaning the prison population was well below 3,800 for most of the second half of the year. The falling average daily prison population follows a decade to 2008 in which crime rates increased and the prison population rose to crisis levels despite construction projects providing more prison spaces. However, since 2008, rates of recorded crime have fallen, a trend that has now trickled down to the prison system. However the number of prisoners serving life sentences in [Ireland](#) has increased sharply and those prisoners are spending far longer in jail than in the past, according to a new study. The average term served by “lifers” released in the 1970s and 1980s was only 7½ years. However, since then it has increased markedly. The life-sentence prisoners released in 2002 served an average of 11 years, but the figure for those freed in 2012 was 22 years. The average time served dropped to 17½ years for those released in 2013, but it remained more than twice as long as 30 to 40 years ago.

The Supreme Court of the [Philippines](#) ordered 286 people to be released from prison because they had already spent the same amount of time behind bars as the minimum penalties for their alleged offences. The court’s action is designed to address the country’s serious problem of lengthy pretrial detention and is part of what the court called its “Judgment Day” program that, along with “Justice on Wheels” aims to decongest the Philippines’ notoriously overcrowded detention facilities. Around 70,000 people are estimated to be held in pre-trial detention in the country. More than 2,500 prisoners have been released from jails across [Saudi Arabia](#) following an amnesty declared by Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman. Prisoners held for 14 types of crimes such as murder, drug smuggling, crimes related to weapons and bombs, and money laundering were not eligible for the amnesty. In [Sri Lanka](#) over 550 prisoners were released to mark the anniversary of Independence Day. Those eligible for release were those imprisoned for minor offences.

The [Zambia](#) Prisons Service has signed an agreement with Southern African Development Community (SADC) member states to transfer foreign prisoners to their respective countries in a bid to decongest Zambian prisons. The Prisons Service will transfer Malawian, Zimbabwean, Namibian, Botswanan, Mozambican and Mauritian prisoners in Zambia’s correctional facilities to their home countries where they will serve the remainder of their sentences. So far, 13 Malawians have been transferred. Commissioner of Prisons Percy Chato said the agreements with SADC member states will help to decongest prisons and enable foreign prisoners to be close to their families.

In the [US](#), reforms to the way juveniles are treated by the criminal justice system have dramatically cut the number of young people in state prisons, according to a new report.

The report focuses on Texas, where a series of reforms passed by the legislature from early 2007 have helped keep thousands of juveniles closer to home. The reforms included measures prohibiting youths convicted of misdemeanors from being sent to state-run prison facilities, so that they were instead held in county and local facilities. Texas also set up grant programs for counties that created diversion programs to keep offenders in local communities. In 2009, lawmakers set aside \$45 million for what it called a Commitment Reduction Program, aimed at cutting recidivism rates. Two years later, they combined the Texas Youth Commission and the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission into one department, the Texas Juvenile Justice Department. And two years after that, in 2013, the legislature invested another \$25 million in community mental health services. The hundreds of millions of dollars invested in local juvenile probation departments has had a vast pay-off, the report found: the number of juveniles imprisoned in Texas has dropped so much that the state has been able to close nine correctional facilities, re-arrest rates are significantly lower, and the state has saved hundreds of millions more in its corrections budget.

A [Zambian](#) Health Ministry spokesman has announced that the government is building and renovating cells for juvenile prisoners at prisons across the country. The aim is that juveniles will no longer be held with adult prisoners, in accordance with international standards.

Health

Pregnant female prisoners in [Japan](#) will in future give birth without having to wear handcuffs, after the father of a baby born to a prisoner in Kasamatsu prison, Gifu Prefecture, lobbied against the practice. Under the Act on Penal Detention Facilities and Treatment of Inmates and Detainees, prisoners must be handcuffed while being escorted in and out of prison and whenever they are outside prison facilities. Those giving birth are not exempt, although the wardens present can decide to uncuff the prisoners. In most cases, female prisoners have given birth with at least one handcuff on. A representative of the ministry's correction bureau confirmed they decided to change the policy after hearing of the case at Kasamatsu prison. "The decision was made to protect the well-being of mother and child," he said. Other facilities will be informed of the change soon.

A significant portion of [US](#) state and federal prisoners are not receiving treatment for mental health conditions, according to research by The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston (UTHealth) School of Public Health. Mental health disorders among prisoners have consistently exceeded rates of disorders in the general population. Twenty six percent of prisoners reported a mental health diagnosis in the study, compared to 18 percent in the general population in 2012, according to the National Institute of Health. State and federal courts mandate that prisoners must have access to adequate health services in prison. However, that mandate usually covers only "severe or serious" mental illnesses, according to the paper. "Screening tools are not consistent across prisons and inmates could be diagnosed with different conditions or not diagnosed at all when they get transferred to a new location," said the report's author. "A standardized mental health screening process could benefit the inmates and the prison system as a whole." Also in the [US](#), an estimated 40 percent of state and federal prisoners and jail prisoners reported having a current chronic medical condition in the 2011–12 National Inmate Survey, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS). Chronic conditions are persistent health

problems that have long-lasting effects and include non-infectious medical problems, such as cancer, high blood pressure, stroke-related problems, diabetes, heart-related problems, kidney-related problems, arthritis, asthma and cirrhosis of the liver.

The average death toll in [Portugal](#)'s jails is double the European average, according to recent figures from the Council of Europe (CoE), with illness and suicide being the main causes of the deaths. Statistics from the CoE that compare the situation in prisons across the 47 member states found that Portugal has a higher-than-average rate of overcrowding and also has a prisoner death rate of 50 deaths per 10,000 prisoners compared to the European average of 26.3.

Treatment of prisoners

A rights group in [Mexico](#) has warned of the deteriorating conditions in the country's prisons, citing them as overcrowded and governed by the prisoners. The Mexican National Human Rights Commission's (CNDH) latest annual on 152 inspected prisons referred to overcrowding, food shortages, absence of prison guards, a 'growing system of self-government', and failure to properly separate the accused from the convicted as underlying causes of the deterioration of prison conditions. Prisoners in Mexican prisons divide themselves into the gangs to which they belong on the outside, resulting in high murder rates as factions fight between themselves. This comes despite Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto's promise to clean up the penal system when he took office two years ago.

Many prisoners in the District Jail in Gorahi, [Nepal](#), are forced to sleep in plastic sheds outside the prison with no protection against the cold, due to overcrowding at the prison which is holding over 170 people in conditions designed for 50. Conditions inside the prison are also very harsh, with water leaking in and prisoners crammed together, including those with communicable diseases.

The president of the [Danish](#) prison association has said that conditions at ten Zealand prisons are bad, with prisoners and staff crammed together in old buildings that no longer serve their needs. He added that prisoners spend most of the day in small cells with almost no daylight. "The existing detention centres are built for another time," he told a radio station. "There is too little space for joint activities. Inmates are allowed to stay in their small cells most of the day, except for one hour of recreation time." Kriminalforsorgen, the prison and probation service, is assessing all of the prisons to establish which ones could be modernised.

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has given [Bulgaria](#) 18 months to create effective preventive and compensatory remedies for prisoners who wish to challenge their detention conditions. The judgment was made in the case of "Neshkov and Others v. Bulgaria" in which the claimants said that their prison cells provide only one square metre of space per person; their beds are on three levels and there are no bedsheets. The men also complain of lack of heating, poor hygiene and lack of access to toilets. ECHR noted that Bourgas Prison where the men are held currently holds 885 convicts in a building designed to accommodate a maximum of 371 persons. In a report of its visit to Bulgaria the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) found that ill-treatment of individuals both by the police

and prison staff remains a serious problem which requires urgent action by the authorities. It also concluded that Bulgarian authorities should address the issues of inter-prisoner violence and prison overcrowding. The Committee said that [Bulgaria](#) has not implemented the vast majority of its long-standing recommendations to address these problems, as well as those concerning material conditions of detention in investigation detention facilities and prisons. Prison health care staffing levels, discipline, segregation and contact of prisoners with the outside world were all identified as areas in which most recommendations of the committee have not been met.

European Court of Human Rights judges ruled that the detention conditions of a severely disabled prisoner in [France](#) violated European human rights law. The case concerned the compatibility of a disabled prisoner's state of health with his continuing detention and the arrangements for his care in prison. On 28 March 2006, while he was in prison in Nancy, the applicant, Mr Helhal, fell several metres while trying to escape. He sustained a fractured spine resulting in paraplegia of the lower limbs and urinary and faecal incontinence. Following the accident he was transferred to prisons in Mulhouse, Metz, Fresnes and, in 2009, to Uzerche Prison. The court found in particular that, although the Helhal's continuing detention did not in itself constitute inhuman or degrading treatment in the light of his disability, the inadequacy of the physical rehabilitation treatment provided to him and the fact that the prison premises were not adapted to his disability amounted to a breach of Article 3 of the convention.

The British Columbia Civil Liberties Association ("BCCLA") and the John Howard Society of Canada ("JHSC") have filed a lawsuit against the Attorney General of [Canada](#) challenging the use of solitary confinement in Canadian prisons as unconstitutional. The lawsuit alleges that the use of solitary confinement - where prisoners are isolated for up to 23 hours a day, sometimes for months or years at a time - amounts to cruel and unusual punishment. The lawsuit argues that the solitary confinement regime leads to prisoner suffering and deaths, deprives prisoners of fundamental procedural protections and is discriminatory against both mentally ill and Aboriginal prisoners. In Canada, one out of every four prisoners in the federal prison system has spent some time in solitary confinement, also known as "segregation." At any given time, there are as many as 1800 people in solitary confinement in federal or provincial prisons.

In the [US](#), Texas prisons keep too many prisoners in solitary confinement for too long — sometimes years — damaging their mental health and placing communities at risk when the prisoners are eventually released, according to research. The report criticized Texas for keeping 4.4 percent of its prisoners in solitary confinement — amounting to 6,564 prisoners in September 2014, or more than the combined prison population of 12 states. "On average, prisoners remain in solitary confinement for almost four years; over 100 Texas prisoners have spent more than 20 years in solitary confinement," according to the report. And although the practice can lead to mental damage, in 2013 the Texas Department of Criminal Justice released 1,243 prisoners "directly from solitary confinement cells into Texas communities." A Texas prisons spokesman said solitary confinement is reserved for the most dangerous prisoners, who are protected by a process that includes a hearing within seven days, an appeal through the offender grievance process and biannual reviews by prison administrators and monthly reviews by unit personnel.

A senior judge in [Palau](#) has ordered prison authorities not to use solitary confinement on prisoners, following allegations that the conditions in which prisoners are held are "cruel and inhumane". The temporary order was made after two prisoners took their cases to court late last year. The judge, Justice Asby Pate, made his decision after taking an unexpected trip to the solitary confinement room itself.

A group of [South African](#) prisoners are suing G4S over abuse they allege they suffered in a Bloemfontein prison run by the British security company. British law firm Leigh Day, which is representing the 43 prisoners, has sent an urgent letter to the company's UK headquarters. The prisoners claim they were given electric shocks, forcibly injected with anti-psychotic drugs and held in isolation cells for up to three years. The firm is also acting for the mother of a prisoner who died in custody. "The instructions we have received from our clients attest to a culture of abuse and fear that appears to have been endemic in Mangaung Correctional Centre for years," the letter to G4S reads. "Many allegations involve inmates being taken to solitary cells where there are no cameras, stripped naked and forced on to a metal bed with water thrown on them before being repeatedly shocked with electric shields, including to the head and genitals." If the claim is successful, it will be a landmark case for prisoners held by the biggest security provider in the world, with revenues worth £7.4bn. G4S won a 25-year R15bn (about £820m) contract from the South African government to construct, run and manage the prison in 2000.

A third of [Afghan](#) detainees have been allegedly tortured or mistreated during detention, the UN said in its latest report. According to the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), the number of detainees saying they had been ill-treated or tortured in the past two years was 278 out of 790 that were interviewed. Most of the interviewees were younger than 18. They were detained in 128 facilities spread across the country's 34 provinces. The report listed 16 different torture methods, including severe beatings with pipes, suspension from walls or ceilings, electric shocks and near-asphyxiation. The majority of the detainees tortured were suspected Taliban terrorists.

A man who is serving 13 years in prison in the [Netherlands](#) is going to court because he faces losing his prison privileges. Sandro G and a number of other prisoners at a special unit in Veenhuizen jail are to be moved to make way for an influx of prisoners from Norway. This means the men, all of whom are serving sentences of at least 10 years, will lose the right to cook for themselves, grow their own vegetables and keep chickens. They also have a television and are allowed to choose the colour of one wall in their cell themselves in the Veenhuizen prison. The arrival of the Norwegian prisoners means G and the others will be moved to a 'normal' regime. Some 240 prisoners will be brought from Norway to the Netherlands to serve out their sentences in a Dutch jail this summer under an agreement signed by the junior justice minister.

Prisoners in the Cotabato District Jail in the [Philippines](#) staged a hunger strike to protest about conditions in the prison. The prisoners say they do not have enough drinking water, with only three or four pails of water made available per day for at least 100 prisoners, and also that they do not receive enough food. They also said that medical treatment for sick and elderly prisoners is very poor. The deputy warden of the prison denied the accusations,

saying the prisoners' needs had been provided for despite the meagre budget of only P50 (\$1.14) allocated to feed each prisoner per day.

Human Rights Watch has accused [Egyptian](#) authorities of failing to take serious steps to improve conditions in overcrowded prisons which are causing deaths. The government denied the accusations. The New York-based group said it had documented nine deaths in custody since mid-2013. The group said some detainees appeared to have died after torture or physical abuse while "many appear to have died because they were held in severely overcrowded cells or did not receive adequate medical care for serious ailments". Citing interviews with relatives and lawyers, it described as "life-threatening" the conditions many detainees faced, and detailed the deaths of five men from beating and lack of medical care. An Interior Ministry spokesman said "such talk has no basis in truth."

Prisoners across [Cambodia](#) continue to face systematic abuse, squalid conditions and corruption, according to a report released by rights group Licadho. The report describes the country's court and prison systems as "corrupt political structures driven by nepotism" that together result in the brutal treatment of prisoners. "Some [prisoners] had their heads smashed against walls. Objects used during beatings included guns, sticks, iron rods, stun batons, walkie-talkies, handcuffs, chains, ropes, electric cables, bricks and belts," the report says. It adds that torture was used to extract confessions and involved electric shocks and cigarette burns. The report also outlines a clear hierarchy inside the prisons by which "basic commodities and individual rights come at a price." A prison official called the findings "exaggerated."

The 2014 annual report into places of detention under the United Nations' Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT) has harshly criticised the [New Zealand](#) Corrections Department for breaching some prisoners' privacy because guards, including those of the opposite gender, can watch them showering and using the toilet. "The ability to view naked female prisoners in the shower and undertaking their ablutions is of great concern," it said about Auckland Women's Prison. It was a "significantly degrading treatment or punishment" under OPCAT and the Crimes of Torture Act. Prisoners in separate cells at the prison were monitored on camera in the shower and toilet, as were those in the at-risk unit. Male guards observed the cameras in both units when female staff were unavailable. In addition, fellow prisoners and staff could watch female prisoners in separate cells showering or using the toilet by standing in a corridor or cell opposite the facilities, the report said. The Corrections Department rejected the report's recommendation that cameras should not cover toilets and shower areas, although it agreed to "consider" installing privacy screens in some areas in jails

Prison violence

A police officer and a prisoner were killed and 29 other prisoners wounded in the latest riot to hit [Brazil](#)'s overcrowded prison system, authorities said. The violence erupted in a Recife jail when an orderly protest broke down, and was brought under control only after police arrived. One officer died of a bullet wound in hospital, while details surrounding the prisoner's death were not released.

A fire at the main prison in the [Ghanaian](#) city of Kumasi sparked rioting and an attempted jail break, with one prisoner shot dead and four policemen hurt. The fire was caused by lightning and began in one of the cells before engulfing much of the jail, Kumasi prison spokesman James Annan said. "We had to open the inmates' (cells) for their lives to be spared," he told AFP. Once in the yard, scores of prisoners tried to escape but were blocked by a large deployment of police surrounding the compound. Prisoners threw bricks, chairs and other dangerous objects at the officers and over the prison wall, Annan said. One prisoner "attempted to snatch a weapon from one of the police officers during the chaos", Annan continued. "Another officer looking on shot him and he died." He added that four officers were severely injured in the fracas.

At least 2,100 people died in [Syrian](#) prisons in 2014 and the bodies of many showed signs of torture, a monitoring group said, quoting the families of deceased detainees. The British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said it believed the true figure to be much higher but had only reported cases where families had received a corpse or a death certificate from a prison. "The prisons tell the families that the prisoners died of natural causes, such as a heart attack," Observatory head Rami Abdulrahman told Reuters. Syrian officials could not be reached for comment.

Police in [Honduras](#) uncovered a makeshift grave containing the remains of at least two prisoners at a jail for young offenders. Officials said they had assumed the two had escaped six months earlier but now thought they had been killed by rival gang members. Honduras has the highest peacetime murder rate in the world and its prisons are notoriously overcrowded and violent. Local media reported that the prisoners more or less ran the prison from the inside as guards were too afraid to enter the premises and only controlled the perimeter. By law, guards in Honduras are not allowed to carry firearms inside youth offender jails.

Officials at Brandvlei Correctional Centre in [South Africa](#) are being investigated after they allegedly attacked prisoners, killing one of them and wounding five others. A Department of Correctional Services spokesman said the beating followed an assault on a prison warden. The official was taken to hospital, and treated for serious injuries before receiving trauma counselling. In the aftermath of the attack officials allegedly attacked prisoners, including the individual involved in the attack. Six of the prisoners were taken to hospital. While five of them recovered, the sixth victim – the prisoner believed to have assaulted the official – had slipped into a coma. He was transferred to hospital but died 10 days later. A report by Just Detention International into conditions in one [South African](#) prison found that between four and 14 warders supervise 1,200 to 1,400 prisoners on any given day; at night there is a "stark absence" of staff, rendering those on duty "relatively ineffective"; and officers on night duty often work two 18-hour shifts back-to-back and during the weekend, when only half of the officers are on duty.

A hostage crisis was sparked when death row prisoners in [Mauritania](#) seized two prison guards ended after the hostages were freed, security sources said. The prisoners at Nouakchott's central penitentiary kidnapped the wardens during a violent protest in which several security personnel were injured. The prisoners — including more than a dozen sentenced to death or life imprisonment — were protesting against the refusal of the

authorities to release those who had completed their jail terms. A prison source told the press that the group “accepted a government proposal to release those among them who are entitled to leave and to improve the conditions of detention of others.”

The [US](#) state of Oklahoma has the highest rate of prison homicides in the nation, with state prisoners killed at a rate more than three times the national average, according to the latest figures from the Bureau of Justice Statistics. The figures show 39 homicides at Oklahoma prisons between 2001 and 2012, a rate of 14 per 100,000 prisoners. The second highest rate is Maryland with 11 homicides per 100,000. The national average is 4 per 100,000. Those who work inside Oklahoma’s prisons say the reason why the rate is so high is simple: the facilities are overcrowded and understaffed. Statewide, prison activity rooms, classrooms and virtually all other spaces have been converted into housing areas. Prison guards are routinely required to work double-shifts, and a 2013 survey by an Oklahoma association that represents prison workers shows the state has the lowest guard-to-prisoner staffing ratios in the country.

More than 300 prisoners were killed in [Venezuela](#)’s violent and overcrowded prisons in 2014, according to a report from a local prisoner-rights group. The report issued by the Venezuelan Prison Observatory (OVP) documents 309 deaths and 179 injuries in jail during the course of the year, a reduction from 2013 when 506 prisoners were killed and 616 wounded. The report cites disputes among prisoners and clashes with prison guards as the primary causes of death and injury in jail. Between 1999 and 2014, almost 6,500 prisoners died and over 16,000 were injured due to prison violence. “Since the creation of the Ministry of Penitentiary Affairs, in mid-2011, 1,622 inmates have died and 2,328 have been injured,” said the head of the OVP.

An internal report at a juvenile prison in İzmir, [Turkey](#), has exposed sexual abuse and bullying of minors by older prisoners, according to media reports. The report was signed by Hamit Karslıoğlu, the warden at Şakran Prison, a closed facility for juveniles. It reveals that older prisoners sexually abuse younger ones at the prison and that gang rape and sexual torture are highly prevalent. The document also exposes other cases of mistreatment and torture at the prison. Some older prisoners have passed urine into beverages for weaker prisoners to drink and others have deliberately cut themselves with glass and tiles so they can go to hospital.

Developments in rehabilitation

Prisoners and guards from the [Fiji](#) Corrections Service centre at Natabua in Lautoka are participating in a pine planting program. Corrections spokeswoman Kuini Waqasavou said the first batch of officers and prisoners involved in the program totalled 40. "There are 20 inmates and 20 officers taking part in pine planting, however, this number will be boosted in the next few weeks," she said. Ms Waqasavou said apart from contributing to the economy, prisoners would financially benefit from the program. "Upon completing their sentence, they will collect cheques as a reward for their hard work. We view this as a win-win situation because Fiji Pine benefits, the country gains and the work assists us in our efforts to rehabilitate these inmates."

The number of repeat criminals among those facing charges has been growing in the [Czech Republic](#), which seems to reflect a failure in the care for people released from prisons, according to the head of the Czech criminology association. He said in the 1990s, most crimes were committed by people who had not been prosecuted before. In 2000, only one third of suspected crime perpetrators were repeat offenders, while in 2013 more than half were repeat offenders. He noted that many people released from prison cannot get a job. As a result, many resort to crime again. "If we want to lower the number of repeat criminals, we must give some thought to programmes for released prisoners," he said.

The [Singapore](#) Prison Service (SPS) has launched its first Community Rehabilitation Centre (CRC) aimed at helping young drug offenders. The launch of the CRC marks a major milestone in the development of initiatives aimed at rehabilitating young drug offenders. The rehabilitation centre can house up to 50 residents and offers a structured environment where young male drug offenders aged between 16 and 21 undergo a comprehensive drug intervention programme while continuing with outside activities such as school or work. Families of residents are advised to maintain regular visits and be involved in the programmes the residents undergo. The six-month residential period commences after the residents have served a short period of detention in the Drug Rehabilitation Centre (DRC). Once they successfully complete this phase within the CRC, they will then be electronically tagged and placed on another six months of supervised home-leave. In addition to support from their families during this subsequent phase of the programme, the young offenders will continue to receive counselling and guidance from the SPS' Correctional Rehabilitation Specialists to ensure they stay on track.

In the [UAE](#), Dubai's Community Development Authority (CDA) has suggested replacing imprisonment with vocational training for juveniles, according to Boshra Quaid, head of CDA's Children, Youth and Women's Division. She added that the suggestion had been approved by the Public Prosecution and Dubai Courts who were working with public and government institutions to implement the changes. Ms Quaid said "Replacing imprisonment with rehabilitation programmes will be decided by the judge, but our aim is to raise efficiency of these youths and help them integrate with their families so that they can continue their lives normally."

Prison authorities in [Denmark](#) have approved a dating site for prisoners and the people wanting to meet them. More than 10,000 members have joined the online group since it was launched in January. The nature of the penal system in Denmark is the reason the group is able to exist, with prisoners allowed access to the internet and to have time off from jail at weekends. The authorities hope the jail date group may aid rehabilitation by enabling prisoners to adjust better to life beyond the walls when they are released. Prison service spokesman Lars Erik Siegumfeldt said, "We know that when prisoners have served their sentence, if they have a family or a partner that is one of the key elements in not committing new crimes."

A mini city has been built inside the walls of a prison in Beijing, [China](#), with the aim of helping prisoners to adjust to life outside when they are released. The prison includes a fake underground station, bank, supermarket and internet café, allowing prisoners who have been imprisoned for more than 20 years to learn how to cope with the modern world.

Prisoners start the course three months before their release date and have to demonstrate they understand everything from buying vegetables in a supermarket using a bank card, through to purchasing a ticket on the underground and using it to get through automatic barriers.

In [Thailand](#) the Phuket Provincial Administration Organisation has allocated 515,000 baht for a programme which aims to train prisoners in construction skills (brick-laying, plastering, welding, electricity works), motor skills (motorcycle repair), cooking, and English communication skills, among others. Skilled labourers in these fields are in demand by local construction companies and other businesses. The training is part of a wider programme which also includes general education, life skills, and social development. The aim is to instil confidence in prisoners in the hope that they will reintegrate into society and not commit further crime.

Sentencing and the law

With a view to ending the culture of torture and initiating legal action against those involved in such activities, the [Nepalese](#) Ministry of Home Affairs has tabled the Torture, Cruel, Inhumane and Disrespectful Behaviour (Control) Bill, 2014 at the Legislature-Parliament. The Bill is aimed at protecting the right to dignity of persons arrested and kept in police custody, prison or under house arrest, and at discouraging law enforcement officers or others holding public posts from torturing suspects to obtain a confession. The Bill requires that anyone held under any form of detention should be given a mental and physical health check by a medical practitioner, that a record be made of the findings and that it should be made available to the court on request.

[Jamaican](#) lawmakers have passed an act to decriminalise small amounts of marijuana and establish a licensing agency to regulate a lawful medical cannabis industry on the island. The drug law amendments make possession of up to 2oz (56.6g) of marijuana a petty offence that would not result in a criminal record. Cultivation of five or fewer plants on any premises would also be permitted.

More [US](#) prisoners were exonerated of crimes that they did not commit in 2014 than in any year since records began in 1989. Some 125 prisoners were exonerated and released last year, marking the first time that the number has risen above 100 in a single 12-month period. In 2013, the total number of exonerations was 91. The record number, as recorded by the National Registry of Exonerations, points to the nationwide spread of “conviction integrity units” – dedicated teams of experts set up in largely city-based jurisdictions to consider possible miscarriages of justice. There are now 15 such units in the country. Six were created last year alone. One of the striking features of last year’s unprecedented batch of exonerations was the high proportion among them of defendants who pled guilty to crimes they did not commit. Some 47 of the 125 innocent prisoners – almost four in 10 – participated in their own wrongful conviction by agreeing to guilty pleas, mostly in cases involving drug possession. Two possible explanations have been put forward – the first is that people pled guilty to possession of drugs, unaware that the chemicals they were carrying were in fact either harmless imitations such as talcum powder or legal pharmaceutical medicines. The second, and more likely explanation, is that defendants were

put under so much pressure to cut a plea bargain with prosecutors, with threats of long prison sentences hanging over them if they pleaded not guilty, that they acquiesced to their own wrongful conviction despite their knowing that they were innocent.

People from an ethnic minority background are more likely to be sentenced to a jail term in the [Netherlands](#) than their white peers and their sentences are likely to be longer, according to research carried out by Leiden University for the Dutch Council for the Judiciary, Raad voor de Rechtspraak. The researchers analysed more than 100,000 criminal cases from between 2005 and 2007 and interviewed 1,500 people who had been remanded in custody. The results showed a white Dutch person had a 7% chance of being sentenced to a prison term for aggravated theft while people with Turkish and Antillean backgrounds had an 11% risk. The council has called for more research to be done into sentencing patterns among people from different ethnic backgrounds.

Prison policy

The [Maltese](#) government is rolling out a programme in collaboration with various stakeholders to make the prisons more accessible for people with disabilities. Speaking during a visit to the prisons, the Home Affairs Minister said certain steps had already been taken with two ramps installed - one near the entrance and one leading to the chapel. One cell has also been equipped for wheelchair users, he said. The minister also said that a six-week training course for prison staff, which includes dealing with disabled prisoners, has been launched. The government announced it would also be recruiting a sign language interpreter for the prison. The minister said that services provided when people were first admitted to prisons should also be improved to include assessment by a multidisciplinary team including social workers and doctors. He also noted that the gender identity bill, which was now entering second reading stage, would give transsexual prisoners the right to choose whether to be in the men's or women's wing.

Remote electronic monitoring of prisoners is underway in [Kazakhstan](#), as the new criminal and penal codes adopted in early July went into effect on 1st January. The codes were enacted against the background of the nation's continuing efforts to humanise its criminal and penal legislation through the wide use of non-punitive legal means. The action is aimed at positively influencing prisoners and helping with their reintegration into society. In line with the newly-introduced penal code, electronic monitoring bracelets will be used to track three categories of those convicted by the courts: those sentenced to restricted freedom, given a suspended sentence and released from prison on parole.

[Pakistan](#)'s first-ever high security prison is to be inaugurated in Sahiwal in Punjab province. The jail, constructed on 98 acres at an estimated cost of Rs 930,206 million, will have the capacity to hold 1,044 prisoners. So far, a control room, switch room, fire alarm system, CCTV cameras, UPS, blocker barrier, under vehicle surveillance system, electro-mechanical barriers and other modern features have been installed in the jail. Initially prisoners serving terms for 'ordinary' offences will be transferred to the jail on a trial basis, to be followed by those convicted of offences relating to terrorism, and sectarian cases.

[Lebanese](#) authorities have implemented new security plans at the country's largest prison, Roumieh, after police raided the detention facility following reports that the prison had

become an “operations room” for the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Authorities have removed “dangerous” prisoners from B block—a notorious wing holding approximately 900 prisoners, including more than 300 designated as terrorists by security forces —and placed them on a new solitary confinement wing, pledging to tighten up security in the facility.. A total of 17 Roumieh prisoners have been categorized as “dangerous” and moved into solitary confinement.

In the [US](#), over a third of newly employed corrections officers at New York City’s Rikers Island jail “were not fit for fit for service and should not have been hired”, the New York City Department of investigation (DOI) has found. The public findings in the report examined a random sample of 153 files of fresh recruits and found that 10 had been arrested more than once, 65 had psychological issues and others had gang affiliations as well as unexplained relationships with current prisoners. The investigation concluded that the state of the notorious jail facility, which houses 15,000 juvenile and adult prisoners, indicated significant shortcomings in New York’s department of corrections’ (DOC) screening process, which the city’s newly appointed corrections commissioner, Joseph Ponte, has pledged to reform.

In [Australia](#), the private operators of Victoria's newest prison could be paid millions of dollars in bonuses if they reduce the reoffending rate of the prisoners held there. In a state first, the GEO Consortium will be paid as much as \$2 million a year if the rate of reoffending among prisoners released from Ravenhall prison is 12 per cent lower than at other prisons. The contract includes a target of a 14 per cent reduction in recidivism among indigenous prisoners. The number of indigenous prisoners in Victoria has increased 73 per cent in the past four years. The \$670 million prison is expected to house 1000 prisoners, but will have the capacity for 1300.

Women in [Iceland](#) will not be able to serve their sentences until the women’s prison in Hólmsheiði is finished in April 2016. According to data from the Icelandic Prison Service, the number of women in the prison system fluctuates greatly year on year. In 2000 for example, there were only 4 women serving prison sentences in Iceland, but in 2009 and 2012 there were as many as 23. The current director of the Icelandic Prison Service said that this will delay the start of but not change the length of the terms served by prisoners.

A wide-ranging review of the [Irish](#) Prison Service, to include the “culture within the service” and whether it meets its objectives, has been announced by the inspector of the prison service. It is the first time the inspector has embarked on a broadly-based report into the culture and objectives of the prison service. Previous reports have included annual reports and reports into specific issues such as prison deaths or the operation of specific prison units. The terms of reference of the new review are to “to carry out an assessment of the current culture within the Irish Prison Service and the extent to which it facilitates or hinders the development of the service”, the inspector said.

If you have any feedback or would like to unsubscribe from this News Digest please contact Helen Fair h.fair@bbk.ac.uk