



International Centre for Prison Studies

ICPS NEWS DIGEST

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Welcome to the twenty second 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 July to 31 August 2014. Please click on the blue highlighted words to access the news reports.

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Prison populations

[Slovenia](#) is facing overcrowding in its prisons due to a shortage of financial support, according to a report by the Slovenian Press Agency. The prison population is increasing while the prison administration is struggling due to budget cuts, meaning that prisoners' health insurance is not being covered by the prisons and health bills are not being paid. The shortage of funds also means that the administration cannot recruit new staff. To deal with the overcrowding the authorities have introduced 'open prisons' where the prisoners work during the week and stay in prison at the weekends, and are planning to open a new prison in Ljubljana in 2017.

Official data from [India](#) shows that the country's prisons hold around 42,000 more prisoners than they have capacity for. However it is just a handful of states which contribute to this figure, while prisons in almost 20 states are either below or at capacity. Uttar Pradesh alone has close to 32,000 more prisoners than it has capacity for, Chhattisgarh is around 3,000 prisoners over capacity and Madhya Pradesh prisons are overcrowded by around 7,000 prisoners. The [Indian](#) National Crime Records Bureau reports that over 65 percent of prisoners in the country are awaiting trial, and many of them are detained indefinitely because the prison system fails to comply with laws that mandate their release after a specified period, based on their alleged offence. In an attempt to tackle the issue, the [Indian](#)

government has initiated work on an IT system for prisons in the country aimed at reducing the number of under trial prisoners in jails and to prevent keeping prisoners in jail beyond the length of their sentence. In the pilot system at the Tihar Jail, details of prisoners can be obtained on line. The software records the date of arrival of a prisoner and generates a notification when it is time for the prisoner to be released.

The [French](#) parliament has adopted a law calling for greater use of probation and other measures to reduce overcrowding in a prison system that the Justice Minister says does little to cut reoffending. A key measure of the legislation allows judges to choose probation over prison for those sentenced to less than five years' jail for crimes ranging from theft to assault. It also abolishes minimum prison sentences for repeat offenders and those convicted of violent crimes.

[Colombia](#)'s ombudsman has called on the national government to declare a state of emergency in response to dangerous prison conditions and continued strikes by prison staff. The call comes after 1,000 employees of the National Penitentiary and Prison Institute (INPEC) went on strike, citing poor working conditions, overcrowding and inhumane conditions for prisoners. The ombudsman argued that the problem is not just a question of human rights violations but also the large amount of money spent by the government as a result of legal cases involving prison conditions. INPEC has announced that nine of [Colombia](#)'s prisons will be expanded to create 6,300 new cells by the end of 2018 in an attempt to combat the overcrowding.

[Ghana](#)'s Interior Minister is advocating for the release of people who have been on remand in prison for over five years, as part of a broader scheme to decongest the country's overcrowded prisons. He announced that the Ministry would be holding a stakeholder conference to seek suggestions as to how the country's laws could be reformed to make provision for non-custodial sentences. The Minister stressed the importance of decongesting the prisons to make room for quality prison care as well as a just and effective criminal justice system.

The prison population in [Ireland](#) has dropped by more than 500 in the past year, according to the latest figures. The decrease is partly attributed to a greater use of non-custodial sanctions, structured temporary release and a reduction in the use of custody for non-payment of court ordered fines. However almost half of the country's prisons are still operating above their official capacity.

Tens of thousands of people in prison for drug offences in the [US](#) have become eligible for early release under a plan to reduce prison numbers and costs. The US Sentencing Commission earlier this year voted to substantially lower recommended sentences for drug dealers, and has now made this retroactively applicable to 46,000 prisoners. The Commission has said sentences would be cut by an average of 25 months. No prisoner is to be released until November 2015 and the releases are to be phased in over a period of years.

Nearly 1,200 convicted criminals are waiting to serve their time in [Norwegian](#) prisons due to a shortage of cell space in prisons that also need renovation. The Justice Minister blamed

earlier governments for failing to take the need for more prison space seriously. The practice of people being placed on waiting lists to serve their sentence has been happening for years. However the list has grown by more than 400 in the past year. The Justice Ministry is proposing several measures including the construction of new cells in Oslo, securing alternative prison space while renovations are underway on older prisons, building new cell space within the walls of existing prisons and building more prisons.

[Australia](#)'s prison population is rapidly ageing, with the nation's prisons now holding more than twice the number of older prisoners than nine years ago. Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics shows that in 2005 there were 312 people aged 65 or over in prison, but by 2013 this had more than doubled to 629. The Australian Institute of Criminology has found that prisoners experience an apparent ten year differential between their health and that of the general population, which is generally attributed to a combination of their lifestyle prior to entering prison, including poor nutrition, substance misuse and a lack of medical care, and the understanding that the prison environment may escalate age-related illnesses and conditions.

A shortage of funding is turning [South Korea](#)'s overcrowded juvenile correctional facilities and reformatories into mere holding pens, according to reports. The facilities are overcrowded because one out of two juvenile prisons and five out of 14 reformatories were shut down between 2005 and 2007. The remaining facilities cannot expand due to a shortage of funds, a situation which has also undermined rehabilitative activities. The reformatories also have a shortage of staff for ethics education and counselling, and teachers at the facilities say they often need to work around the clock because the number of staff is insufficient.

Health

The president of the union that represents [Canadian](#) prison guards says they are not being properly trained to deal with prisoners who have mental health issues. He cited the case of Marlene Carter, a severely mentally ill woman who has been sentenced to an additional two years at the Regional Psychiatric Centre where she spends 23 hours a day in solitary confinement strapped to a bed because otherwise she repeatedly bangs her head against the walls of her cell at a rate that can reach 150 times in a couple of minutes. The union president says guards at the Centre haven't been trained to deal with severely mentally ill prisoners, and called for a joint judicial and health-care overhaul.

A report from [Cambodia](#) suggests that mentally ill people lack support in prison. There are more than 100 known prisoners suffering from mental health problems in the country's prisons, where the cramped, unhygienic conditions and scarcity of food and water breed psychological problems. Sometimes prisoners live with as little as 0.7 square metres of floor space, according to rights group Licadho. An NGO, Transcultural Psychological Organisation (TPO) is working in four of the country's prisons where it provides three mental health professionals to offer psychiatric treatment and trains prison staff to identify prisoners who they feel may be mentally ill and refer them to TPO specialists for assessment. A total of 112 people have been helped by the programme so far, though there are likely to be many more in prisons where TPO cannot work due to a lack of funding.

More than 80 people with mental health problems have died as a result of abuse or neglect in [US](#) jails since 2003, according to a BBC Panorama investigation. In facilities in six US states the BBC catalogued cases where prisoners had been beaten, sprayed with chemicals or tied down for long periods. In others prisoners had been held indefinitely in solitary confinement. In most of the cases of death and abuse it found, mistreatment had been initially denied, sanctioned or covered up. With mental health budgets being cut further in many parts of the country, there are now ten times more mentally ill Americans in jails and prisons than in state mental health institutions.

Nanjing, capital of east [China](#)'s Jiangsu Province, has established a special prison for HIV positive prisoners. An official said it is called a special prison but it is more like a hospital. In the past, HIV positive prisoners were often released because there was a lack of facilities to deal with their condition.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has established a clinic in Kandahar's Sarposa prison. The ICRC also regularly provides the provincial Ministry of Public Health with drugs and medical supplies for the clinic and pays the salaries of the staff. This is part of a much broader programme undertaken by the ICRC to make better health care available to prisoners in [Afghanistan](#). The ICRC is carrying out similar activities at several detention facilities in the country. Working in cooperation with prison authorities and the health ministry, ICRC medical staff make regular visits to prisons throughout the country to monitor the health of prisoners and the services on offer. ICRC engineers are helping to improve prisons' infrastructure by refurbishing kitchens, improving sanitation and water supplies and, as in the case of Sarposa, undertaking a major renovation of health facilities.

The [Nigerian](#) Federal Ministry of Health is working with the Nigerian Prisons Service and the Tuberculosis Foundation of the Netherlands (KNCV) to tackle tuberculosis in the country's prisons. The project, funded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) has resulted in the training of 50 medical doctors and 430 Nigerian Prisons Service Health Care personnel to help reduce the spread of the disease. KNCV has also refurbished and equipped an initial 20 prison yard laboratories.

Treatment of prisoners

A United Nations report, compiled after visits to prisons, detention centres and police stations last year, has criticised [New Zealand](#)'s prisons. The report found that most prisoners were held in their cells for 19 hours a day and some had to take Vitamin D pills because of the lack of sunlight. Others were fed frozen leftovers. The food was described as 'monotonous' and newly built solitary confinement cells were small 'tin cans'. The Corrections National Commissioner acknowledged the findings but said some older prisons have already been closed and money is being spent on improving existing prisons or building new ones. Also in [New Zealand](#), prison staff have been criticised for telling prisoners to urinate on the floor of prison vans during long journeys. The Corrections Minister said toilet stops are always part of long-haul transfers but public safety is more important than prisoner comfort.

The UN Human Rights Committee has strongly criticised [Ireland](#)'s prisons, citing the 'chronic' overcrowding and the 'inhuman' practice of slopping out. The Committee said Ireland is overusing prison as a punishment, noting that in 2013 the vast majority of prisoners – 89 percent – were serving sentences of less than 12 months. An estimated 334 prisoners are still slopping out in prisons around the country, meaning that they have to use a bucket as a toilet. The figure has dropped by two thirds in the past four years, but Ireland is still one of the few developed countries that allow the practice.

Breaches of human rights law by [Bulgarian](#) authorities have prompted court judges to urge reform of the country's treatment of life sentenced prisoners. In the Chamber judgment in the case of Harakchiev and Tolumov v. Bulgaria, which is not final, the European Court of Human Rights held unanimously that there had been a violation of article 3 (prohibition of inhuman and degrading treatment) as concerned the regime and conditions of the prisoners' detention; a violation of article 13 (right to an effective remedy) as concerned the lack of effective domestic remedies in respect of the conditions of their detention; and a violation of Article 3 of the European Convention, as concerned Mr Harakchiev's inability to obtain a reduction of his sentence of life imprisonment without commutation from the time when it became final. The case concerned the life imprisonment without commutation of Harakchiev and the strict detention regime, involving isolation, in which Harakchiev and Tolumov, another life prisoner, are held.

Caging remand prisoners during court hearings is degrading, European Court of Human Rights judges have told [Russian](#) authorities. In the case of Svinarenko and Slyadnev v. Russia the Court found that holding the applicants in a metal cage during court hearings amounted to inhuman and degrading treatment for which there could be no justification. Such treatment constituted an affront to human dignity in breach of Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Seven years after Ashley Smith strangled herself to death with a piece of clothing in a small prison cell, there has been 'no substantial change' in the use of solitary confinement, according to the ombudsman for [Canadian](#) federal inmates. Despite recommending a complete prohibition on the use of segregation of prisoners who suffer from mental-health conditions, the Correctional Investigator says that with no policy changes in place, admissions to segregation cells are in fact on the rise. At any given time, there are 850 prisoners in solitary confinement in Canada's federal penitentiaries. According to the Office of the Correctional Investigator, there were 8,700 segregation placements in 2011-12, an increase of 700 in the last five years.

A report into [Samoa](#)'s notorious Tafai'gata Prison has found a culture of corruption and abuse, with prisoners treated 'like animals.' The report said the prison was overcrowded and that prisoners are beaten, abused and fed from buckets. The Prisons Chief Executive said he would address the issues raised in the report once he had read it.

A survey of prisons across [Ghana](#) by the Auditor General has found widespread prisoner neglect with an average of 48 prisoners forced to share one toilet. With the exception of the newly constructed Ankaful Maximum Security Prison, the survey found that all the other prisons had torn window nets, falling ceilings and leaking roofs. Prison infirmaries did not

have drugs to treat the illnesses such as malaria and skin infections that are common among prisoners. Auditors also found that overcrowding in the prisons made it difficult for the Prisons Service to classify prisoners according to offence.

Torture remains a serious problem in [Brazil](#) despite recent measures to curb the practice, according to Human Rights Watch (HRW). HRW found compelling evidence in 64 cases of alleged abuse since 2010 that security forces or prison authorities engaged in cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment against people in their custody. In 40 of these cases, the evidence supported the conclusion that the abuse rose to the level of torture. HRW found that these abuses often occur within the first 24 hours in police custody, and called on Congress to approve a bill that would require officials to physically present detainees before a judge for a 'custody hearing' within 24 hours of arrest. This would ensure that victims of torture would be able to report abuses at the outset of the legal process, when corroborating evidence is still available, and help to prevent confessions obtained through torture from being used in court.

In the [US](#), four investigators with the Department of Corrections have accused the state of Florida of running a prison system rife with corruption, brutality and officially sanctioned gang violence – and of retaliating against them when they tried to expose what was going on. The four filed a federal whistle-blower complaint alleging that state prisoners were beaten and tortured, that guards smuggled in drugs and other contraband in exchange for money and sexual favours, and that guards used gang enforcers to control the prison population. The state Governor's chief inspector general said an investigation into the allegations is ongoing.

The number of staff with expertise in dealing with detainees should be increased while special measures for those aged between 15 and 18 should be introduced, a report by [Bahrain](#)'s prison watchdog has concluded. The report, compiled following an unannounced four day inspection by the Prisoners and Detainees Rights Commission (PDRC) to the Dry Dock Detention Centre, said that juveniles needed the special measures for visits, communications and activities and said they needed to be motivated to complete their studies. The Commission said the staff at the Centre should also be given regular training on how to deal with older detainees and those with special needs as well as foreign nationals. Staff should also be trained in assessing and managing risks.

The [Angolan](#) Attorney General's Office (PGR) has backed the creation of Supervisory Courts with a view to monitoring and overseeing the conditions of prisoners and the fulfilment of sentences to ensure the strengthening of human rights in the country. The PGR is sponsoring seminars on the protection of human rights in order to turn the creation of the Courts into a reality.

The [Liberian](#) General Auditing Committee's (GAC) compliance and system audit report has revealed that males and females are being detained in one prison cell in some prisons. This act exposes the women in these prisons to sexual exploitation and abuse. The Ministry of Justice blamed the situation on low budgetary allocation and admitted that they were unable to comply with the law stating that men and women should be held separately due to financial restraints.

The Institute for Population and Social Research (IPSR) has called on authorities to improve living conditions for female prisoners in [Thailand](#). IPSR visited more than ten prisons in 2013 and found that most prisons holding female prisoners are between two and six times over capacity. A Corrections Department regulation says each prisoner is entitled to a living space of at least 2.25 square metres but the IPSR found available space was far smaller. In one prison in the north 150 female prisoners were forced to share one toilet, and in a prison in the south as many as 45 prisoners were packed into a single room. The IPSR proposed the introduction of early release for good behaviour, as well as greater use of probation, community sentences and house arrest to relieve the overcrowding.

Prison violence

A riot by around 600 prisoners at a prison in the southern [Brazilian](#) state of Parana left five people dead - including two who had been beheaded - 25 people injured and structural damage to at least 80 percent of the prison. The rioters were protesting about the condition of the prison infrastructure, hygiene and food, as well as the alleged brutality of the guards. The riot came to an end after 45 hours when authorities transferred 851 prisoners to other prisons with better living conditions. Hours later riots broke out at two further [Brazilian](#) prisons. One prisoner died and a further 30 were injured when a group of prisoners at the municipal jail of Campestre set fire to mattresses in protest against a judge's decision to close the prison and transfer them to other prisons, while 23 prisoners were injured in a fight between rival gangs at a detention facility in the city of Juiz de Fora.

In [El Salvador](#) two members of the Mara Salvatrucha gang, both minors, were murdered in a prison near the capital, San Salvador, according to officials with the Salvadoran police and the Attorney General's Office. Sources say that both boys were apparently hanged. Four Miskito Indians held in pre-trial detention in [Honduras'](#) National Penitentiary were fatally shot by a fellow prisoner, according to the prisons service. The murders were apparently linked to organised crime.

Ten guards and several prisoners were injured during a large scale riot at the Zarzal Correctional Institution in Rio Grande, [Puerto Rico](#). The riot started after prison guards uncovered a stash of illegal substances, leading to a fight between prisoners and guards. The riot was eventually brought under control by a prison service SWAT team.

Assaults on prison officers in [Ireland](#) increased by 50 percent last year, and almost one third of them occurred in St Patrick's young offenders' institution. According to figures released by the Department of Justice, there were 154 assaults, or one almost every two days, by prisoners on staff in 2013, compared with 107 in 2012. The department also confirmed that there were 604 assaults on prisoners by their fellow prisoners in 2013.

An [Iranian](#) official has confirmed that at least 11 prisoners were killed in a fire at a jail in Shahrekord city. Iran's Saham news portal reported that the incident occurred when prisoners burned jail overalls and mattresses in protest against the head of the prison, who had attempted to punish a group of prisoners who were on strike. The news portal reported

that the guards locked the main door to the prison and prevented assistance being rendered to the prisoners.

The independent [Venezuelan](#) Prison Observatory (OVP) has reported that 150 prisoners have died and another 110 have been injured in the country's prisons in the first six months of 2014. From July 2011 when the late President Hugo Chavez created the Penitentiary Service Ministry, through to June 2014, 1,463 prisoners died and a further 2,259 were injured. The head of the OVP has called for the Penitentiary Service Ministry to be abolished and replaced with an organisation "that really works" and which is managed by state governments.

A report has found that by several measures, including assault, sexual assault and attempted suicide, [Canadian](#) federal prisoners are more likely to incur harm than they were ten years ago. For several years the Correctional Investigator has been reporting that prisons are becoming more violent, and he emphasised that a disproportionate number of affected prisoners suffer from mental health conditions. The report also found that the use of solitary confinement has increased, with admissions for disciplinary reasons rising from 7,137 in 2003-4 to 8,221 in 2012-13. Incidences of attempted suicide have risen dramatically, from 35 in 2003-4 to an all-time high of 113 in 2012-13.

Developments in rehabilitation

Prisoners at Ngawha Prison in [New Zealand](#) are learning to sew and make quilts for charity. The idea is to give the prisoners skills they can use once they are released, as well as keeping them usefully occupied while in prison. The prisoners were interviewed and had to demonstrate good behaviour to get on the course, which was limited to eight at a time. They also had to win the trust of prisoner officers because they would be using needles and scissors. Also in [New Zealand](#), fourteen prisoners at Invercargill Prison built a one-bedroom self-contained unit as part of a Southern Institute of Technology (SIT) course. The prisoners gained practical skills and about 40 credits towards their NZQA level 2 trade certificate in carpentry and painting and decorating. The building was lifted over the prison fence and taken to SIT where it will get a few minor finishes and then be sold to the public. Funds raised from the sale would pay for the materials and training and the department would then look at starting another building,

In [Chile](#), fourteen prisoners at the Santiago Sur Detention Center are participating in an instrument building workshop, where twice a week they lathe, sand and polish wood to be turned into musical instruments such as guitars, charangos and fiddles. The prisoners hope to sell these to earn money for their families. About 60 prisoners have so far completed the workshop, which has been offered at four of the country's prisons. The director of CoArtRe, which runs the workshop, said the prisoners "are able to develop social skills such as responsibility, tolerance, teamwork and discipline, which will be useful once they have been released."

A relationship has formed between the South [Australian](#) oyster industry and some of the region's prisons. Port Lincoln prisoners have been building equipment for the Eyre Peninsula oyster industry and now the Port Augusta prison is keen to get involved. The prisoners have

been constructing and repairing cages, baskets and long lines. The industry coordinator at the Port Lincoln prison says the work being done is beneficial not only for the oyster growers but for the prisoners as well as they feel like they are contributing to the region. He said "It actually gives them skills, a meaning. They have the opportunity to gain new skills for future employment."

Prisoners at the Hermanice prison in Ostrava in the [Czech Republic](#) have volunteered to fix old bicycles for a charity serving rural Gambia, where children use them to reach distant schools. Aside from a sense of satisfaction, the prisoners receive small perks including coffee, tea or cigarettes and a good word to courts ordering their probation. Since September 2013, prisoners have repaired more than 1,600 bikes, all of which have been shipped to Gambia.

In West Delhi, [India](#), a restaurant has opened which is run by prisoners from the nearby Tihar Central Prison. Situated less than a kilometre away from the main prison dormitories, the restaurant is open to everyone but has strict parameters for its workers – a prisoner who works there must have at least a high school certificate, a clean record during their time in jail and only two years remaining on their sentence. The prisoners are paid a small wage, with profits from the restaurant going towards prisoner welfare and other training programmes. This is an attempt by prison authorities to rehabilitate the prisoners before they are released.

Data released by the [Singapore](#) Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises (Score), which trains and matches ex-prisoners to employers, shows that former prisoners are commanding higher pay and staying longer in their jobs than ever before. Last year 34 percent of the 2,123 ex-prisoners it placed earned above \$1,300. In 2011 only eight percent took home that amount. Some 16 percent drew a salary above \$1,500 compared with five percent in 2011. Not only has their pay risen but prisoners are more able to hold onto their jobs. In 2013 about 60 percent of former prisoners retained their jobs for at least half a year, compared to 37 percent who managed to do so in 2007.

Aboriginal women at the Pine Grove Correction Centre in Prince Albert, [Canada](#), have a new place to practice their cultural beliefs. A large building has been renovated to accommodate traditional ceremonies such as smudging. The facility will also have a sweat lodge and parenting resources. Officials say spiritual healing is an important part of rehabilitation. The goal of the centre is to integrate the prisoners back into society and prevent them from reoffending.

The Department of Prison Management in [Nepal](#) has announced plans to enhance its efforts to provide higher education to prisoners. The Department aims to establish at least seven secondary schools in various prisons across the country. A proposal has been sent to the Department of Education to seek funding to establish the schools.

In [Qatar](#), the Ministry of the Interior's Supply and Equipment Directorate is currently equipping and furnishing two villas at the Central Prison to facilitate visits by prisoners' family members. Under this facility, a prisoner would be able to spend around 4-5 hours or even a complete day in privacy with his wife and children after providing the necessary

documentation. The initiative is aimed at enhancing the ties between a prisoner and his family so that he is able to lead a normal family life on release from prison.

Prisoners in [Malta](#) are not being given a fair chance at rehabilitation because of a shortage of social workers and psychologists, according to a prisoner advocacy group which is calling for more investment in care workers. The group was reacting to figures tabled in Parliament showing that 172 new staff were needed at the Corradino Correctional Facility, the country's only prison, including seven social workers and psychologists. The head of the group said that prisoners were normally given a care plan and regular assessments by care workers, but the staff shortage meant follow up sessions were postponed for months on end or not held at all.

In [Australia](#), Victoria's crowded prisons will be investigated by the state's new ombudsman in an inquiry into the level of rehabilitation offered to a record number of prisoners. The ombudsman announced she would investigate rehabilitation and transitional services offered to prisoners before and after their release, focusing on those provided to female and indigenous prisoners. She said she was prompted to examine these services as prisoner numbers continue to grow, putting pressure on prison services. Her report will be released in October.

Sentencing and the law

In the [US](#), a bill aimed at easing conditions for some prisoners in near-solitary confinement in California prisons has died in the state legislature amid concerns that the state Governor would veto it. The measure to allow prisoners in the state's Security Housing Units (SHUs) to keep photographs and make a phone call after three months of good behaviour was listed as inactive. California has drawn criticism from human rights organisations for its use of prolonged, indeterminate sentencing in its SHUs, in which some prisoners are left by themselves for nearly 23 hours a day. Meanwhile the mayor of New York, [US](#), has signed a bill requiring New York City corrections officials to track and publish information on the use of solitary confinement. It mandates that jail officials post quarterly reports online detailing several dozen metrics about the 23 hour lock-in. These include any injuries sustained and the state of prisoners' mental health.

The [Gambia](#) National Assembly has voted to lessen the penalties imposed on people found guilty of possessing and trafficking cannabis. Under previous legislation, people found guilty of possession of drugs faced a D250,000 fine and/or a three year jail term. Under the new law, anyone found guilty of possession of between 0.1 and 150 grams of cannabis will be liable to a fine of D50,000 – D100,000 and/or imprisonment for a term of six months to a year. Possession of 151 to 500 grams would lead to a fine of D100,000 – D150,000 and/or imprisonment of one to two years, and those found guilty of possession of over 500 grams would be liable to a fine of 150,000-250,000 and/or imprisonment for a term of two to three years.

[India](#)'s cabinet has approved a bill to allow children over the age of 16 to be tried as adults for crimes such as rape and murder. The move follows calls for stricter punishment for juveniles after a 17 year old was among those convicted of gang rape and murder in Delhi in

2012. At present, juvenile courts can imprison those aged under 18 for a maximum of three years. Under the bill, minors convicted in adult courts would face longer sentences but would be spared the death penalty or life imprisonment. The bill still needs the approval of parliament.

Under a new proposed law, the age of criminal responsibility in [Uruguay](#) would be lowered from 18 to 16. The law will now be decided by a popular referendum. The Commission to Promote Lowering the Age of Criminal Responsibility collected over 300,000 signatures in 2012, the amount required to send the law to a vote before the people. The electoral commission subsequently confirmed these signatures and set a vote to coincide with the presidential election in October 2014. Proponents of the law argue that with a rising crime rate in Uruguay, lowering the age of criminal responsibility will serve as a deterrent to potential violators, a claim that has been refuted by critics of the law who say that adolescents commit only seven percent of crimes in the country. International advocates have also argued that the referendum contradicts international standards for the protection of children set forth in major international treaties, of which Uruguay is a signatory.

A bill which increases the amount of time to be spent in prison before someone serving a life sentence becomes eligible for parole in [Israel](#) has passed its first reading. The bill means that those convicted of serious crimes would have to wait 15 years instead of seven before they can apply to the parole board. The bill also proposes that those serving more than one life sentence would not become eligible for parole until they have served a minimum of 20 years, whereas currently they can apply after 15 years.

The [Irish](#) government has stalled for more than two and a half years on a plan to give judges the power to recommend a minimum sentence for persons convicted of murder. The proposal was made by the Law Reform Commission (LRC) in January 2012, and at the time the Department of Justice said the recommendation would be studied and a decision reached on whether to amend the legislation to make way for the change. Arguing its case for new powers for judges, the LRC pointed out that the mandatory life sentence applied to all persons convicted of murder, regardless of his or her circumstances or the special details of the case. When it was being imposed, it was unclear how long the person would spend in prison and it also questioned how a decision on release by the minister, without any input from the sentencing court and often many years after the case had been heard, could be compatible with the European Convention on Human Rights.

Around 130 prisoners at the Golden Grove prison in [Trinidad & Tobago](#) embarked on a week-long hunger strike in protest against what they said were “severe delays” in the judicial system. Relatives of the prisoners said that some of the prisoners have been waiting between nine and 11 years for a trial. Delays in the judicial system are an ongoing problem, and mean that in some cases prisoners have spent more time in prison awaiting trial than they would have if they had already been tried, found guilty and given the maximum sentence. The delays also mean that some individuals accused of a minor offence, even if they are not guilty, are advised to plead guilty and serve a six month sentence rather than fight the case and spend a much longer time in prison on remand.

The [Nigerian](#) Prisons Service has said that a three-week long strike of judicial workers in the country is affecting about 42,000 remand prisoners whose cases have stalled since the industrial action began. Around two thirds of the country's prisoners are awaiting trial. The judicial workers embarked on the strike due to the alleged failure of the various state governments to comply with the order of a Federal High Court in Abuja on the funding of the state judiciaries.

The British High Commission in [Ghana](#) has funded the Centre for Paralegal Services at Nsawam Prisons, which aims to address the issue of prisoners awaiting trial for long periods of time, often years. The Prisons Paralegal Officers will monitor how long a prisoner has been held on remand. When a time limit, depending on the seriousness of the case, has been reached, then the Officer will forward the details to the Young Bar's Pro Bono lawyers who will have the case listed for a bail application and to have the case expedited. The Prisons Service is now looking to open further such Centres in other prisons.

Prison policy

A group of prisoners in Ontario, [Canada](#), is taking the federal government to court over its recent move to cut the pay they receive for prison work. Last October the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) cut prisoner pay rates by 30 percent, claiming the money was to pay for room and board and the prisoner phone system. The government said the move was to make prisoners more accountable and would save the government about \$4 million out of CSC's more than \$2.6 billion annual budget. The prisoners' suit claims the new pay scale means many prisoners are no longer able to pay for phone calls, send money out to support their families or have money to prepare for their release. Prisoners must use their own money to purchase personal hygiene items such as shampoo, soap, deodorant and over the counter medicine, which the system no longer provides. The case is expected to be heard in federal court this autumn.

Prison officers working at high-security prisons in [Denmark](#) will now be armed with pepper spray as part of their everyday outfit when they are dealing with the most violent prisoners. Previously pepper spray cans were held in a locked cupboard and could only be used in extreme emergencies. The Justice Minister says it will reduce the risk of violent assaults against prison staff, and the prison and probation service said it can be used to pacify prisoners and limit the need for further use of force. However the national association of defence lawyers and the national legal advisors association have both warned that pepper spray may become another way for prison staff to use force against prisoners, even though it is intended to replace previous forcible means.

The technical team established by the Prime Minister of [Trinidad & Tobago](#) to implement recommendations made by the special Prisons Committee has delivered an update on steps being taken to improve security in the prison system. According to the report, bullet and stab proof vests will be handed over to prison officers in October, and emergency housing will be made available in instances where prison officers' lives are at risk. The report also notes that the use of force policy and training will continue and yearly refresher courses will be implemented. To date around 400 prison officers have benefited from the training.

Also in [Trinidad & Tobago](#), the government is proposing to create an Inspectorate of Prisons to deal with the treatment of prisoners and investigate their complaints. The Minister of Justice said the Inspectorate would be a corporate body comprising several people and managed by the Chief Inspector of Prisons. Currently there is a single Inspector of Prisons. The Minister said the aim was to make the prison environment more humane, taking into account the physical, educational and psychological needs of the prisoners.

Over 1,000 prison guards in [Colombia](#) went on strike to protest crowded conditions and layoffs, and to call for improved work contracts. Guards from at least 35 facilities took part in the strike, which prevented prisoner transfers as well as stopping lawyers and prosecutors from entering the prisons. Hearings, internal referrals and medical services in the prisons were also affected.

Trusted long term prisoners in [Ireland](#) are to be trained as librarians in the country's prisons to improve the service to prisoners, which has suffered due to staff shortages. An outside librarian has already been hired on contract to train up prisoners in areas where the service is not fully operational, and the Justice Minister has said that the Irish Prison Service is now actively pursuing the option of deploying "suitably trained" prisoners in all prisons to maximise the service. A key target of the extension of the library service is to cater for prisoners who are kept apart from the general prison population for security or personal protection reasons.

The [Lithuanian](#) government has approved a new prison modernisation programme, which provides for the modernisation of detention facilities by 2022. Four of the proposed programme projects will be implemented on a public-private partnership (PPP) basis. PPPs have spread in recent years in [Latin America](#)'s prison systems, although questions over efficiency persist. While most prisons remain under state control in the region, Chile, Mexico, Brazil and Peru have all used outsourcing in an attempt to improve the management of overcrowded prison systems. Chile has awarded eight facilities under this system since 2000, while Peru has begun a pilot project and Mexico has opened three jails under PPPs. Several Brazilian states also awarded public-private contracts to build new jails. However, questions over efficiency in the sector remain and Chile has said it will build two planned prisons with exclusively public funds as a result.

Prisons in New South Wales, [Australia](#), are set to go cash-free from October this year, when prisoners' family and friends will be banned from using hard currency, cheques or money orders to make payments at the state's correctional centres, and will have to make payments electronically by phone or internet instead. NSW Corrective Services has touted the move as one of convenience and modernisation, but reports suggest it also aims to kill off a potential avenue for corruption.

[Russia](#)'s Federal Penal Service has announced that the country's prisoners will soon be contributing to public works including the construction of the Kerch Strait Bridge to Crimea and a cleanup operation in Sochi, where the Winter Olympics were held earlier this year. The deputy head of the service said that the initiative follows the creation of the Federal Penal Service's Trade House, which aims to increase the prison system's revenues.

[Saudi Arabia and Yemen](#) have signed an agreement to extradite their country's prisoners to serve part of their sentence in their home country. The agreement also stipulates that the two countries notify one another of judicial rulings involving their citizens, including prison sentences. Prisoners will be transferred depending on whether the offences for which they are being held constitute a crime in both countries. In addition, both countries will be obliged to approve prisoner transfer requests for the ruling to be binding. Defendants must also agree to their own transfer, either in writing or through the consent of legal representatives or relatives, and should have to serve at least six months in order to be eligible for extradition.

The [US](#) state of Ohio is considering becoming the first state in the country to use aerial drones to patrol state prisons, according to corrections officials. The idea is in its very early stages, but Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections (DRC) officials say unmanned aircraft would be a big help in monitoring prisoners and catching outsiders throwing guns and other contraband over prison fences. A representative of the American Civil Liberties Union said the proposal doesn't raise significant constitutional concerns, but that if they are introduced the DRC should make sure it has a firm policy in place about how and when they can be used.

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