



INTERNATIONAL PRISON NEWS DIGEST

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Welcome to the thirty fourth 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 July to 31 August 2016. Please click on the blue highlighted words to access the news reports.

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Prison populations

[Central America](#)'s relentless struggle with gangs and street crime has created a worrying consequence: prisons so overcrowded they serve more as schools for criminals than institutions for rehabilitation, according to experts. Together, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Costa Rica and Panama have over 100,000 prisoners in prisons whose combined capacity is meant to be around 48,000. Prison overpopulation in each facility ranges from 22 percent to 246 percent. "The overcrowding highlights the failure of the structure of the justice system in its entirety," said Laura Andrade, a Salvadoran expert on prison issues. Several studies show that the governments in the region have opted for a populist policy that simply scoops up massive amounts of criminals and locks them away as an answer to public fears in some of the world's most dangerous countries. Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador constitute what is known as the "Northern Triangle" of Central America: gang-ridden nations whose murder rates are among the highest on the planet outside of actual war zones. But experts question the strategy, which they say merely creates fertile centres for criminal learning. "The citizen perception of imprisonment as a solution to security problems has impeded progress in reforms to reduce the prisoner population, adopt alternative measures, and promote social reinsertion," the UN Development Programme said in a 2013 report.

The [French](#) Prime Minister has promised that a plan to relieve the country's overcrowded prisons will be delivered in the autumn. He made the pledge during a visit to a jail in Nîmes, southern France, where 406 prisoners are packed into a facility with capacity for only 192.

France's prison population stood at nearly 69,000 in May, but its prisons have capacity for only around 58,000 prisoners. That has led to systematic overcrowding, with 1,648 prisoners sleeping on mattresses on the floor.

Officials in the [Philippines](#) have said the government would build new jails to address severe congestion, describing conditions as "inhumane" and "unacceptable." AFP photographs of Quezon City Jail, where thousands of prisoners take turns to sleep on an open-air basketball court and in a staircase, were an "eye-opener" for authorities to hasten the construction of a new facility, according to Quezon City Vice Mayor Joy Belmonte. On Monday, QC officials signed an agreement to donate land to the national government for a new prison. The facility in the northern district of Manila would replace the jail built six decades ago for 800 prisoners but which now houses almost 4,000. "The photos are really unacceptable. Seeing prisoners sleep on top of each other because of the lack of space, I feel it's a violation of human rights, an urgent matter that must be addressed," Belmonte told AFP.

More than 25 individuals arrested by the [Liberia](#) National Police were turned away by the Monrovia City Court due to overcrowding at the Monrovia Central Prison. The alleged criminals, who are commonly referred to as 'zogós,' were charged with minor offences including theft of property and loitering. After being refused by the court, the criminals were taken back to the LNP headquarter and later released. The court action comes after a communication from Solicitor General Betty M. Lamin-Blamo directing all county attorneys, prosecutors, district attorneys and city solicitors to avoid issuing writs of arrest for minor criminal offences due to the overcrowding at the prison. Lamin-Blamo advised prosecutors to only issue writs of arrest in cases of capital offences such as murder or rape, offences relating to national security threats, human trafficking, and arson.

[Costa Rica](#)'s overcrowded San Sebastián prison that prisoners describe as "hell on Earth" could be closing its gates for good after a San José judge ordered it shut down. Sentencing Judge Roy Murillo made the decision in a resolution citing the prison's terrible conditions and antiquated infrastructure. The prison currently houses 1,260 prisoners, only 165 of whom have been convicted of a crime, according to the Justice Ministry. The rest are being held in pre-trial detention. The prison's stated capacity is 664 prisoners. Detainees at San Sebastián have complained to the media of inhumane conditions in overcrowded cells with minimal ventilation and so little sleeping space that some prisoners have to sleep on the floor next to urinals.

New data on [Honduras](#)' prison population seem to indicate that mandatory pre-trial detention has exacerbated overcrowding in recent years, providing added justification for a recent congressional decision to give judges more leeway when determining the use of incarceration during criminal proceedings. Figures released by the National Penitentiary Institute show that the prison population has grown by 30 percent since 2013, increasing from around 12,000 to over 17,000 prisoners. This significant increase occurred over the three years following implementation of mandatory pre-trial detention for 21 crimes. Mandatory pre-trial detention -- which prohibits judges from choosing alternatives to time behind bars -- had been in effect for crimes such as drug trafficking, extortion and sexual assault, for which a majority of current prisoners are being detained. The law placed

individuals awaiting trial for these crimes in preventive custody with no possibility of bail. As a result, more than 8,000 prisoners are currently being held without a conviction.

In 1970, there were less than 8,000 women in [American](#) local jails. By 2014, that number had increased to nearly 110,000 — making women in jails the fastest growing segment of America's imprisoned population. A comprehensive report by the Vera Institute of Justice and the Safety and Justice Challenge has found that women in jail are mostly black or Hispanic, overwhelmingly poor and low-income, and nearly 80 percent are mothers. Many have high rates of trauma, serious mental and physical illness and histories of substance abuse. Unlike prison, where those convicted of crimes are sent to serve sentences, most people in jail are awaiting trial and are legally presumed innocent. While jails have been rightly recognized as a driver of mass incarceration, women are often left out of the national conversation because they comprise only a small percentage of the incarcerated population as a whole, the report found. But women's pathways to incarceration are different than their male counterparts, the report's author explained, and deserve to be investigated closely. "Jails are designed for men, because they're the majority of who is there," she said. "But that makes it very difficult on women."

Recent reforms to [Sierra Leone](#)'s prison system have failed to bring much meaningful improvement, according to an Institute for War and Peace Reporting investigation. Official figures show that the current prisoner population stands nationally at over 3,000, even though the system only has capacity for 1,785. New laws introduced by the correctional service in 2014 sought to provide an alternative to incarceration, a major reason for overcrowding. An antiquated legal system with stiff custodial penalties for even minor offences and lengthy periods of remand had put enormous pressure on the country's prisons. Poor hygiene and malnutrition meant that disease was rife, with very little hope for rehabilitation and reintegration back into society. But the legislation seems yet to have had any meaningful impact, with human rights groups warning that overcrowding, inadequate food, poor sanitation and a lack of access to healthcare are still major issues.

About 200,000 prisoners in [Thailand](#) have been initially deemed eligible for prison-term reductions, according to the Justice Minister, who confirmed the decree does not apply to pardons for people jailed for rape because of the public's sentiment about the crime. The names and prospective release dates of the first batch of prisoners are not yet available, the Minister said, but he added that the Justice Ministry's permanent secretary and the Corrections Department had considered the eligibility of prisoners. About 200,000 of 300,000 prisoners nationwide are considered potentially eligible for term reductions or immediate release, he added.

[Angola](#)'s government has approved a new amnesty law to release home thousands of prisoners with prison sentences of up to 12 years as it works to free up overcrowded jails and penitentiaries. The new law grants amnesty only to common crimes of prisoners who have completed half of their sentence and will cover national and foreign citizens in Angola. "The amnesty for all offences punishable by imprisonment of up to 12 years...results from the feeling of providing social opportunities, policies and other rehabilitation staff and family," said Virgilio de Fontes Pereira, president of Parliamentary Group of the ruling party, MPLA.

Treatment of prisoners

[Canada](#)'s prison watchdog is calling for tighter legal restrictions and greater oversight over solitary confinement as two more cases of suicide in segregation hit the spotlight. Howard Sapers, Canada's correctional investigator, said he is "very concerned" that the circumstances around these deaths in custody had similar elements as those flagged years ago in the high-profile inquest into the death of teen prisoner Ashley Smith. Sapers is calling for legislated hard caps on the length of time someone can spend in segregation; a prohibition against the use of segregation for vulnerable persons, including those with known serious mental health issues or a history of self-harm or injury, and more accountability and oversight, including an external review of continued segregation placements. Some critics and prisoners' advocates have called for a total ban on segregation. The B.C. Civil Liberties Association and John Howard Society of Canada have filed a constitutional challenge against the practice, arguing it amounts to cruel and unusual punishment to keep a prisoner isolated for prolonged and indefinite periods.

[Australia](#)'s prime minister has launched a public inquiry after the broadcast of footage of children in detention being abused, hooded and bound in a manner likened to Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo Bay. Malcolm Turnbull announced a royal commission hours after the airing of shocking footage showing the treatment of the children at the Don Dale detention facility outside Darwin in the Northern Territory. In one scene that the Four Corners programme compared with images from Guantánamo Bay or the Abu Ghraib jail in Baghdad, 17-year-old Dylan Voller was shown hooded and tied in a restraint chair for two hours. Voller – who was featured repeatedly suffering apparent mistreatment at the hands of guards – and five other former Don Dale prisoners are to sue the Northern Territory government.

Over 3,500 women and children locked up in jails across [Pakistan](#) are living in deplorable conditions in the absence of satisfactory prison facilities. These details were shared in a meeting of a national committee formed to improve the conditions of the imprisoned women and children organised by the Federal Ombudsman Office. The committee on jail reforms, which was formed at the Supreme Court's order, submitted its report, highlighting miserable conditions for women and children. Officers visited several prisons across the country to gather first-hand information about the living conditions of prisoners and were asked to report on the overall condition at jails as well. Speakers at the meeting shared that currently there are around 1,600 females, 1,500 juveniles and 425 children living with their mothers in major jails across the country.

Privately operated [US](#) government prisons, which mostly detain migrants convicted of immigration offenses, are drastically more unsafe and punitive than other prisons in the federal system, an investigation by the US Department of Justice's inspector general has found. Prisoners at these 14 contract prisons, the only centres in the federal prison system that are privately operated, were nine times more likely to be placed on lockdown than prisoners at other federal prisons and were frequently subjected to arbitrary solitary confinement. In two of the three contract prisons investigators routinely visited, new prisoners were automatically placed in solitary confinement as a way of combating

overcrowding, rather than for disciplinary issues. The review also found that contract prison prisoners were more likely to complain about medical care, treatment by prison staff and about the quality of food. Investigators determined that these facilities were also more dangerous than others in the federal system. For example, the report found that prisoner on prisoner assaults were 28% higher in contract prisons, and confiscation of contraband mobile phones occurred eight times more. The [US](#) Justice Department subsequently announced that it would end its use of private federal prisons.

In [Trinidad & Tobago](#) two brothers who spent three years in prison awaiting trial on a murder charge for which they were subsequently released due to insufficient evidence, are suing the state for the inhumane and deplorable conditions they were subjected to during their incarceration. The brothers claim their constitutional rights were violated as they were subjected to, among other things, cruel and unusual treatment at Golden Grove Remand Prison. Describing the conditions as contrary to the dignity of any human being, the men said they were placed in cells which were small, overcrowded, cramped and infested with cockroaches, mosquitoes, flies, rats and ants. The cell had debris and smelt of stale urine, vomit, old rubbish and faeces, they said. The brothers also complained the cell lacked lighting, ventilation, sleeping facilities and running water. They said they used a bucket as a toilet and they were provided with inadequate, poorly-prepared meals, sometimes the fish would be rotten. They claimed the drinking water was not fit for human consumption and they were exposed to contagious illness and diseases from other cellmates. Additionally, the men are claiming they were exposed to the risk of being beaten and sexually abused by other prisoners and prison staff; limited airing time and received sub-standard medical care and treatment.

Prison Health

Faced with the threat of a federal lawsuit, the prison system in the [US](#) state of Nevada will no longer apply segregation policies that deny prisoners with HIV access to work programs where other prisoners earn credits to reduce the length of their sentences. The state Department of Corrections “will not support denying a prisoner a job or housing a prisoner differently from the general population based on the reasoning that they have HIV or other blood-borne disease,” prisons chief James Dzurenda said. Dzurenda instructed prison officials not to disclose the condition of HIV-infected prisoners to correctional officers or those who assign work details. He also said medical records that identify HIV prisoners must be kept confidential. Justice Department lawyers warned Nevada's attorney general last month that they might sue the state under the Americans with Disabilities Act if it didn't change the policies based largely on unfounded fears about the transmission of HIV. They recommended the state pay compensatory damages to prisoners who have been discriminated against — and in some cases threatened and harassed — as a result of the “medically unnecessary” segregation policy that stigmatizes those with HIV.

Conversely in [China](#), Shanghai New Criminal’s Prison has set up a ward that will keep its 117 prisoners living with HIV separate from the rest of the prison population. Liu Tongjiang, the prison spokesman, told Sixth Tone news outlet the facility decided to set up their “special ward for criminals with HIV/AIDS” in response to an increasing number of HIV-positive prisoners. Since 2005, the prison has been home to nearly 400 HIV-positive prisoners in

total. The new department has room for 220 prisoners. Qiu Hengyu, a lawyer at Yingke Law Firm in Beijing, told Sixth Tone that he fears the new ward will lead to discrimination. He said that health information should be kept confidential. "This kind of segregation is telling the public that they are HIV-positive," Qiu added. The Ministry of Justice in 2005 issued a notice that allowed for the "concentrated management" of HIV-positive people. The prison's new ward has a dedicated team of 10 people to look after the prisoners' medical needs, and the furniture is made from plastic to prevent the prisoners from scratching themselves. The ward has been painted a light-yellow colour, which Liu said will help the prisoners relieve the stress they feel from being incarcerated.

In [Australia](#), Canberra's adult jail may get a medically supervised injecting room, after it was chosen as the preferred model for a prison needle and syringe programme (PNSP). A working group believes a supervised injecting room was the "most viable model" for the environment at the Alexander Maconochie Centre, the Corrections said. The working group's decision comes after a year of consideration and signals a PNSP may now finally be a step closer. The working party was established after the government deferred controversial plans for a PNSP in Canberra jail in April 2015 due to protracted opposition by prison staff. The Minister said the working group would consult with staff and stakeholders in coming weeks to work out the detail of the model, before being put to staff for a vote. "Our primary focus in developing a needle and syringe program is to reduce the spread of serious blood-borne viruses among detainees," he said. "Direct distribution by nurses or doctors through an injecting room model could allow for personal contact with prisoners and the opportunity for health professionals to provide qualified medical advice to detainees."

Some 2,000 foreign prisoners in [Swiss](#) jails may only be eligible for emergency medical care because they lack insurance for routine treatment, Swiss public television SRF reported. The Tagesschau news programme aired evidence of a 61-year-old prisoner in a Zurich prison who has been denied medical help to treat a restricted urethra because he does not have health insurance and the condition is non-emergency. He has fallen between the cracks due to a lack of Swiss residency or other temporary travel papers. Bruno Gravier, president of the Swiss prison doctors' association, said this case might be in breach of international law that demands prisoners receive the same medical attention as other citizens. "This is a clear violation of the medical code that Switzerland has signed up (for) and which is recognized internationally," he told the news programme. Furthermore, Gravier believes that this "inhumane situation – a veritable tragedy" may not be isolated. Gravier estimates about 2,000 of the 4,900 foreign prisoners in Switzerland may only be eligible for emergency treatment due to their lack of health insurance, which is mandatory for all Swiss residents.

Almost one in every two prisoners in [Madagascar](#) suffers from moderate or severe malnutrition. In 2015, more than 9,000 prisoners were identified as malnourished and treated as part of an emergency food programme aiming to get this extremely vulnerable population back on their feet and prevent malnutrition-related deaths. With more than 4,000 prisoners already treated so far in 2016, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is on track to reach the 2015 figure by the end of the year. Madagascar was badly hit by the economic crisis and the authorities are finding it increasingly difficult to feed the country's prison population. Official ministry of justice orders specify that each prisoner

should receive a daily ration of 750 grams of cassava but, in reality, they rarely receive more than 300 grams.

The [Canadian](#) Department of Public Safety says 36 per cent of the men working as corrections officers within federal penitentiaries report being affected by post-traumatic stress disorder, a startlingly high number that reflects what the guards say is the dangerous and emotionally corrosive atmosphere within Canada's prisons. They report being forced to search out and pay for their own PTSD treatment programs and to fight to get claims for mental injuries approved by workers' compensation boards. The union that represents the roughly 8,200 federal officers says the prevalence of PTSD among prison workers has received less attention than the occupational stress injuries afflicting soldiers, police, firefighters and paramedics – and that has made it more difficult for corrections officers to get the help they need. "One in five federal public servants will suffer from a mental-health issue and, you can tell, our numbers are a hell of a lot higher than that," Jason Godin, president of the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers, said in an interview.

Prison violence

More than 70 prisoners at a maximum security prison in [Paraguay](#) held two security guards hostage to avoid a mandatory search, local media reported. During a daily check, five prisoners in one cell-block at the Tacumbu prison in the country's capital of Asuncion, attacked a pair of guards, the director of Penal Institutions said. "One officer was wounded in the head but we manage to rescue both immediately," he told local media. Despite the quick rescue of the guards within about 15 minutes after they were attacked, the riot lasted several hours. Prisoners closed cell doors and requested the presence of the media to avoid reprisals from guards while opening the doors. Prisoners were protesting about mistreatment by security officers, overcrowding, power outages and poor food, according to the commissioner of the National Mechanism to Prevent Torture.

Prisoners burnt down two buildings at a southern [Thai](#) jail during a six-hour riot that left three prisoners dead and several officials injured, according to authorities. The mutiny broke out on when nearly 100 prisoners in southern Pattani province set fire to the jail's cooking quarters, according to a military spokesman. He said the prison warden tried to control the rebellion but was pelted with stones and called for police reinforcements. Around a hundred officers arrived at the scene and quelled the rioters before midnight, by which time a second building had been burned down and three prisoners were dead, according to the provincial police commander. After the riot, the prisoners handed authorities a written list of 14 demands, including requests for more family visits and freedom to watch the news on television. They also called for a change of command at the prison, which houses around 1,800 prisoners, and the ability to receive food from relatives. "All of their demands are illegal and none will be complied with," the police commander told AFP.

Convicted murderer Byron Lima was among the 13 people killed on Monday after a riot broke out at Pavon prison in [Guatemala](#). Interior Minister Francisco Rivas said the riot involved a fight between Lima's prisoner group and a rival gang. Four of the dead had been decapitated, Rivas said. An Argentine woman who regularly visited Lima in prison was also

among the dead. Lima had been considered the most powerful prisoner in Guatemala's prison system. He was also facing additional charges for his activities behind bars. Prosecutors allege that Lima built a multimillion-dollar illicit prison empire based on threats and corruption. They said Lima took money from other prisoners in return for favours such as access to prohibited cell phones and appliances, as well as special food and conjugal visits.

Four prisoners in [El Salvador](#) were murdered during a fight, the national prison service said via Twitter. The prisoners, members of the Barrio 18 gang, were killed in the facility which is in the city of Quezaltepeque, 21 km (13 miles) northwest of the capital. The attorney general's office said that the death toll could rise. In August last year, 14 prisoners were killed in the prison, with authorities saying it was part of a purge within the same gang.

In [Russia](#), more than 240 prisoners rioted in a prison colony in the Siberian Republic of Khakassia, the Interfax news agency reported. Local media reports suggested that the riot was organized by a small number of prisoners, including one detainee who had recently returned from solitary confinement. Prison officials regained control of the colony after a confrontation lasting over six hours, Interfax reported. No deaths or injuries were reported. Three prisoners were detained on charges of instigating mass disorder, with investigators alleging that, "the interior of one of the prison's buildings was destroyed from within by prisoners breaking off doors, throwing tables and overturning beds."

[Moroccan](#) police foiled an escape attempt by prisoners at a juvenile detention centre in Casablanca, resulting in nine detainees being injured, the prison service said. "The Ain Sebaa rehabilitation centre was the scene of rioting", the General Directorate of Prisons and Re-integration said. Detainees at the centre set fire to beds in a bid to attract staff, attack them and try to escape, it said. The prisoners tried and failed to break into a weapons store, but managed to get out of the main building and set light to a prison bus. They attacked and lightly wounded several staff. Police then intervened to put down the riot.

A prison in southern [Syria](#) erupted in rioting after authorities attempted to transfer three prisoners to the capital Damascus to be executed. Suwaydah prison, in south-western Syria, was reportedly surrounded by government troops and pro-government militias after a night of unrest inside. The riot ended after negotiations between detainees and prison authorities. Local sources told Middle East Eye that prisoners had seized control of parts of the facility in protest over the transfer plans for three prisoners from the southern city of Daraa.

An explosion in a [Venezuela](#) prison yard killed seven prisoners and left 47 wounded. The Venezuelan public prosecutor's office said that it appears somebody threw two explosive devices at the Alayon detention center in the town of Maracay. Local media reported that explosives were detonated during a clash among prisoners. Federal officials are launching an investigation. Venezuelan prisons are notoriously overcrowded and lawless. Many are run by prison gangs that have access to powerful weapons behind bars.

Violence against prison officers in [Denmark](#) is on the rise and politicians are calling for tighter penalties. In the first half of 2016, some 274 violent and threat incidents against

prison guards have been recorded, which is a 34-percent increase compared with the same period last year. “My people are paying the price for stricter rules and harder pressure against gangs,” Kim Østerbye, the chairman of the Danish Prison Association, said. “The extreme hunt for mobile phones with daily searches of prison cells inevitably increases frustration among prisoners and leads to more resistance to the staff.” Østerbye has called for more manpower to prevent violent attacks in the future or to manage them more efficiently.

Developments in rehabilitation

A prison bakery has been officially opened at Brandvlei prison in [South Africa](#). The Deputy Minister of Correctional Services said the baked bread provided an opportunity to create jobs and skills development for offenders. “This bakery has the capacity to produce up to 1,700 loaves of bread per day to supply offenders in this centre as well as those housed in Breede River Correctional Centre. The bakery will deliver a loaf of bread at one-third of the open market rate and will help save up to R400,000 per year,” he said. The bakery manager said the project was another way of reducing crime. “The project is not only focusing at saving money for the department, it is also another way of fighting the rise in crime. “We give them skills so they can be employed by companies or start their own businesses after serving their sentences.”

In [New Zealand](#), prisoners from Waikeria Prison’s Te Whare o Te Ao Marama (formerly the Māori Focus Unit) have been providing their time and labour to support Waikato Women’s Refuge Te Whakaruruhau by renovating a donated house into a home that will house women and children escaping from violence. Up to six men at a time, who have been approved to work off prison grounds, have been working on the project for about six weeks. The work party has been erecting fences, preparing footpath areas, and laying concrete to prepare the place for the women who will use it. The prisoners involved are passionate about this work, explains Prison Director Kevin Smith: “A lot of the feedback we hear is that there is a real sense of satisfaction when the men see what has been accomplished for others. They see that they have done something that will help keep someone else safe. It can be really motivating for them, giving them the drive to learn more about what they can do to break the cycle of violence.”

Five hundred juvenile prisoners from 13 prison schools in [Malaysia](#) will be trained to use basic computer programs such as Microsoft Word, PowerPoint and Excel. This is all part of Microsoft Malaysia and the Prisons Department of Malaysia's objective to make these 16-to-21-year-old prisoners digitally literate, to prepare them for jobs or further studies on release. The corporate vice president of Microsoft Philanthropies said that the three-year partnership includes teaching digital literacy, entrepreneurship, computer science and leadership. Microsoft is also looking at providing training to teachers from the prisons. Also in [Malaysia](#), a report has highlighted the efforts of the management of the Kajang Women’s Prison in training low-risk prisoners and those serving short sentences to provide hair care and spa services to the general public. Behind the walls of the prison, a spa and salon has been operating for over seven years now, offering a wide array of beauty services. The spa is open not only to those who work at the prison, but also to members of the public, who can have their hair cut, permed or dyed. Other services such as milk, spice and flower baths,

body massages, reflexology, and sauna treatments are also available. The manager of the prison spa said the beauty spa programme there was aimed at providing skills and preparing prisoners for the outside world upon their release. The programme is also aimed at changing the public's perception towards prisoners, especially after they have served their sentences.

A new report says more than two-thirds of all youths in prison in [Guatemala](#) are "rehabilitated" while incarcerated, a rare bright spot for the country's oft-maligned penitentiary system that also highlights the challenges of reintegrating gang members into society. A Guatemalan court for minors reports that therapy sessions and workshops manage to reform 70 percent of youths being held in detention facilities. Ninety percent of minors not affiliated with gangs are rehabilitated, according to the court, while just 40 percent of youths who already belong to these criminal structures are reformed. This discrepancy is due to the irrevocable allegiances youths are forced into when they join a gang, the court says. "It is more difficult for youths who belong to gangs to reform themselves... due to the fact that the members threaten them if they abandon the [gang] cell," the court reported. "At the moment of entering the gang, they make pacts and receive benefits such as economic support for their family members." The court also noted the challenges involved in trying to reintegrate young prisoners into the workforce, saying businesses are reluctant to provide them with job opportunities once they have completed their sentences.

Young [Japanese](#) prisoners are being trained as barbers so that they will have practical skills and can make a living after they serve their sentences. The program is part of a growing effort in Japan to help former prisoners rejoin society. Much like other countries, Japan is struggling to reduce the rate of repeat offences by prisoners and offenders sent to juvenile reformatories. A quarter of the 400 prisoners at the Nara juvenile prison are currently taking vocational training courses in 13 fields, including architecture, nursing care and hairdressing. At the end of May, six prisoners were practicing their cutting skills in silence in a training room that resembled an old-style barber shop. Correction officers in uniform kept a close eye on the trainees' every move. The prisoners will be eligible to take the examination for a national hairdressing certificate upon completion of the two-year course.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has donated knitting and sewing machines to the [Zimbabwe](#) Prisons and Correctional Services (ZPCS) at Harare Central Prison. ICRC also offered a two-month training programme to prisoners and prison officers in knitting and sewing techniques and the project will yield 10,000 jerseys annually. Speaking at the handover ceremony, Head of Regional Delegation of the ICRC Mr Thomas Merkelbach said that they started working with the ZPCS in 2009 with the aim of improving the conditions of treatment and detentions at prisons around the country. He added that the ICRC had reached a milestone on the path towards helping the ZPCS to be better equipped to meet its responsibilities to provide adequate conditions of detention and to contribute to the rehabilitation of prisoners.

The Ministry of Corrections is supporting the rehabilitation of prisoners in [Georgia](#)'s prisons by encouraging them to use their talents, create handiwork and sell their goods to earn money while behind bars. A new website was launched where prisoners can advertise and

sell their goods. This was made possible after a decree was signed by Georgia's Corrections Minister that allowed convicts to sell various things that were made by them. The Ministry believed this would encourage prisoners to do something with their lives while behind bars and motivate them to rehabilitate back into society once they left prison. Furthermore, the money received by selling their handmade goods will go directly to the prisoners, which they can use themselves or send back to their families.

Prisoners in the regional penitentiary of Pelotas in the south of [Brazil](#) are building houses for dogs and – since the project started roughly three months ago – over 50 houses have been already built. Every three days of work reduces one day of jail time. When the wood and shingle houses are ready, they are placed around the city and dogs can come and go as they please. Some citizens have enjoyed the projects contributions so much that they have donated materials to the prison and requested shelters for their own yards. The project also helps to resocialise the criminals. “It's good for nothing to just lock the person in a cell. So we try to give them something they can do, give some meaning in life” said the director of the prison.

A comprehensive nationwide prison survey is expected to begin in [Guyana](#) in September with the aim of designing rehabilitation and social reintegration services for prisoners. The survey will be funded by the Inter-American Development Bank through the Citizen Security Strengthening Programme (CSSP) and is part of the third component of the CSSP's five-year programme. Project Manager of CSSP, Clement Henry says the aim of the survey is to capture information on the experiences of prisoners' lives prior to incarceration, during imprisonment, and those who are repeat offenders. “The hope is that when we look at the information capturing what has been happening to these prisoners and ex-prisoners, we can be able to design programmes to target recidivism, and to also improve conditions in the prison. The pre-prison experiences will help us in terms of designing programmes to deal with ‘at risks youths’ so that they don't end up in the prisons.” Henry said the CSSP will begin crafting rehabilitation and social reintegration programmes on the preliminary findings.

Sentencing and the law

The [Zimbabwean](#) Constitutional Court has ruled that prisoners sentenced to life in prison must be considered for presidential pardon. In a landmark judgment, Justice Bharat Patel sitting with eight other judges of the Constitutional Court declared it unconstitutional to sentence convicted murderers to life without any hope for parole or release on licence. The court described it as a violation of human dignity and amounts to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment in breach of Sections 51 and 53 of the Constitution. In the past, such prisoners were not considered when others with lesser sentences were freed on presidential amnesty. The [Zimbabwean](#) President has subsequently pardoned 20 life sentence prisoners.

Every year, more than 11 million people go through [American](#) local jails, mostly for low-level, nonviolent offenses, and only a fraction will ever be convicted of a crime and sent to prison. The President has announced a new initiative to drive that number down by cutting unnecessary arrests, holding fewer suspects until trial and proactively finding treatment

services for mentally ill Americans, who are disproportionately arrested and jailed. “What we have seen as we’ve engaged with state and local leaders is that [these] are people who simply do not need to be in our jails,” said a senior adviser to the president. The administration’s Data-Driven Justice Initiative encourages local jurisdictions, of which more than 60 have already signed on, to use data to become smarter about who gets incarcerated and when. These efforts can, according to the adviser, “reduce local jail populations, direct people to the services they need and often save money in the process, while importantly keeping their community safe”.

[Thailand](#) is on the wrong track in its efforts to address drug problems and it is time to treat drug abuse as a health issue rather than a crime, says Justice Minister Paiboon Koomchaya. Speaking at the "Thailand's Drug Policy Revisited" forum held by the Thailand Institute of Justice, Gen Paiboon said the high number of drug offenders and widespread drug abuse in communities shows the drug policy is failing. "It has been wrong all these years. If not, why do 70% of drug offenders remain in prison? Why does the problem persist despite thousands of deaths? And why do people still complain about drugs in their community? They're telling us there's something wrong," he said. Gen Paiboon, who has spoken on a similar theme previously, said the country has to shift the emphasis from suppression to treating drug abuse as a health problem and engaging the public health system in the issue. He said the drug law should be amended to prepare the country for the change.

The [Canadian](#) Liberal government is studying the idea of building some flexibility into the controversial convention of mandatory minimum sentences to avoid unduly harsh penalties in cases that don’t warrant them. The examination is part of a federal review of changes to the criminal justice system and sentencing reforms ushered in by the previous Conservative government, a frequent champion of setting minimum penalties for crimes involving drugs, guns and sexual exploitation. A report prepared for the Justice Department says “a politically viable strategy” is to craft exemptions to mandatory minimums that kick in when certain criteria are met, as seen in several other countries. For instance, relief from a mandatory minimum could be granted in the case of a juvenile offender, an early guilty plea or when an accused provides substantial help to the state, says the report. “The main argument in favour of creating exceptions to the application of mandatory minimum penalties remains the need to avoid unjust and arbitrary punishment,” says the report, completed in March and recently disclosed under the Access to Information Act.

Prison policy

The [Thailand](#) Department of Corrections is preparing to separate lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) prisoners from other prisoners to ensure their safety and security. The deputy permanent secretary for justice said LGBT prisoners could be kept in dedicated facilities to protect them from being abused by other prisoners. Min Buri Prison would be used as a prison for LGBT prisoners under a pilot scheme, he added. There are 4,448 prisoners who have agreed to be classified as LGBT: 2,258 females, 2,156 males and 34 transgender people, according to the Department of Corrections. LGBT prisoners account for about 1% of the prison population.

Transgender prisoners in [Malta](#) are to start being assigned to the section of the prison that matches the gender on their legal documents in line with a “transgender variant and intersex prisoners policy” which has just been launched. To date, prisoners were admitted to the section which reflected the gender listed on their birth certificate, Ministers said. They said that when a prisoner was in transition or intended to start the transition process, he or she would have to make a declaration under oath to be admitted to the appropriate division. A trans-prisoner could be initially accommodated in separate facilities for an assessment but this could not last longer than seven days. Searches would also be carried out by a prison official of the appropriate gender, and staff would receive additional training and information on human diversity and gender identity. Prisoners would have the right to access the procedures of gender recognition, health services and mental health support.

The [Nepal](#) Department of Prison Management has launched a computer-based Prison Management Information System to maintain records of prison employees and prisoners. According to a DoPM spokesman, the computer-based PMIS will eliminate the risk of mouse or termite attack and ensure that information regarding prison employees and prisoners may be retrieved as and when required without any difficulty. “The PMIS system reduces physical storage needs and enhances the productivity of the office. It would also help us search for documents and records without rummaging through piles of dust-covered files,” an official said. The PMIS is also aimed at enhancing the security of records and streamlining the work flow of the office by making it easier to store, share and access data.

Prisoners at a maximum security prison in Washington State, [US](#), spend 23 hours each day alone in a small concrete cell. The prisoners at the Washington Corrections Center are considered the most dangerous of the overall prison population. But in an attempt to keep a peaceful environment, prison officials give prisoners the option of watching video installations of the ocean, sunsets and mountains in a so called “Blue Room.” The room, intended to relieve stress and release anxiety, was created at the prison last year and was based on the successes from a similar setup at an Oregon prison. The room is painted blue and features indoor plants, art, classical music, and a place for prisoners to sit and watch the nature videos. There are two blue rooms in the prison, one in the maximum security area and another in the “Skill Builder” unit, which houses intellectually challenged offenders with IQs between 69 and 79. The aim for the corrections officials is that by offering a visual dose of nature, prisoners will be calmer, which should lower violent outbursts and — in general — increase the safety of the prison.

The [Irish](#) Government's Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness includes measures to help former prisoners and sex offenders get accommodation once they are released. Housing Minister Simon Coveney's plan to solve the housing crisis promises to implement better procedures to ensure such individuals don't end up homeless. The plan promises that the Government will "enhance inter-agency arrangements to ensure that accommodation, welfare and health support for prisoners are in place prior to their release". It commits to a time-line of doing this by the end of September this year with the Prison and Probation Services, the Local Government Management Agency and the Housing Department among the agencies involved. Separately, the plan also commits to implement national procedures to enhance cooperation between agencies in the accommodation of sex offenders by the end of June 2017.

Families with relatives who die in [Canadian](#) federal jails aren't consistently getting the full story of what happened, sometimes waiting for a year or more for heavily censored investigation reports, according to Canada's correctional investigator. He told a gathering of judges and lawyers that his investigators looked at uncensored investigations and compared them with what families receive, and concluded that most of the information should have been provided in writing or through oral briefings. "There is little consistency. In fact there's tremendous inconsistency in how the information is received," he said during his presentation. He said in one case the family received a heavily censored report three years after they were told they had to apply through the Access to Information Act. "It's my perspective that if a family asks for it (the investigation report), they're entitled to it," he said in an interview after his talk. In 2015-16, 65 people died in Canadian federal prisons, including 39 from natural causes, nine suicides, five overdoses and eight from undetermined causes. The investigation was in response to three separate complaints to the Investigators' office from families dissatisfied with the information they received after deaths of relatives in prisons.

The [Dominican Republic](#) Justice Ministry plans to build new prisons prioritizing the new model of correctional facilities, with at least two being inaugurated before year end, one of them especially equipped to hold convicted members of the military "so they'll be under the control of the corresponding court." New Model Prison coordinator Ismael Paniagua said the Justice Ministry is satisfied that more than 17,000 prisoners of different nationalities have received training whilst in the prisons. "The various centers of the new model have more than 50 educational, technical and vocational training programs that benefit more than 9,000 prisoners with training in all areas such as industrial and residential electricity technicians, and over 54% in elementary and mid-level education," Paniagua said

"We envisage a future where we can run a prison without guards," says [Singapore's](#) Commissioner of Prisons. His vision is intentionally "provocative", he said: he wants to show the potential of technology, but doesn't plan to cut staffing. Instead, prison officers will change roles, spending their time on rehabilitation, rather than on patrol. Singapore is looking at how video analytics and facial recognition can free officers from the passive tasks of guarding prisoners. Prisoners currently have to be escorted when they move around the prison complex, he says, but this will soon no longer be required. "With facial recognition, I can know where the prisoner is and where he is supposed to be." These tools will also help him "repackage the job" of prison wardens, making it more attractive to the younger generation.

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