

INTERNATIONAL PRISON NEWS DIGEST

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Welcome to the thirty second 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 March to 30 April 2016. Please click on the blue highlighted words to access the news reports.

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Prison populations

A UN human rights expert has condemned overcrowding at [Haitian](#) prisons and the slow pace of the country's legal system that has left many suspects awaiting court dates languishing behind bars. Gustavo Gallon, an independent UN expert on human rights in Haiti, said he met a prisoner who has been jailed since December 2012. The man was accused of buying a stolen gun, a crime that carries a sentence of a year and a half, but has been behind bars for more than three years because he has yet to appear before a judge. Nationally, over 70 percent of prisoners are awaiting trial, a situation denounced for decades by human rights advocates.

Figures released by the Lae Buimo prison in [Papua New Guinea](#) have shown that prisoners are being held in prison for up to nine years without a final decision by the courts. A list of 199 prisoners obtained by EMTV News has revealed that some prisoners have been held without trial for close to a decade. The five-page list is from 2014, however, many of the prisoners still have not been released. Most of the 199 prisoners have been in Buimo for more than 12 months with no certainty of trial. Two of the longest serving prisoners on remand have served 8 years and 9 years respectively. They last appeared for mention in 2005 and 2006 and are still waiting for a proper trial and sentencing.

The [Moroccan](#) minister of justice and liberties has confirmed the continued overcrowding of the kingdom's prisons and attributed the phenomenon to e over-use of pre-trial detention and delays to the judicial process. The minister called on King Mohammed VI's judicial

forces to turn down requests from the prosecution for pre-trial detention unless the defendant has been caught red-handed in a crime, if judicial supervision will not be enough to prevent the defendant from escaping justice, or if the release of the suspect would lead to the obstruction of justice in another manner.

The Attorney General of [Trinidad and Tobago](#) has revealed it costs the State almost \$50 million a month to maintain the over 2,200 remand prisoners in the country. He claimed the situation was exacerbated by the fact that 11 per cent of remand prisoners have been awaiting trial for over ten years, 11 per cent for between five and ten years and the rest for under five years. He added that 42 per cent of the remand population were there on murder charges, 11 per cent for drug possession, seven per cent for sexual offences and 12 per cent for lesser offences, including child maintenance and traffic offences. He suggested that discussions be held on whether the decriminalisation of marijuana and lesser offences may help reduce the remand population as well as improve the efficiency of the criminal justice system.

In the wake of the violent prison unrest that claimed the lives of 17 prisoners, top representatives of [Guyana](#)'s Judiciary and the Executive have agreed to consider a raft of measures to address overcrowding in the country's jails. Chancellor of the Judiciary Justice Singh hinted that proposals are being considered for magistrates to assist in easing the overcrowding of the prisons. "What we did was to identify measures by which the judiciary's work, particularly at the magisterial level can impact in a way that brings about some relief particularly the problem of overcrowding at the prison," he said. Hundreds of the prisoners are currently remanded or convicted and jailed for minor offences including possession of very small amounts of marijuana while others are serving jail terms for other comparatively minor offences.

[El Salvador](#)'s congress has approved a temporary measure to allow about 1,000 old or sick prisoners to leave prison, to free up police to fight gangs. The legislation may also help reduce overcrowding in the Central American country's prisons. The measure will allow the release of prisoners with a terminal or degenerative illness and prisoners over age 60 who have served at least a third of their sentences. Nobody with a sentence of over eight years nor those convicted of serious offenses will be eligible under the measure, which is scheduled to last one year.

The [Cambodian](#) Interior Minister has announced that his ministry plans to construct a prison capable of holding 7,000 prisoners on an 800 hectare plot of land in Pursat province. Cambodia's present prison population is nearing 20,000 according to the General Department of Prisons while the prisons are designed to hold fewer than 9,000 prisoners.

The [Indonesian](#) Law and Human Rights Ministry has called on the National Narcotics Agency (BNN) to relocate drug prisoners from prisons and detention centres in order to ease an overcapacity problem that may lead to a future jailbreak. A spokesperson for the directorate general for penitentiaries of the Law and Human Rights Ministry, said that existing drug prisoners accounted for around 35 percent of the over 180,000 total prisoners in the country. He said they should be sent to rehabilitation centres to ease overcrowded prisons and detention facilities. Drug convicts tend to stay longer in prison compared to other

offenders as the government has issued a regulation to make it more difficult for drug convicts to receive remissions while serving time in prison.

The [Kenyan](#) National Coordinator for Community Service has announced that 10,000 prisoners will be freed in a move to decongest prisons in the country. He added that a committee is carrying out a sentence review for petty offenders, noting that those who qualify will be set free and others will be put on probation. He further revealed that a counselling program will be provided for the prisoners who have alcohol problems, adding that "Those who are serving sentence because of selling illicit brew will be equipped with skills and funded to start alternative businesses." He called upon the community to embrace former detainees and accord them necessary support.

In the [US](#), the cities of New York, St Louis and New Orleans are among 11 jurisdictions pledging to reduce their jail populations by as much as a third, in exchange for grant funding aimed at curbing mass incarceration. The Safety and Justice Challenge selected the cities to receive between \$1.5 and \$3.5 million each towards diversion programs, training and other interventions meant to curb over-reliance on pre-trial incarceration. The initiative, if successful, would cut thousands from the jail rolls of the participating cities and jurisdictions. The US jail population has more than tripled since the 1980s, mirroring the attendant increase in the prison population, although public attention on the phenomenon of mass incarceration has largely overlooked jails in favour of prisons. Both disproportionately affect black Americans and Latinos, who make up 51 per cent of the jail population, 58 per cent of the prison population and roughly 30 per cent of the general population.

A [Mexican](#) women's rights organization, Equis, has published a report which found that over 53 per cent of women in Mexican prisons are being held for low-level drug offences. Most of these women are from lower income families and are mothers or heads of household, so their incarceration has a huge impact on the family and future generations. According to the research, more than 2,000 women were arrested for drug-trafficking in 2013, almost all of whom were poor, had low education levels, worked in the informal economy and had no criminal record. In these cases, 44 percent of the women were arrested for transporting drugs and 30 percent for possession. The sales of drugs in these cases was an option to earn money in order to support their families, without needing to spend a lot of time away from them. Also, in many cases, the women were not aware of the harsh penalties that could be applied for trafficking, the study states.

Treatment of prisoners

The situation in [Greece](#)'s prisons has "...deteriorated to the point where lives are being lost," the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) said in a report based on a visit to the country last April by a delegation from the group. It cited severe overcrowding, with some prisons at double their capacity, a lack of health care and major staff shortages as well as often appalling hygienic conditions. "Currently, many prisons in Greece are merely acting as warehouses in which to hold people until they are eligible to be released back into the community," the report said. "It is high time to change the way prisons function in Greece." In its response the Greek government said new laws have led to

a reduction of the overall prison population, and it set out a series of targets to be achieved over the next three years.

The authorities in [Kazakhstan](#) are failing to properly investigate hundreds of reports of torture and other ill-treatment by members of the country's law enforcement agencies and prison staff, according to a report by Amnesty International. The report reveals that while human rights organisations in Kazakhstan receive hundreds of reports of torture and other ill-treatment each year, the fear of reprisal, lack of access to appropriate legal advice, or the assumption that nothing will be done means that few cases are registered, and an even smaller number result in prosecution. Legal reforms, including the introduction of a new legal code in January 2015 and the extension of the mandate of "Special Prosecutors" to include the investigation of cases of torture, while welcome, have failed to address the systematic gaps and failures in the current procedures for investigating and prosecuting reports of torture, said Amnesty.

The UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Juan Mendez, has urged the [United States](#) to allow his long-sought visit to all places of detention in the country and to reform the widespread use of prolonged or indefinite solitary confinement affecting tens of thousands. "My request to visit the United States of America has been pending for five years over the terms of reference in order to obtain access to all places of detention," Mendez told the UN Human Rights Council. President Barack Obama has made criminal justice reform a focus late in his administration and last July became the first sitting president to visit a federal prison. In January he said he would ban solitary confinement for juveniles in federal prisons, citing concerns about harmful psychological effects. Up to 100,000 people are in solitary confinement in U.S. prisons, including juveniles and people with mental illnesses, Obama said.

The number of prisoners placed in solitary confinement in [Israel](#)'s prisons in 2014 was nearly double the number from two years prior, according to a new report by Physicians for Human Rights. A total of 755 prisoners were placed in solitary confinement in Israel's prisons in 2014, compared with 390 in 2012. And in July 2015, out of the 117 prisoners in solitary confinement, seven had been there for more than five years in a row. The figures were obtained from the Israel Prison Service under the Freedom of Information Law. Prisoners in Israel may be placed in solitary confinement in three cases: during interrogation, if deemed necessary; as a disciplinary measure; and to separate the prisoner from the general prison population. The figures provided by the prison service do not relate to solitary confinement as a disciplinary measure, so the figures could actually be much higher.

[Canadian](#) lawyers are calling for more action to address overcrowding in Ontario prisons after the provincial government was confronted with the reality that prisoners in at least one jail have been forced to sleep in shower cells. The Provincial Community Safety and Correctional Services Minister said, "This practice is appalling, completely unacceptable, and I have ordered its immediate and permanent end. This practice should never have occurred and I want to be clear that it will never happen again." The revelation has renewed calls from lawyers and advocates for a complete overhaul of Canada's bail system, which they say is a key way to address the problem of overcrowding.

In [Switzerland](#) the Lausanne-based Federal Court has upheld the appeal of a prisoner who complained of being held in the famously overcrowded Champ-Dollon prison under inhumane conditions for 136 days. The case will now have to be re-examined by the Geneva court which will rule on how the violation of the European Convention on Human Rights will affect the prisoner's sentence. The appellant, a heroin trafficker, was sentenced to four years in prison. He is demanding a five-month reduction to his sentence due to the difficult conditions he had been subjected to. He was sent to the prison in April 2014 and spent the first night there in a cell measuring around 10 square metres with two other prisoners. He was later moved to a more spacious cell but until September 2014 his prison stay did not meet minimum standards. This is not the first time the highest court in the land has ruled on detention conditions in Champ-Dollon. Last November, it accepted the appeal of two prisoners and declared their detention in cells measuring around four square metres to be illegal.

The United Nations Human Rights Council's report on [South Africa](#) has painted a grim picture of the country's prisons. The committee on South Africa reported a slew of factors contributing to poor conditions at state detention centres. "The committee is concerned at poor conditions of detention in some of the state's prisons, particularly with respect to overcrowding, dilapidated infrastructures, unsanitary conditions, inadequate food, lack of exercise, poor ventilation, and limited access to health services," it read. "The committee notes with concern the conditions of detention in the two super-maximum security prisons and the segregation measures imposed, for instance in Ebongweni super-maximum prison, where prisoners are locked up 23 hours a day for a minimum period of six months." The committee recommended that the state take drastic steps to reduce overcrowding and ensure that detainees are treated with dignity.

[Mexico](#)'s National Human Rights Commission has reported that most of the country's prisons are ill-equipped, overcrowded and dangerous. A report by the governmental commission said that of 130 state prisons inspected, 95 lack adequate guards and staff and 104 fail to adequately separate convicted prisoners from people awaiting trial. The most shocking part of the report was the overcrowding found at 71 of the 130 penitentiaries. The Commission President said as many as 30 prisoners were found living in cells designed for four people. Prisoners were found to be partly in control of more than half the prisons, the report added.

Prison Health

At least half of [Canada](#)'s 40,000 prisoners have endured abuse as children – just one of a catalogue of maladies affecting prisoners detailed in a new study that assembles the country's first comprehensive portrait of prisoner health. Around one in three women and one in five men in federal custody take some kind of psychiatric medication, the review found. To all this, incarceration adds an elevated prevalence of many communicable diseases. Tuberculosis is five times more common in custody than out. Thirty per cent of female prisoners and 15 per cent of male prisoners in federal custody have hepatitis C. Rates of sexually transmitted infections are also high.

In what one commentator described as “a bold step”, the [Cambodian](#) Interior Ministry’s prisons department has seemingly admitted that prisons have a drug problem, and has requested the Health Ministry’s assistance in tackling it. The prisons department operations director reported that nearly a third of the country’s prisoners are there on drug-related charges. The prisons department issued a statement through its Facebook page announcing the creation of a working group to tackle the issue, promising to provide rehabilitation and detoxification treatment to detainees; to explore the possibility of separating addicted prisoners from their non-drug dependent peers; to root out drug distribution networks inside and outside Cambodia’s prisons; to identify persistent drug users; and to collect evidence relating to drug use to be passed to officials responsible for administrative punishment.

A Human Rights Watch report has found that the [US](#) state of Louisiana has systematically failed to provide HIV services and testing to prisoners in its jails, potentially in violation of international human rights treaties. The report argues that the state avoids testing prisoners at local “parish” jails, the equivalent of counties, to avoid providing costly HIV treatment in state prisons. Even when treatment is provided, the report called it “limited, haphazard and in many cases nonexistent”. HRW workers described HIV care that was almost entirely dependent on federal monies, and said some parish workers were reluctant to test for HIV, because local jails didn’t have the money to pay for care. Louisiana has the highest rate of new HIV diagnoses in the country for any state, at 37 persons diagnosed with the disease for every 100,000 living in the state.

Scientists in [east Africa](#) plan to exploit rats’ highly developed sense of smell to carry out mass screening for tuberculosis among prisoners in crowded prisons in Tanzania and Mozambique. African giant pouched rats trained by the Belgian non-governmental organisation APOPO are widely known for their work sniffing out landmines, and are now developing a reputation in east Africa for their skill and speed at detecting TB too. Although data from African jails is hard to come by, studies from Tanzania, Malawi and Ivory Coast show that TB rates are 10 times higher in prisons than in the general population, according to the US Centre for Infectious Diseases Control.

Thousands of men and women with psychosocial disabilities in [French](#) prisons are at risk of suicide or harming themselves because of the neglect of their physical and mental health, Human Rights Watch said in a new report. The situation is exacerbated by overcrowding, stigma, and isolation, the report found. A shortage of mental health professionals in many prisons means that appointments are infrequent and often brief and limited to prescribing medication. The lack of adequate conditions and care also results in difficult working conditions for prison staff. “It’s shameful for a country like France to keep people with mental health conditions locked up for months or years in prisons without adequate access to mental health care,” said the Western Europe researcher at Human Rights Watch. “The lack of adequate mental health treatment effectively amounts to additional punishment for prisoners who need this care.”

The Western [Australian](#) government has allocated \$13.1 million over three years in the 2016/17 state budget for the Mental Health Court Diversion Program. The Mental Health minister said the program identified people whose criminal offending was potentially the

result of mental illness and offered them an alternative to prison through access to mental health treatment and support services. The Attorney General said that since March 2013, about 934 adults and 898 children had been referred for treatment, with 80 per cent of adults who completed the program either ceasing offending or committing less serious crimes.

Prison violence

In [Guyana](#), 17 prisoners died in a fire in a prison in the capital Georgetown. The Public Security Minister said prisoners had set fire to their mattresses to protest against conditions inside Camp Street prison. He said they were protesting about overcrowding and delays for prisoners awaiting trial. The Minister said the protest had begun after a raid of cells by police officers looking for contraband. The previous day there had been similar disturbances, with prisoners setting fire to their mattresses and repeating the act when the blazes were extinguished.

At least five people died and almost 60 were injured in a western [Venezuelan](#) prison during an attempt by a group of prisoners to kidnap the warden, according to the Attorney General's Office. In a communique, the AG's Office said that it designated two prosecutors to head the investigation "into the deaths of five men and (the wounding of) 57 people, (which) occurred during an irregular situation on Tuesday, March 15, at the Fenix Penitentiary Center." According to the statement, "During the morning hours on Tuesday, the prisoners tried to take the prison warden hostage as he was making his rounds in one area of the complex." The incident became a "violent situation" that left four prisoners and a prison guard dead, along with 52 prisoners and five prison employees injured, including the warden. Days later a riot at the Uribana prison in [Venezuela](#) ended with the liberation of 18 prison staff who had been held hostage and the death of another, when the prisoner who was guarding them detonated "a bomb," the Penitentiary Service Minister said.

Five prisoners died in a prison fire in [Indonesia](#), according to police, after an operation to search for a drug kingpin sparked a violent riot. More than 250 prisoners were rescued as the fire tore through the facility, but there were five who did not make it out alive. "It's true that five prisoners died. They were trapped inside," said a police spokesman. "Several of the prison buildings have been damaged, but the investigation is still underway." Indonesia has some of the toughest anti-narcotics laws in the world, including death by firing squad for traffickers, and has launched a full-scale "war on drugs" to erase what authorities claim is a nationwide scourge.

In Varanasi Jail in [India](#), prisoners held the prison superintendent hostage for six hours following a clash with staff over several issues, including the "poor quality" of food served to them. He was freed after the district administration assured the prisoners that they will look into their allegations. The deputy jailer was seriously injured in the riot and was taken to hospital. At least a dozen other people, including prison guards, were also injured in the fight. The prisoners had taken control of a section of the prison barracks, where they were holding the jail superintendent captive. The prisoners also snatched weapons off the guards and several shots were heard from inside the jail.

Human rights advocates are concerned that rising cases of serious assault, injury and illness are going largely uninvestigated in [Australian](#) prisons. Twenty-five years after the release of the findings into the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, advocates have said it is time to turn attention to such incidents, known as "near misses". Near misses occur when a prisoner almost dies because of assault, illness or injury. The figures that are available from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare show serious incidents in Australian prisons are rising for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous prisoners. Nearly one-third of Indigenous prisoners in 2015 had to see medical staff for injuries, up from 22 per cent in 2012. Eight per cent of all prisoners were attacked while in prison and four per cent self harmed, up from two per cent in 2012.

The number of assaults by prisoners on prison officers in [Ireland](#) last year decreased by 37 per cent to less than two per week on average. Figures released by the acting Justice Minister show that 91 assaults in 62 separate incidents were perpetrated by prisoners on prison officers last year. The total represents a 37 per cent reduction on the 144 assaults that were recorded for 2014 and a 41 per cent reduction on the 154 assaults that took place in 2013. The reduction in assaults has been attributed to several factors including a 20 per cent reduction in prisoner numbers. The introduction of enhanced security measures by the prison service, such as hand-held metal detectors and security screening machines, are also believed to have resulted in the reduction of assaults.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) detainees suffer more acts of violence than the general population in custody, according to a new [United Nations](#) human rights report that explored the link between gender and torture. "Gender stereotypes still cause us to downplay the suffering of women, girls, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people and sometimes even acquiesce in it," the UN Special Rapporteur on torture, said. The report to the Human Rights Council looks at gender-based violence through the prism of the Convention against Torture, and highlights a tendency to regard violations against these groups as "ill-treatment" even where they would more appropriately be defined as "torture." The human rights expert pointed to the clear link between the criminalization of LGBT people and the violence and stigma these groups face. At least 76 countries have laws criminalizing consensual same-sex relationships between adults, he said.

Developments in rehabilitation

Sixteen prisoners from the Tower Street Adult Correctional Centre in [Jamaica](#) have benefitted from the Chess in Prison Programme. The programme, an initiative of the Modernization Initiatives and Strategic Projects Division of the Ministry of National Security in partnership with the Department of Correctional Services and the Magnificent Chess Foundation, took place over four weeks and culminated with a closing ceremony, held at the correctional centre on Tuesday, March 15. Addressing the prisoners at the ceremony, the Acting Director of Rehabilitation at the DCS said, "When the odds are against you, we want you to make rational decisions and chess is a game that will help in your decision making." This initiative is the first of its kind at the facility and was started as a response to a call for more rehabilitative measures to be put in place in prisons.

Around 99 per cent of the 21,189 prisoners in [Malaysia](#) who completed their rehabilitation outside prison or via the parole system from 2008 to 2015 found employment, according to the Prisons Malaysia director-general. He added they found jobs either through self-employment or by working for employers in various fields. He said rehabilitation outside prison or the parole system via community-based programmes could provide an opportunity for prisoners to get closer to the community, thus facilitating their acceptance by society. "An effective and organised rehabilitation programme within or outside the prison walls, as well as support from all parties were important factors to the success, and we are targeting a five per cent recidivism rate by 2020," he said.

A training programme for former prisoners in the [UAE](#) is now helping them to have a better future. The Ministry of Interior announced that Al Radda Programme helps give former prisoners a chance to lead a normal life and to invest their potential to achieve social good. The entrepreneurship development and funding programme aims at granting Emirati prisoners the opportunity to enter the business sector and reintegrate in the community after serving their sentences, and to make good use of the investment expertise they acquired by managing their businesses while incarcerated. The programme provides a number of services that include specialised training courses that focus on entrepreneurship, consultancy, feasibility studies and financial support for distinctive and viable projects. It also helps to provide prisoners with a source of income after having served their sentences.

Some 257 [Saudi](#) women prisoners in various parts of the Kingdom have completed their three-month vocational training in a number of skills including computer, sewing, embroidery, textiles, designs and others, according to a prison service report. The report said 180 new women prisoners have joined the training programs aimed at providing them with the necessary skills to find jobs after their release from the prisons. The report said that when the women complete their vocational training, their names will be conveyed to the Governorate to reduce their jail terms by up to 25 percent.

Newly released prisoners in [Japan](#) are to be assigned robot "mentors" in a pilot programme being trialled in Tokyo designed to ensure they do not slip back into their old criminal ways. Former prisoners are buddying-up with Pepper robots, a humanoid android developed by telecommunications firm SoftBank that is able to interact with humans by determining their feelings from the tone of their voice and their facial expressions. The four-foot-tall devices are marketed as a "social companion for humans", and there are now hopes they may help parolees turn their back on a life of crime, national broadcaster NHK reported. Japan is experiencing a surge in the number of repeat offenders, particularly among older people, and the Ministry of Justice is working with a rehabilitation facility in Tokyo on the project, which may be rolled out elsewhere if it proves successful. Officials say they hope residents of the half-way house will be able to communicate with the robots - described as "robots with a heart" - and tell their new companion things they would not be able to share with another human.

Sentencing and the law

The Supreme Court of [Canada](#) has ruled that two key "tough on crime" measures brought in by the previous Conservative government are unconstitutional. In the first case, the court

ruled 6-3 that a mandatory minimum sentence of one year in prison for a drug offence violates the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The court ruled the sentence cast too wide a net over a wide range of potential conduct, catching not only the serious drug trafficking that is its proper aim, but also conduct that is "much less blameworthy." In the other case, the Supreme Court was unanimous in ruling that a person who is denied bail because of prior convictions should be able to receive credit for time served before sentencing. Normally, a person denied bail can get 1.5 days of credit for each day spent in pre-sentence custody, reflecting what are often harsh conditions with a lack of access to programs. Under sentencing reforms introduced by the Conservatives in 2009, a person denied bail because of a previous conviction is not eligible for enhanced credit.

[India](#)'s top judge has made an emotional plea to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to recruit more judges to handle an "avalanche" of backlogged cases. Chief Justice TS Thakur appeared close to tears as he asked how the country's current 21,000 judges could cope with tens of millions cases pending. He said a judge at India's Supreme Court dealt with about 2,600 cases a year, compared with just 81 in the US. India has a notoriously slow legal system, and court hearings can go for years or even decades. At the rate they are currently being handled, it would take about 30 years to clear only the criminal cases, experts say.

The [Namibian](#) Correctional Services is implementing community work as a form of punishment. The chief public relations officer in the Ministry of Justice said sentences to perform community service are not new. "They've been there, as they are authorised by the Criminal Procedure Act of 1977 in terms of Section 297. However, such provision of the law has not been fully implemented due to many challenges the system has been facing." He explained that community service sentences do not apply to serious criminal offences, but only to offences deemed light by the court, that will not have a negative impact on society should the offender be released to do community work. He said sentenced offenders found guilty of such offences will not be put in jail. Instead they will be assigned to identified institutions where they will serve their sentences by working for the benefit of the community, such as cleaning at hospitals, schools, offices, or carrying out any other work that may be assigned to them in terms of the community service orders imposed on them by the courts.

In Victoria, [Australia](#), the prisons are so overcrowded some magistrates are releasing prisoners on bail to ensure they'll turn up to court. It is usually the job of Corrections to bring prisoners on remand to court appearances but the jails are so full Corrections seems unable to cope. In the first seven weeks of 2016 alone, Corrections failed to bring 455 prisoners to their scheduled court appearances, according to magistrates' court figures provided to Victoria Legal Aid. The situation is so bad that prisoners are missing their bail applications and assessments for community-based sentences. About a quarter of prisoners are on remand, meaning they are either yet to be charged, or yet to be sentenced for a crime. The high number of remand prisoners is leading to bottlenecks and severe delays in the magistrates courts in particular. Some magistrates are so frustrated with prisoners continually missing court appearances, they are releasing them on bail - believing it's more likely an accused will turn up on their own recognisance.

The [US](#) Justice Department has called on state judges across the country to root out unconstitutional policies that have locked poor people in a cycle of fines, debt and jail. In a letter to chief judges and court administrators, Vanita Gupta, the Justice Department's top civil rights prosecutor, and Lisa Foster, who leads a program on court access, warned against operating courthouses as for-profit ventures. It chastised judges and court staff members for using arrest warrants as a way to collect fees. Such policies, the letter said, made it more likely that poor people would be arrested, jailed and fined anew — all for being unable to pay in the first place. Ms. Gupta said that in some cities, hefty fines served as a sort of bureaucratic cover charge for the right to seek justice. People cannot even start the process of defending themselves until they have settled their debts.

Following an agreement with the Interior Ministry, the [Saudi Arabian](#) Justice Ministry has started establishing courts near prisons in Jeddah, Riyadh and Dammam to expedite the trial of prisoners. Lawyers and legal experts have welcomed the ministry's move. Omar Al-Khouli, a professor of law, highlighted the benefits of establishing courts, especially criminal courts, near jails. "If courts are set up near prisons, the need to handcuff or shackle prisoners when they are taken to courts will not arise. Taking prisoners to courts in shackles is humiliating," he said. Al-Khouli also commended the Justice Ministry's efforts to speed up court procedures by reducing the time required to schedule hearings.

The [Turkish](#) government is preparing to roll out new judicial reforms for undermanned courts that face the burden of an overload of cases. The reforms, which will bring major changes to the judiciary, include plea-bargaining, a staple of the U.S. justice system. The Justice Ministry is working on a package of regulations and amendments to the Penal Code to relieve the burden on courts, and authorities examined U.S. and European Union model judicial systems. The reforms, which will be included in a set of bills to be brought to Parliament for ratification, aim to foster a quicker judicial process, as in other countries, for the Turkish legal system. Reforms will also contribute to decreasing the high prison population by calling for sentence reductions for defendants that make plea deals with prosecutors. In some countries, sentences for those pleading guilty are halved, while Turkey plans a one-third reduction in sentences in such cases. The approval of prosecutors and judges will be required for sentence reductions. Plea bargains will be confined to offences that carry lesser prison terms rather than serious crimes such as homicide, while offences against children will be excluded from plea-bargaining.

In [Ireland](#) a bail supervision scheme aimed at keeping young people out of prison will be piloted in Dublin, the Minister for Children has said. The system aims to increase supervision to strengthen adherence to bail conditions and reduce child custody rates on remand, which are higher than those of adults. The department of children said the scheme will ensure that detention can be a last resort. It said judges will have available to them information on how a young person is complying with bail conditions laid down by the court. The department said the added supervision will ensure greater compliance and closer monitoring. The scheme will also provide support through the use of Multisystemic Therapy (MST) to assist the young person to desist from anti-social behaviour and support families during the period of remand.

In its annual report the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) has called upon the 47 [Council of Europe](#) member states to review their treatment of life-sentenced prisoners according to the individual risk they present, and to provide for their possible reintegration into society at some stage. “It is inhuman to incarcerate a person for life without any real prospect of release”, said the CPT President. “This does not mean that every prisoner should necessarily be released at some stage, but individual plans and follow-up are essential to evaluate on a case-by-case basis whether and when the person can return to society.” Although the majority of countries imposing life sentences require that a minimum period of between 20 and 30 years be served before a prisoner may benefit from conditional release, a number of do not have a system of conditional release for life-sentenced prisoners. As a result, some prisoners may never be released (except on compassionate grounds or by pardon). The CPT urges those states where it has found that conditions for life-sentenced prisoners were particularly harsh to improve their regime.

Prisoners serving life sentences in the [Netherlands](#) may come up for release after 25 years if new proposals being drawn up by the junior justice minister become law. Currently in the Netherlands, life sentences mean just that, with no prospect of early release. There are currently around 30 prisoners serving life sentences in Dutch prisons. The minister’s plan would mean those serving life sentences would have their detention assessed after 25 years. The opinions of prosecutors and judges would be taken into account, as would the prisoner’s mental health and the interests of victims and survivors. The Dutch government has come under pressure from the European Court of Human Rights, which ruled in 2013 that it is inhumane to detain someone for life with no prospect of release. Currently, prisoners serving life sentences can only be pardoned by royal decree.

Life in prison may no longer mean life under changes to the legal system proposed by the Majlis Al Shura in [Oman](#). A member of the Legal Committee at the Majlis Al Shura said that a raft of suggestions included changing the tariff for a life sentence from all of a prisoner’s remaining years to 25 years, in line with similar punishments in countries around the world. “We have suggested the change as we feel that life sentence means execution but in a slower way. The committee held several meetings with experts and specialists of such Laws from Sultan Qaboos University SQU, Supreme Court, Public Prosecution, Ministry of Legal Affairs and the council legal experts,” he said, adding that the committee has studied the penal codes of other countries before its conclusion regarding the need to limit the life sentence to 25 years.

In a landmark decision, [Russia](#)’s Constitutional Court has ruled against fulfilling a demand from the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) on prisoners voting rights. In July 2013 the ECHR considered a lawsuit filed by several Russian citizens and ruled that the article of the Russian Constitution that suspends the electoral rights of people serving prison sentences was indiscriminate and automatic, and therefore contradicted the International Convention on Human Rights and Basic Freedoms – in particular, the section that guaranteed the freedom of elections. In its ruling, Russia’s Constitutional Court stated that currently it was impossible to fulfil the ECHR’s demand and that the claimants in the case should be left without compensation.

Defendants in [China](#) who stand trial while in custody will no longer have to wear prison uniforms, according to a revised protocol on court hearings made public Thursday. The protocol, which has been in effect since 1994, has undergone a large-scale revision with 15 new articles added to better protect the rights of defendants and other participants in court hearings. In most cases, defendants will not wear restraints, such as handcuffs or shackles, according to the document. Witnesses, expert witnesses and victims in criminal cases can testify via video link from a separated room if they need special protection. Courts have been asked to install barrier-free facilities so that disabled citizens can attend court hearings.

Prison policy

More prisons in the [Netherlands](#) will close in the next few years as the government looks to cut the cost of hundreds of empty cells, justice minister Ard van der Steur has told parliament. The *Telegraaf* newspaper says it has obtained internal documents revealing that the government plans to shut five prisons, with the loss of 1,900 jobs. The downward trend in crime, which has fallen by an annual average of 0.9 per cent in recent years, is expected to mean 3,000 prison cells and 300 youth detention places will be surplus to requirements in five years' time. Van der Steur also said that judges were imposing shorter sentences, meaning criminals were spending less time on average in jail. More serious crimes are also becoming less common, he added

[Georgia](#)'s prisoners will soon be able to sell products that they have personally produced or manufactured, according to planned changes to the country's penal code and supported by the finance and budget committee. Money received from the sales will be directly credited to the individual's personal bank account. The Deputy Corrections Minister said more specific rules regarding the prisoners' activities will be determined later in the year. In addition to the correctional board, the initiative has the backing of Georgia's Human Rights Committee.

[Uganda](#) is in the process of modernizing its prison farms amid ongoing concerns over the welfare and possible exploitation of prisoners. The commissioner in charge of prison farms reported that the government recently provided 7.5 billion Uganda shillings (\$2.2 million) worth of agricultural machinery to 16 of the government's 19 commercial prison farms. "Our mechanization level is still low, at less than 50 per cent," he said. "We hardly have a farm with two tractors and when you see the available equipment, one tractor cannot do planting, spraying and harrowing." However, the increased mechanization on prison farms, which provide produce to jails across the country, is taking place as human rights groups say there are still concerns about the conditions prisoners are working in.

An organisation in New South Wales, [Australia](#), that advocates alternatives to jail says a new tool reveals the thousands of dollars per day that imprisonment costs local communities. The justice reinvestment calculator, released by Just Reinvest New South Wales, shows adult and juvenile incarceration and community supervision costs \$2.5 million per day across the state. The calculator is designed to break down the cost of imprisoning prisoners from each postcode. The Just Reinvest chair said the tool highlighted the money that could be saved and reinvested in alternative ways to deal with offenders, and prevent crime.

[El Salvador](#) has declared a state of emergency at seven prisons and transferred 299 high-ranking gang members at the start of “extraordinary measures” that the government has promised to take against gangs. The emergency declaration puts prisoners on lockdown and suspends family visits for 15 days. “They are going to be subjected to a higher security regimen, with greater control to make sure communication from inside the prison system is stopped,” the Minister of Justice and Public Security said. “They have been identified as those most involved in communicating with the outside, in directing and coordinating illegal activities of the criminal groups.” He said mixed units of police and soldiers will handle security inside and outside El Salvador’s prisons.

In Western [Australia](#), prisoners up to six months pregnant and new mothers will be handcuffed during escorts under harsher rules imposed after the embarrassing escape of a pregnant prisoner. Janaya Edith Williams, 21, was four months pregnant when she fled guards outside King Edward Memorial Hospital. At the time of her escape, Corrective Services’ policy was for pregnant and post-natal prisoners not to be restrained under escort. But the new policy stipulates prisoners up to six months pregnant or post-natal must be restrained with a “single cuff” to a prison officer. They must be restrained when they are escorted between a prisoner transport vehicle and an “end destination”, such as a hospital. “Under the new procedures pregnant women will be restrained unless there are medical reasons for this not to happen,” a Corrective Services spokesman confirmed.

The [Greek](#) Justice Ministry has announced that all prisoners will have access to Skype to communicate with relatives and friends. Speaking to a local radio station, the Justice Minister described the initiative as “pioneering” by Greek standards and part of the government’s wider effort to modernize the country’s penitentiary system, despite the lack of resources.

A world-first system called PrisonCloud has been introduced in a prison in Antwerp, [Belgium](#), allowing prisoners to access the internet, make calls and download films from the privacy of their own cell. The system allows prisoners to access leisure and education opportunities, as well as making the prison run more efficiently. Every prisoner has a USB stick, a username and password. They can access the internet, but only certain sites. Facebook is not allowed, for example. They can also make calls from their cell rather than go onto the landing to use the phone, they can download films and music, and they can play computer games. They can order extra items from the canteen, ask for library books, officially communicate with prison staff and see their court records.

The [Dutch](#) prison service is planning to replace televisions and prison libraries with tablet computers, the AD newspaper has reported. The paper says the service aims to provide thousands of prisoners with a tablet so they can watch television, follow courses and buy essentials from their own cells. The move is part of efforts to get prisoners to take more responsibility for themselves, a justice ministry spokesman told the AD. ‘It is becoming increasingly important to be able to take care of yourself,’ the spokesman said. ‘We want to impress that on prisoners as well, so they can organise their own visits and buy their own supplies.’ Prisoners will not have free access to the internet and will only be able to use approved websites, he said.

[Colombia](#) wants to call in the help of foreign governments and companies to partially privatize a number of prisons to solve an ongoing crisis in the country's prison system. The administration will construct four new prisons through public-private alliances with foreign companies, the Vice-Minister of Justice told Congress. The country's prisons are suffering from major overcrowding and under-funding, which has led to a dreadful humanitarian crises. For years the government has tried addressing this problem, but without much success. To make matters worse, the country is going through an economic slowdown, which has drastically reduced the government's investment budget. To solve this, public-private alliances between the Colombian government and national or foreign companies could provide the funding for the construction of prisons, the government believes.

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