

RESEARCH FINDINGS No. 116

WORLD PRISON POPULATION LIST (second edition)

Roy Walmsley

The World Prison Population List gives details of the number of prisoners held in some 200 independent countries and dependent territories. It shows the differences in the level of imprisonment across the world and makes possible an estimate of the world prison population total.

KEY POINTS

- ▶ Some 8.6 million people are held in penal institutions throughout the world, either as pre-trial detainees (remand prisoners) or having been convicted and sentenced. Half of these are in the United States (1.85m), China (1.4m) or Russia (1.05m).
- ▶ Russia has the highest prison population rate in the world, some 730 per 100,000 of the national population, followed by the USA (680), the Cayman Islands (665), Belarus (575), Kazakhstan (495), the Bahamas (485), the US Virgin Islands (475), Belize (460), Bermuda (445) and Kyrgyzstan (440).
- ▶ However, almost two thirds of countries (64%) have rates of 150 per 100,000 or below. (The United Kingdom's rate of 125 per 100,000 of the national population places it at about the mid-point in the World List. Among European Union countries its rate is the second highest, after Portugal's 130.)
- ▶ Prison population rates vary considerably between different regions of the world, and between different parts of the same continent. For example:
 - in Africa the median rate for western and central African countries is 50 whereas for southern African countries it is 260;
 - in the Americas the median rate for south American countries is 115 whereas for Caribbean countries it is 330;
 - in Asia the median rate for south central Asian countries (mainly the Indian sub-continent) is 45 whereas for (ex-Soviet) central Asian countries it is about 260;
 - in Europe the median rate for southern European countries is 70 whereas for central and eastern European countries it is 220;
 - in Oceania (including Australia and New Zealand) the median rate is 120.
- ▶ Prison populations are growing in many parts of the world. Updated information on countries included in the first edition of the List shows that prison populations have risen in 70% of these countries; a similar pattern is evident in all continents.

This second edition of the World Prison Population List has been compiled, like the first edition, from a variety of sources. In almost all cases the original source is the national prison administration of the country concerned, or else the Ministry responsible for the prison administration. Most figures relate to dates between the beginning of 1996 and the end of 1999. Since prison population rates (per 100,000 of the national population) are based on estimates of the national population they have been rounded to the nearest five in order to avoid a spurious appearance of precision. In order to compare prison population rates in different regions of the world, and to estimate the number of persons held in prison in the countries for which information is not available, median rates have been used because they minimise the effect of countries with rates that are untypically high or low.

The List has a number of weaknesses. It lacks information on 19 independent countries and figures do not relate to the same

date. Comparability is further compromised by different practice in different countries, for example with regard to whether all pre-trial detainees and juveniles are held under the authority of the prison administration, and also whether the prison administration is responsible for psychiatrically ill offenders and offenders being detained for treatment for alcoholism. People held in custody are usually omitted from national totals if they are not under the authority of the prison administration.

Despite its limitations it is hoped that the World Prison Population List will be found useful by academic criminologists who are studying the use of imprisonment world-wide and by non-governmental organisations who are interested in variations in criminal justice practice. The data – for all its imperfections – may prompt fresh thought among policy makers and other criminal justice experts about the size of the prison population in their country, given the huge costs and disputed efficacy of imprisonment.

KEY TO SOURCES

C of E	Council of Europe	OIP	Observatoire International des Prisons
ILANUD	UN Latin American Institute	PRI	Penal Reform International
NPA	National prison administration		

Table 1 AFRICA

	Prison population total (no. in penal institutions incl. pre-trial detainees)	Date	Estimated national population	Prison population rate (per 100,000 of national population)	Source of prison population total
Northern Africa					
Algeria	35,737	/96	28.6m	125	OIP, 1997
Egypt	c.80,000	/98	66.0m	c.120	Crim. justice expert, Egypt
Libya	c.6,750	/98	5.3m	c.125	Crim. justice expert, Libya
Morocco	48,600	/97	27.5m	175	OIP, 1998
Sudan	32,000	/97	27.9m	115	Conference paper, Jan 1998
Tunisia	23,165	31/12/96	9.2m	250	United Nations 5th Survey
Western Africa					
Benin	3,937	23/8/99	5.9m	65	NPA direct communication
Burkina Faso	6,100	31/12/94	10.2m	60	Burk. Faso human rights movement
Cape Verde	775	30/6/99	418,000	185	Crim. justice expert, Cape Verde
Côte d'Ivoire	13,670	5/11/98	14.4m	95	NPA document
Gambia	478	12/7/99	1.25m	40	Min. of Interior direct communication
Ghana	9,523	12/99	19.7m	50	NPA direct communication
Guinea	4,014	31/12/96	7.25m	55	Response to UN enquiry
Mali	3,135	12/98	10.8m	30	Rept. of Spec. Rapp. on Afr. prisons
Mauretania	1,400	/97	2.4m	60	Conference paper, Jan 1998
Niger	5,263	1/10/98	10.15m	50	NPA direct communication
Nigeria	44,797	31/10/99	109.0m	40	Crim. justice expert, Nigeria
Senegal	4,653	9/97	8.8m	55	OIP, 1998
Togo	2,043	6/11/98	4.4m	45	NPA direct communication
Central Africa					
Angola	4,884	6/11/99	12.5m	40	UN mission in Angola
Cameroon	15,903	/97	13.9m	115	OIP, 1998
Chad	2,521	1/96	6.4m	40	OIP, 1997
Congo (Brazzaville)	918	/93	2.4m	40	PRI, from NPA
Sao Tome e Principe	99	/94	130,000	75	United Nations 5th Survey
Eastern Africa					
Burundi	9,411	/97	6.4m	145	OIP, 1998
Comoros	c.200	/98	658,000	c.30	Crim. justice expert, Comoros
Djibouti	384	16/12/99	629,000	60	Min. of Foreign Affairs, Djibouti
Kenya	41,064	23/10/96	28.9m	140	OIP, 1997
Madagascar	20,109	31/7/99	15.5m	130	NPA
Malawi	7,341	10/4/99	10.5m	70	NPA document
Mauritius	3,239	/97	1.1m	295	NPA direct communication
Mozambique	c.10,800	12/97	18.5m	c.60	Rept. of Spec. Rapp. on Afr. prisons
Rwanda	143,021*	30/11/98	6.9m	- *	Rwanda Human Rights League
*(Prison population total includes an estimated 135,000 held on suspicion of participation in genocide.)					
Seychelles	157	27/10/99	76,000	205	NPA
Tanzania	45,715	1/12/99	33.0m	140	NPA direct communication
Uganda	21,971	30/6/98	20.6m	105	NPA direct communication
Zambia	12,500	/99	9.0m	140	NPA direct communication
Zimbabwe	19,256	1/99	11.45m	170	PRI Newsletter 36, 1999
Mayotte (France)	123	1/9/98	131,300	95	French Ministry of Justice
Réunion (France)	1,019	1/10/98	682,000	150	French Ministry of Justice
Southern Africa					
Botswana	6,413	5/3/99	1.6m	400	NPA direct communication
Lesotho	2,552	4/99	2.1m	120	NPA direct communication
Namibia	4,397	31/8/98	1.7m	260	NPA direct communication
South Africa	161,163	30/11/99	40.1m	400	NPA report to UN Congress
Swaziland	2,221	14/9/98	958,000	230	NPA direct communication

(No information) **Western Africa:** Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Sierra Leone. **Central Africa:** Central African Republic, Congo (Kinshasa), Equatorial Guinea, Gabon. **Eastern Africa:** Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia.)

Table 2 AMERICAS

	Prison population total (no. in penal institutions incl. pre-trial detainees)	Date	Estimated national population	Prison population rate (per 100,000 of national population)	Source of prison population total
North America					
Canada	32,970*	/98-99 *(Average daily population 1/4/98-31/3/99)	30.65m	110	Canadian Centre of Justice Statistics
USA	1,860,520	30/6/99	272.9m	680	US Bureau of Justice Statistics
Bermuda (UK)	286	29/12/99	64,000	445	NPA direct communication
Greenland (Denmark)	78	25/8/98	56,000	140	Danish NPA, direct communication
Central America					
Belize	1,097	/99	239,000	460	Elias Carranza,ILANUD,from NPA et al
Costa Rica	8,526	/99	3.7m	230	Elias Carranza,ILANUD,from NPA et al
El Salvador	6,868	/99	6.25m	110	Elias Carranza,ILANUD,from NPA et al
Guatemala	8,169	/99	11.7m	70	Elias Carranza,ILANUD,from NPA et al
Honduras	10,869	/99	6.3m	175	Elias Carranza,ILANUD,from NPA et al
Mexico	139,707	/99	97.4m	145	Elias Carranza,ILANUD,from NPA et al
Nicaragua	7,198	/99	5.05m	145	Elias Carranza,ILANUD,from NPA et al
Panama	8,517	/99	2.8m	305	Elias Carranza,ILANUD,from NPA et al
Caribbean					
Antigua & Barbuda	225	11/95	65,000	345	Information from W. Singh, PRI
Bahamas	1,401	1/98	290,000	485	Survey for UN by Wendy Singh
Barbados	772	1/98	263,000	295	Survey for UN by Wendy Singh
Cuba	c.33,000	/97	11.1m	c.295	Nils Christie, Oslo University
Dominica	298	/99	71,000	420	Elias Carranza,ILANUD,from NPA et al
Dominican Republic	14,188	/99	8.35m	170	Elias Carranza,ILANUD,from NPA et al
Grenada	327	1/98	99,000	330	Survey for UN by Wendy Singh
Haiti	4,152	/99	7.9m	55	Elias Carranza,ILANUD,from NPA et al
Jamaica	4,288	/99	2.5m	170	Elias Carranza,ILANUD,from NPA et al
St Kitts & Nevis	135	/99	40,000	340	Elias Carranza,ILANUD,from NPA et al
St Lucia	365	/99	150,000	245	Elias Carranza,ILANUD,from NPA et al
St Vincent & Grenadines	405	/99	110,000	370	Elias Carranza,ILANUD,from NPA et al
Trinidad & Tobago	4,794	/99	1.365m	350	Elias Carranza,ILANUD,from NPA et al
Aruba (Netherlands)	223	11/98	89,000	250	Dutch NPA direct communication
Cayman Islands (UK)	244	6/12/99	36,600	665	NPA direct communication
Guadeloupe (France)	706	1/10/98	445,000	160	French Min. of Justice publication
Martinique (France)	547	1/10/98	390,000	140	French Min. of Justice publication
Neth.Antilles (Netherlands)	780	11/98	214,000	365	Dutch NPA direct communication
Puerto Rico (US)	16,524	31/12/98	3.8m	435	US Bureau of Justice Statistics
Virgin Islands (UK)	43	19/8/99	20,000	215	Pris.reform coord'tor, UK O'seas Terr's
Virgin Islands (US)	447	31/12/98	94,000	475	US Bureau of Justice Statistics
South America					
Argentina	38,604	/99	36.2m	105	Elias Carranza,ILANUD,from NPA et al
Bolivia	8,315	/99	8.15m	100	Elias Carranza,ILANUD,from NPA et al
Brazil	194,074	/99	171.0m	115	Elias Carranza,ILANUD,from NPA et al
Chile	30,852	/99	15.0m	205	Elias Carranza,ILANUD,from NPA et al
Colombia	57,068	/99	37.4m	155	Elias Carranza,ILANUD,from NPA et al
Ecuador	8,520	/99	12.4m	70	Elias Carranza,ILANUD,from NPA et al
Guyana	1,697	1/98	852,000	200	Survey for UN by Wendy Singh
Paraguay	4,088	/99	5.45m	75	Elias Carranza,ILANUD,from NPA et al
Peru	27,452	/99	25.6m	105	Elias Carranza,ILANUD,from NPA et al
Suriname	1,933	/99	442,000	435	Elias Carranza,ILANUD,from NPA et al
Uruguay	6,198	/99	3.25m	190	Elias Carranza,ILANUD,from NPA et al
Venezuela	23,147	/99	23.7m	100	Elias Carranza,ILANUD,from NPA et al
French Guiana/ Guyane (France)	3,47	10/98	144,000	240	French Min. of Justice publication

Table 3 ASIA

	Prison population total (no. in penal institutions incl. pre-trial detainees)	Date	Estimated national population	Prison population rate (per 100,000 of national population)	Source of prison population total
Western Asia					
Bahrain	305	31/12/93	549,000	55	Response to UN enquiry
Israel	9,337	1/11/99	6.15m	150	NPA direct communication
Jordan	3,749	31/12/93	5.1m	75	UN enquiry (A/CN.15/1996/16/Add.1)
Kuwait	1,735	/97	1.7m	100	Conference paper, Jan 98
Lebanon	5,000	/97	3.1m	160	Conference paper, Jan 98
Qatar	527	31/12/93	540,000	100	UN enquiry (A/CN.15/1996/16/Add.1)
Saudi Arabia	7,939*	31/12/93	17.2m	45*	UN enquiry (A/CN.15/1996/16/Add.1)
			*(sentenced prisoners only)		
Syria	14,000	/97	15.0m	95	Conference paper, Jan 98
United Arab Emirates	c.6,000	12/98	2.4m	c.250	Criminal justice experts in U.A.E
Yemen	14,000*	/98	16.9m	85*	PRI Newsletter 33, 1998
			*(government managed prisons only)		
Central Asia					
Kazakhstan	82,945	1/5/97	16.8m	495	NPA direct communication
Kyrgyzstan	19,857	1/5/97	4.5m	440	NPA direct communication
Tajikistan	c.6,000	/96	6.3m	c.95	Crim. justice expert, Tajikistan
Turkmenistan	c.6,000	4/99	4.4m	c.135	Government statement, Turkmenistan
Uzbekistan	c.60,000	/96	23.3m	c.260	Crim. justice expert, Uzbekistan
South Central Asia					
Bangladesh	c.50,000	/98	125.8m	c.40	Conference paper, Apr 99
India	381,147	/98	982.0m	40	Conference paper, Apr 99
Iran	101,801	31/12/93	65.0m	155	UN enquiry (A/CN.15/1996/16/Add.1)
Maldive Is.	1,098*	/96	265,000	415*	Ministry of Justice, Maldive Is.
			*(sentenced prisoners only)		
Nepal	7,000	/98	23.4m	30	Report by Rani Shankardass
Pakistan	74,485	1/1/99	150.0m	50	Crim. justice expert, Pakistan
Sri Lanka	18,619	/99	18.6m	100	David Biles, from NPA
South Eastern Asia					
Brunei Darussalam	286	/99	322,000	90	David Biles, from NPA
Cambodia	3,832	/99	10.9m	35	David Biles, from NPA
Indonesia	55,026	/99	209.3m	25	David Biles, from NPA
Malaysia	27,148	/99	21.8m	125	David Biles, from NPA
Myanmar (Burma)	53,195	31/12/93	45.0m	120	UN enquiry (A/CN.15/1996/16 Add.1)
Philippines}	35,864	31/12/93	65.5m	55	UN enquiry (A/CN.15.1996/16/Add.1)
Philippines}	21,287*	/99	74.5m	30*	David Biles, from NPA
			*(does not include those in municipal and provincial prisons)		
Singapore	11,858*	/99	3.5m	340*	David Biles, from NPA
			*(does not include those in drug rehabilitation centres run by the Singapore Prison Service)		
Thailand	197,214	/99	60.9m	325	David Biles, from NPA
Vietnam	55,000	/98	77.6m	70	David Biles, from NPA
Eastern Asia					
China	1,408,860	/99	1,266.8m	110	David Biles, from NPA
Japan	52,715	/99	126.5m	40	David Biles, from NPA
Korea (Republic of)	69,102	/99	46.5m	150	David Biles, from NPA
Mongolia	6,414	/99	2.6m	245	David Biles, from NPA
Taiwan	c.31,000	/98	20.5m	c.150	Crim. justice expert, Taiwan
Hong Kong (China)	11,215	/99	6.65m	170	David Biles, from NPA
Macau (Portugal)*	778	/99	459,000	170	David Biles, from NPA
			*(Portuguese dependency until 20/12/99 when it became a 'Special Administrative Region' within China)		

(No information) **Western Asia:** Iraq, Oman. **South Central Asia:** Afghanistan, Bhutan. **South Eastern Asia:** Laos. **Eastern Asia:** Korea (Democratic People's Republic of North Korea.)

Table 4 EUROPE

	Prison population total (no. in penal institutions incl. pre-trial detainees)	Date	Estimated national population	Prison population rate (per 100,000 of national population)	Source of prison population total
Northern Europe					
Denmark	3,496	1/9/99	5.3m	65	NPA direct communication
Estonia	4,465	1/12/99	1.45m	310	NPA, C of E steering group
Finland	2,389	31/12/99	5.15m	45	Statistics Finland
Iceland	103	1/9/98	275,000	35	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
Ireland	2,929	12/11/99	3.7m	80	NPA direct communication
Latvia	8,868	20/11/99	2.45m	360	NPA, C of E steering group
Lithuania	14,259	3/10/99	3.7m	385	NPA, C of E steering group
Norway	2,695	30/9/99	4.45m	60	NPA direct communication
Sweden	5,270	30/9/99	8.85m	60	NPA direct communication
United Kingdom	(73,195)	(11/99)	(59.6m)	(125)	Calculated from next three entries
–England & Wales	65,993	30/11/99	52.8m	125	NPA direct communication
–Scotland	6,010	30/11/99	5.1m	120	NPA direct communication
–Northern Ireland	1,192	29/11/99	1.7m	70	NPA direct communication
Faeroe Is. (Denmark)	7	29/9/98	43,000	15	Danish NPA direct communication
Guernsey (UK)	67	30/11/99	61,400	110	NPA direct communication
Jersey (UK)	135	30/11/99	86,500	155	NPA direct communication
Isle of Man (UK)	70	30/11/99	73,000	95	NPA direct communication
Southern Europe					
Albania	2,922	1/9/98	3.35m	85	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
Andorra	20	23/8/99	66,000	30	Tribunal de Corts, Andorra
Bosnia & Herzegovina					
–Federation	836	31/8/99	2.5m	35	NPA direct communication
–Republika Srpska	787	30/4/98	1.3m	60	NPA direct communication
Croatia	2,227	31/12/98	4.6m	50	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
Greece	7,525	1/9/99	10.55m	70	Crim. justice expert, Univ. of Athens
Italy*	51,427	1/9/99	57.6m	90	National statistics bureau
*(by agreement with Italy, persons imprisoned by San Marino and Vatican City are held in Italian prisons)					
Macedonia (F Yug Rep)	1,105	1/9/98	2.0m	55	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
Malta	260	1/9/98	378,000	70	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
Portugal	13,086	1/9/99	10.0m	130	NPA direct communication
Slovenia	980	31/12/99	2.0m	50	NPA direct communication
Spain	44,197	31/12/99	39.4m	110	NPA document
Gibraltar (UK)	29	30/11/99	27,200	105	NPA direct communication
Western Europe					
Austria	6,877	31/8/99	8.2m	85	Statistics Austria
Belgium	8,135	31/12/99	10.2m	80	NPA direct communication
France	53,948	1/9/99	59.0m	90	French Ministry of Justice
Germany	79,666	31/1/99	82.2m	95	German Federal Ministry of Justice
Liechtenstein	24	30/6/99	32,000	75	President of Crim. Court, Liechtenstein
Luxembourg	392	1/9/98	427,000	90	Central Statistical Services, Lux'bourg
Monaco	13	10/98	32,000	40	Information from Pierre Tournier
Netherlands	14,057	31/12/99	15.85m	90	NPA direct communication
Switzerland	5,950	1/9/99	7.1m	85	Swiss Federal Statistical Office
Europe/Asia					
Armenia	7,608	2/98	3.8m	200	C of E report, Armenian prison system
Azerbaijan	24,881	2/7/97	7.7m	325	C of E report, Azerb'jan prison system
Cyprus	247*	1/9/99	650,000*	40	Cypriot Min of Justice and Public Order
*(does not include the internationally unrecognised Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Including TRNC the population of Cyprus is estimated at about 750,000 in 1999, plus about 100,000 Turkish settlers.)					
Georgia	10,158	12/98	5.4m	190	C of E report, Georgian prison system
Russian Federation	1,060,085	31/12/99	145.5m	730	NPA
Turkey	64,907	1/9/98	63.6m	100	C of E Annual Penal Statistics

Table 4 cont. EUROPE

Central and Eastern Europe

Bulgaria	11,773	1/9/98	8.25m	145	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
Belarus	58,879	31/12/97	10.2m	575	United Nations 6th Survey
Czech Republic	23,060	31/12/99	10.3m	225	Inst for Crim&Soc Prevention, Cz.R
Hungary	15,110	31/12/99	10.05m	150	NPA direct communication
Moldova	10,044*	1/1/99	3.65m*	275	NPA direct communication
*(does not include the internationally unrecognised Transdnistria. Including Transdnistria the national population of Moldova is estimated at 4.3 millions in 1998.)					
Poland	56,765	31/12/99	38.65m	145	Publicat. of Inst. of Justice, Warsaw
Romania	49,790	31/12/99	22.45m	220	NPA website
Slovakia	6,628	1/9/98	5.4m	125	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
Ukraine	217,400	12/99	50.7m	430	NPA direct communication

(No information Southern Europe: Yugoslavia.)

Table 5 OCEANIA

	Prison population total (no. in penal institutions incl. pre-trial detainees)	Date	Estimated national population	Prison population rate (per 100,000 of national population)	Source of prison population total
Australia	20,656*	/99	18.7m	110	David Biles from NPA
*(average daily population, 1999)					
Fiji	1,180	/99	806,000	145	David Biles from NPA
Kiribati	91	/95	70,000	130	David Biles from NPA
Marshall Is.	23	/94	52,000	45	United Nations 5th Survey
Micronesia, Fed States of	39	/97	114,000	35	F S Micronesia Stats. Yearbook
New Zealand	5,778	/99	3.8m	150	David Biles from NPA
Papua New Guinea	3,566	/98	4.6m	80	David Biles from NPA
Samoa	176	/98	174,000	100	David Biles from NPA
Solomon Is.	134	/99	430,000	30	David Biles from NPA
Tonga	87	/94	100,000	85	David Biles from NPA
Tuvalu	1	10/92	9,000	45	David Biles from NPA
Vanuatu	46	/99	183,000	25	David Biles from NPA
American Samoa (US)	112	31/12/98	63,000	180	US Bureau of Justice Statistics
Cook Is. (NZ)	45	/95	20,000	225	David Biles from NPA
French Polynesia (France)	280	1/10/98	220,000	125	French Min. of Justice publication
Guam (US)	629	31/12/98	162,000	390	US Bureau of Justice Statistics
New Caledonia (France)	303	1/10/98	197,000	155	French Min. of Justice publication
Northern Mariana Is. (US)	112	31/12/98	70,500	160	US Bureau of Justice Statistics

(No information Nauru, Palau.)

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Roy Walmsley, of the Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate, is involved in technical co-operation projects, mainly on the improvement of prison standards, for the United Nations and the Council of Europe.

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