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World Prison Population List (fifth edition)

Roy Walmsley

The World Prison Population List gives details of the number of prisoners held in 205 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

- Over 9 million people are held in penal institutions throughout the world, mostly as pre-trial detainees (remand prisoners) or having been convicted and sentenced. About half of these are in the United States (2.03m), Russia (0.86m) or China (1.51m plus pre-trial detainees and prisoners in 'administrative detention').
- The United States has the highest prison population rate in the world, some 701 per 100,000 of the national population, followed by Russia (606), Belarus (554), Kazakhstan and the U.S. Virgin Islands (both 522), the Cayman Islands (501), Turkmenistan (489), Belize (459), Bermuda (447), Suriname (437), Dominica (420) and Ukraine (415).
- However, more than three fifths of countries (60.5%) have rates below 150 per 100,000. (The United Kingdom's rate of 141 per 100,000 of the national population places it above the mid-point in the World List; it is the highest among countries of the European Union.)
- 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 48 whereas for southern African countries it is 327;
 - in the Americas the median rate for south American countries is 126 whereas for Caribbean countries it is 297;
 - in Asia the median rate for south central Asian countries (mainly the Indian sub-continent) is 59 whereas for (ex-Soviet) central Asian countries it is 390;
 - in Europe the median rate for southern European countries is 76.5 whereas for central and eastern European countries it is 200;
 - in Oceania (including Australia and New Zealand) the median rate is 111.5.
- Prison populations are growing in many parts of the world. Updated information on countries included in previous editions of the World Prison Population List shows that prison populations have risen in 71% of these countries (in 61% of countries in Africa, 71% in the Americas, 90% in Asia, 66% in Europe and 69% in Oceania).

This fifth edition of the World Prison Population List has been compiled, like previous editions, 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 late 1999 and November 2003. Since prison population rates (per 100,000 of the national population) are based on estimates of the

national population they should not be regarded as precise. 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.

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SOURCESC of E
ILANUD
NPACouncil of Europe
UN Latin American Institute
National prison administrationPRI
UNAFEIPenal Reform International
UN Asia and Far East Institute**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	34,243	31/12/01	31.1m	110	NPA
Egypt	c.80,000	/98	66.0m	c.121	Crim. justice expert, Egypt
Libya	c.6,750	/98	5.3m	c.127	Crim. justice expert, Libya
Morocco	54,207	31/12/02	30.8m	176	PRI, from NPA
Sudan	c.12,000	3/03	33.2m	c.36	NPA
Tunisia	23,165	31/12/96	9.15m	252	United Nations 5th Survey
Western Africa					
Benin	4,961	30/9/00	6.1m	81	NPA
Burkina Faso	2,800	9/02	12.2m	23	NPA
Cape Verde	755	12/99	423,000	178	NPA
Côte d'Ivoire	10,355	8/3/02	16.6m	62	NPA
Gambia	450	9/02	1.4m	32	NPA
Ghana	11,624	mid-02	20.2m	58	NPA
Guinea (Conakry)	3,070	mid-02	8.4m	37	NPA
Mali	4,040	2/02	11.9m	34	NPA
Mauritania	1,354	mid-02	2.8m	48	NPA
Niger	c.6,000	mid-02	11.6m	c.52	NPA
Nigeria	39,368	3/02	119.2m	33	NPA
Senegal	5,360	9/02	9.9m	54	NPA
Togo	2,043	6/11/98	4.4m	46	NPA
Central Africa					
Angola	4,975	mid-02	13.9m	36	NPA
Cameroon	20,000	mid-02	15.5m	129	NPA
Central African Rep.	4,168	/01	3.8m	110	NPA
Chad	3,883	mid-02	8.4m	46	NPA
Congo (Brazzaville)	918	/93	2.4m	38	PRI, from NPA
Sao Tome e Principe	130	4/02	165,000	79	NPA
Eastern Africa					
Burundi	8,647	mid-02	6.7m	129	NPA
Comoros	c.200	/98	658,000	c.30	Crim. justice expert, Comoros
Djibouti	384	16/12/99	629,000	61	Min. of Foreign Affairs, Djibouti
Kenya	35,278	mid-02	31.9m	111	NPA
Madagascar	20,109	31/7/99	15.5m	130	NPA
Malawi	8,566	20/11/03	12.2m	70	NPA
Mauritius	2,565	4/03	1.2m	214	NPA
Mozambique	8,812	31/12/99	17.6m	50	UNDP report
Rwanda	112,000 *	mid-02	8.1m	- *	NPA
* (Prison population total includes 103,134 held on suspicion of participation in genocide.)					
Seychelles	157	27/10/99	76,000	207	NPA
Tanzania	44,063	10/6/02	36.8m	120	NPA
Uganda	c.21,900	5/02	24.7m	c.89	NPA (15,902)+c.6,000 in local prisons
Zambia	13,173	26/6/02	10.9m	121	NPA
Zimbabwe	c.21,000	mid-02	13.1m	c.160	NPA
Mayotte (France)	163	1/4/03	171,000	95	French Ministry of Justice
Réunion (France)	1,071	1/4/03	750,000	143	French Ministry of Justice
Southern Africa					
Botswana	5,890	17/11/03	1.8m	327	NPA
Lesotho	3,000	mid-02	2.1m	143	NPA
Namibia	4,814	31/12/01	1.8m	267	NPA
South Africa	180,952	31/10/03	45.0m	402	NPA
Swaziland	3,400	8/02	948,000	359	NPA
(No information)					Western Africa: Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Sierra Leone. Central Africa: 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	36,024 *	00-01	31.08m	116	Solicitor General, Canada
	* (Average daily population, including young offenders, 1/4/2000-31/3/2001)				
USA	2,033,331	31/12/02	290.0m	701	US Bureau of Justice Statistics
Bermuda (UK)	286	29/12/99	64,000	447	NPA
Greenland (Denmark)	74	/00	56,300	131	Danish NPA
Central America					
Belize	1,097	30/6/99	239,000	459	ILANUD, from NPA
Costa Rica	8,526	6/99	3.7m	229	ILANUD, from NPA
El Salvador	10,278	8/7/02	6.5m	158	ILANUD, from NPA
Guatemala	8,460	9/99	11.89m	71	U.S. government report
Honduras	11,502	6/02	6.7m	172	ILANUD, from NPA
Mexico	154,765	30/6/00	98.9m	156	United Nations 7th Survey
Nicaragua	7,198	30/6/99	5.02m	143	ILANUD, from NPA and others
Panama	10,630	3/03	3.0m	354	Criminal justice expert, Panama
Caribbean					
Antigua & Barbuda	186	2/98	67,000	278	NPA
Bahamas	1,280	10/02	312,000	410	NPA
Barbados	992	11/11/03	270,000	367	NPA
Cuba	c.33,000	/97	11.1m	c.297	Nils Christie, Oslo University
Dominica	298	30/6/99	71,000	420	ILANUD, from NPA
Dominican Republic	16,789	18/6/03	8.7m	193	NPA
Grenada	297	20/6/02	89,200	333	NPA
Haiti	4,152	30/6/99	7.8m	53	ILANUD, from NPA and others
Jamaica	4,744	18/11/03	2.7m	176	NPA
St Kitts & Nevis	135	30/6/99	40,000	338	ILANUD, from NPA
St Lucia	365	30/6/99	150,000	243	ILANUD, from NPA
St Vincent & Grenadines	302	17/10/01	112,000	270	NPA
Trinidad & Tobago	4,794	30/6/99	1.365m	351	ILANUD, from NPA
Aruba (Netherlands)	223	11/98	94,000	237	Dutch NPA
Cayman Islands (UK)	210	19/11/03	41,900	501	NPA
Guadeloupe (France)	695	1/4/03	438,000	159	French Ministry of Justice
Martinique (France)	643	1/4/03	392,000	164	French Ministry of Justice
Neth. Antilles (Netherlands)	780	11/98	214,000	364	Dutch NPA
Puerto Rico (US)	14,725	31/12/02	3.9m	378	US Bureau of Justice Statistics
Virgin Islands (UK)	43	19/8/99	20,000	215	Prison reform coordinator, UK Overseas Territories
Virgin Islands (US)	647	31/12/02	124,000	522	US Bureau of Justice Statistics
South America					
Argentina	38,604	30/6/99	36.23m	107	ILANUD, from NPA and others
Bolivia	8,315	6/99	8.14m	102	ILANUD, from NPA and others
Brazil	284,989	6/03	178.5m	160	NPA
Chile	33,098	30/6/02	15.6m	212	ILANUD, from NPA
Colombia	54,034	31/5/01	42.8m	126	ILANUD, from NPA
Ecuador	7,716	6/02	13.1m	59	ILANUD, from NPA
Guyana	1,507	6/7/01	861,000	175	NPA
Paraguay	4,088	/99	5.48m	75	ILANUD, from NPA
Peru	27,493	30/6/02	26.5m	104	ILANUD, from NPA
Suriname	1,933	30/6/99	442,000	437	ILANUD, from NPA and others
Uruguay	7,100	9/03	3.4m	209	Criminal justice expert, Uruguay
Venezuela	19,554	mid-03	25.7m	76	NPA
French Guiana/ Guyane (France)	590	1/4/03	182,000	324	French Ministry of Justice

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	911	31/12/97	589,000	155	United Nations 6th Survey
Israel	10,164	1/1/02	6.25m	163	NPA
Jordan	5,448	2/02	5.15m	106	PRI
Kuwait	1,735	/97	1.7m	102	Conference paper, January 1998
Lebanon	6,382	10/3/03	3.7m	172	PRI
Oman	2,020	/00	2.5m	81	United Nations 7th Survey
Qatar	570	/00	599,000	95	United Nations 7th Survey
Saudi Arabia	23,720	/00	21.6m	110	United Nations 7th Survey
Syria	14,000	/97	15.0m	93	Conference paper, January 1998
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	83 *	PRI Newsletter 33, 1998
			* (government managed prisons only)		
Central Asia					
Kazakhstan	84,000	30/4/01	16.1m	522	Ministry of Justice, Kazakhstan
Kyrgyzstan	19,500	3/02	5.0m	390	NPA
Tajikistan	c.10,000	9/03	6.3m	c.159	Criminal justice expert, Tajikistan
Turkmenistan	c.22,000	10/00	4.5m	c.489	BBC, from Interfax
Uzbekistan	48,000	8/03	26.1m	184	NPA
South Central Asia					
Bangladesh	64,866	/02	143.4m	45	PRI
India	304,893	30/6/02	1,041.1m	29	National Human Rights Commission
Iran	163,526	4/02	72.2m	226	NPA
Maldives Is.	1,098 *	/96	265,000	414 *	Ministry of Justice, Maldives Islands
			* (sentenced prisoners only)		
Nepal	7,132	/02	24.2m	29	PRI
Pakistan	87,000	/02	148.7m	59	PRI
Sri Lanka	17,485	mid-02	19.3m	91	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
South Eastern Asia					
Brunei Darussalam	454	mid-02	341,000	133	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Cambodia	6,128	mid-02	13.8m	44	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Indonesia	62,886	mid-01	214.8m	29	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Malaysia	28,804	mid-02	23.0m	125	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Myanmar (Burma)	53,195	31/12/93	45.0m	118	UN enquiry (A/CN.15/1996/16/Add.1)
Philippines	70,383	/99	74.5m	94	UNAFEI, from crim. just. expert, Phil's
Singapore	16,310 *	mid-02	4.2m	388 *	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
			* (does not include those in drug rehabilitation centres run by the Singapore Prison Service)		
Thailand	258,076	mid-02	64.3m	401	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Vietnam	55,000	mid-98	77.6m	71	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Eastern Asia					
China	1,512,194 *	mid-02	1,294.4m	117 *	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
			* (sentenced prisoners only)		
Japan	67,255	mid-02	127.5m	53	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Korea (Republic of)	60,721	31/10/02	47.4m	128	NPA
Mongolia	7,256 *	mid-02	2.6m	279 *	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
			* (sentenced prisoners only)		
Taiwan	56,225	11/01	22.5m	250	Ministry of Justice
Hong Kong (China)	12,900	30/9/03	7.0m	184	NPA
Macau (China)	910	mid-02	462,000	197	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference

(No information Western Asia: Iraq. South Central Asia: Afghanistan, Bhutan.

South Eastern Asia: Laos, Timor-Leste (East Timor).

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	3,439	1/9/02	5.38m	64	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
Estonia	4,874	5/03	1.35m	361	NPA
Finland	3,617	1/12/02	5.2m	70	NPA
Iceland	107	1/9/02	289,000	37	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
Ireland	3,366	10/9/03	3.97m	85	NPA
Latvia	8,156	13/6/03	2.32m	352	NPA
Lithuania	9,217	18/8/03	3.46m	266	NPA
Norway	2,662	1/9/02	4.54m	59	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
Sweden	6,506	1/10/02	8.93m	73	NPA
United Kingdom					
– England & Wales	74,452	21/11/03	52.7m	141	NPA
– Northern Ireland	1,220	20/11/03	1.75m	70	NPA
– Scotland	6,569	21/11/03	5.1m	129	NPA
Faeroe Is. (Denmark)	9	/00	43,000	21	Danish NPA
Guernsey (UK)	83	19/11/03	64,800	128	NPA
Isle of Man (UK)	68	20/11/03	74,300	92	NPA
Jersey (UK)	170	19/11/03	90,200	188	NPA
Southern Europe					
Albania	3,053	11/01	3.4m	90	NPA
Andorra	55	1/9/02	66,400	83	NPA
Bosnia & Herzegovina					
– Federation	1,364	30/4/03	2.6m	53	Ministry of Justice, Federation of B+H
– Republika Srpska	919	30/4/03	1.4m	66	Ministry of Justice, B+H Rep. Srpska
Croatia	2,584	31/12/01	4.38m	59	NPA
Greece	8,500	1/12/02	10.58m	80	NPA
Italy*	56,574	30/9/02	56.3m	100	NPA
* (by agreement with Italy, persons imprisoned by San Marino and Vatican City are held in Italian prisons.)					
Macedonia (F Yug Rep)	1,248	1/9/02	2.04m	61	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
Malta	283	1/9/02	386,000	73	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
Portugal	14,300	1/5/03	10.43m	137	NPA
Serbia & Montenegro					
– Serbia	5,566	1/6/01	8.1m	69	NPA
– Montenegro	710	25/4/02	680,000	104	NPA
– Kosovo	965	mid-02	1.8m	54	European Union
Slovenia	1,120	1/9/02	1.99m	56	NPA
Spain	56,140	14/11/03	40.65m	138	NPA
Gibraltar (UK)	31	25/11/03	27,800	112	NPA
Western Europe					
Austria	8,114	10/11/03	8.09m	100	NPA
Belgium	9,253	1/9/02	10.34m	89	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
France	55,382 *	1/4/03	59.70m *	93	French Ministry of Justice
* (metropolitan France, excluding departments and territories in Africa, the Americas and Oceania)					
Germany	81,176	31/3/03	82.56m	98	Federal Ministry of Justice
Liechtenstein*	17	1/9/02	34,000	50	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
* (by agreement with Austria, some persons imprisoned by Liechtenstein are held in Austrian prisons.)					
Luxembourg	380	1/9/02	447,000	85	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
Monaco*	13	10/98	33,000	39	Information from Pierre Tournier
* (by agreement with France, some persons imprisoned by Monaco are held in French prisons.)					
Netherlands	16,239	1/9/02	16.16m	100	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
Switzerland	4,987	4/9/02	7.29m	68	Swiss Federal Statistical Office

Table 4 cont. EUROPE**Europe/Asia**

Armenia	4,343	1/1/03	3.21m	135	NPA
Azerbaijan	17,795	31/1/03	8.2m	217	NPA
Cyprus	345 *	1/9/02	699,000 *	49	C of E Annual Penal Statistics

* (does not include the internationally unrecognised Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Including TRNC the population of Cyprus is estimated at about 799,000 in September 2002, plus about 100,000 Turkish settlers.)

Georgia	7,343	1/9/02	3.7m	198	NPA
Russian Federation	864,590	1/8/03	142.7m	606	NPA
Turkey	64,051	1/9/03	70.0m	92	NPA

Central and Eastern Europe

Belarus	55,156	31/12/01	9.95m	554	NPA
Bulgaria	10,500	9/03	7.82m	134	NPA
Czech Republic	17,360	31/10/03	10.20m	170	NPA
Hungary	16,700	20/11/03	10.11m	165	NPA
Moldova	10,903 *	1/1/03	3.62m *	301	NPA

* (does not include the internationally unrecognised Transdniestria. Including Transdniestria the national population of Moldova is estimated at 4.3 millions.)

Poland	83,113	31/3/03	38.21m	218	NPA
Romania	43,489	11/11/03	21.72m	200	NPA
Slovakia	8,829	1/9/03	5.38m	164	NPA
Ukraine	198,858	1/4/03	47.89m	415	NPA

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	22,492	30/6/02	19.5m	115	Australian Bureau of Statistics
Fiji	897	mid-02	832,000	108	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Kiribati	64	mid-02	96,000	67	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Marshall Is.	23	/94	52,000	44	United Nations 5th Survey
Micronesia, Fed States of	39	/97	114,000	34	F S Micronesia Statistical Yearbook
New Zealand	5,881	mid-02	3.8m	155	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Papua New Guinea	3,302	mid-02	5.0m	66	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Samoa	281	12/11/03	178,000	158	NPA
Solomon Is.	134	mid-99	430,000	31	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Tonga	110	mid-02	104,000	106	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Tuvalu	6	mid-00	10,800	56	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Vanuatu	96	mid-02	207,000	46	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
American Samoa (US)	169	31/12/02	69,500	243	US Bureau of Justice Statistics
Cook Is. (NZ)	24	mid-02	20,000	120	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
French Polynesia (France)	291	1/4/03	243,000	120	French Ministry of Justice
Guam (US)	542	31/12/02	162,300	334	US Bureau of Justice Statistics
New Caledonia (France)	315	1/4/03	227,000	139	French Ministry of Justice
Northern Mariana Is. (US)	123	31/12/02	78,600	156	US Bureau of Justice Statistics
(No information					
Nauru, Palau.)					

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The List has a number of weaknesses. It lacks information on 17 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.

Roy Walmsley is an honorary consultant to the United Nations and an Associate of the International Centre for Prison Studies (King's College, London). At ICPS he is director of World Prison Brief Online, a comprehensive database of information on the prison systems of the world, which is available free of charge at www.prisonstudies.org