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## World Prison Population List (fourth edition)

Roy Walmsley

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

- More than 8.75 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 (1.96m), Russia (0.92m) or China (1.43m plus pre-trial detainees and prisoners in 'administrative detention').
- The United States has the highest prison population rate in the world, some 686 per 100,000 of the national population, followed by the Cayman Islands (664), Russia (638), Belarus (554), Kazakhstan (522), Turkmenistan (489), Belize (459), Bahamas (447), Suriname (437) and Dominica (420).
- However, more than three-fifths of countries (62.5%) have rates below 150 per 100,000. (The United Kingdom's rate of 139 per 100,000 of the national population places it above the mid-point in the World List; it is now 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 50 whereas for southern African countries it is 362;
  - in the Americas the median rate for south American countries is 107 whereas for Caribbean countries it is 297;
  - in Asia the median rate for south central Asian countries (mainly the Indian sub-continent) is 54 whereas for (ex-Soviet) central Asian countries it is 426;
  - in Europe the median rate for southern European countries is 69 whereas for central and eastern European countries it is 213;
  - in Oceania (including Australia and New Zealand) the median rate is 110.
- Prison populations are growing in many parts of the world. Updated information on countries included in the previous editions of the World Prison Population List shows that prison populations have risen in 68% of these countries (in 61% of countries in Africa, 68% in the Americas, 87% in Asia, 65% in Europe and 50% in Oceania).

This fourth 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 1999 and October 2002. 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.

*Continued on page 6*

**SOURCES**

C of E  
ILANUD  
NPA

Council of Europe  
UN Latin American Institute  
National prison administration

PRI  
UNAFEI

Penal 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
<b>Northern Africa</b>					
Algeria	34,243	31/12/01	30.8m	111	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	54,288	/00	28.4m	191	NPA
Sudan	32,000	/97	27.9m	115	Conference paper, January 1998
Tunisia	23,165	31/12/96	9.15m	253	United Nations 5th Survey
<b>Western Africa</b>					
Benin	4,961	30/9/00	6.1m	81	NPA
Burkina Faso	2,800	9/02	11.9m	24	NPA
Cape Verde	775	30/6/99	418,000	185	Crim. justice expert, Cape Verde
Côte d'Ivoire	10,355	8/3/02	16.3m	64	NPA
Gambia	450	9/02	1.34m	34	NPA
Ghana	11,624	mid-02	19.7m	59	NPA
Guinea (Conakry)	3,070	mid-02	8.3m	37	NPA
Mali	4,040	2/02	11.7m	35	NPA
Mauritania	1,354	mid-02	2.7m	50	NPA
Niger	c.6,000	mid-02	11.2m	c.54	NPA
Nigeria	39,368	3/02	116.9m	34	NPA
Senegal	5,360	9/02	9.7m	55	NPA
Togo	2,043	6/11/98	4.4m	46	NPA
<b>Central Africa</b>					
Angola	4,975	mid-02	13.5m	37	NPA
Cameroon	20,000	mid-02	15.2m	132	NPA
Central African Rep.	4,168	/01	3.8m	110	NPA
Chad	3,883	mid-02	8.1m	48	NPA
Congo (Brazzaville)	918	/93	2.4m	38	PRI, from NPA
Sao Tome e Principe	130	4/02	165,000	79	NPA
<b>Eastern Africa</b>					
Burundi	8,647	mid-02	6.5m	133	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	31.3m	113	NPA
Madagascar	20,109	31/7/99	15.5m	130	NPA
Malawi	8,769	mid-02	11.6m	76	NPA
Mauritius	2,438	mid-02	1.2m	203	NPA
Mozambique	8,812	31/12/99	17.6m	50	UN Development Programme report
Rwanda	112,000 *	mid-02	7.9m	- *	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	36.0m	122	NPA
Uganda	c.21,900	5/02	24.0m	c.91	NPA (15,902)+c.6,000 in local prisons
Zambia	13,173	26/6/02	10.6m	124	NPA
Zimbabwe	c.21,000	mid-02	12.9m	c.163	NPA
Mayotte (France)	123	1/9/98	131,300	94	French Ministry of Justice
Réunion (France)	1,038	1/5/02	736,000	141	French Ministry of Justice
<b>Southern Africa</b>					
Botswana	6,102	27/6/02	1.6m	381	NPA
Lesotho	3,000	mid-02	2.1m	143	NPA
Namibia	4,814	31/12/01	1.8m	267	NPA
South Africa	176,893	14/6/02	43.8m	404	NPA
Swaziland	3,400	8/02	938,000	362	NPA
(No information)					<b>Western Africa:</b> Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Sierra Leone. <b>Central Africa:</b> Congo (Kinshasa), Equatorial Guinea, Gabon. <b>Eastern Africa:</b> 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
<b>North America</b>					
Canada	31,624	mid-01	31.0m	102	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
USA	1,962,220	31/12/01	286.0m	686	US Bureau of Justice Statistics
Bermuda (UK)	286	29/12/99	64,000	447	NPA
Greenland (Denmark)	74	/00	56,300	131	Danish NPA
<b>Central America</b>					
Belize	1,097	30/6/99	239,000	459	ILANUD, from NPA
Costa Rica	8,526	6/99	3.72m	229	ILANUD, from NPA
El Salvador	6,914	31/12/99	6.35m	109	U.S. government report
Guatemala	8,460	9/99	11.89m	71	U.S. government report
Honduras	10,869	6/99	6.32m	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	8,290	31/12/00	2.9m	286	United Nations 7th Survey
<b>Caribbean</b>					
Antigua & Barbuda	186	2/98	67,000	278	NPA
Bahamas	1,280	10/02	308,000	416	NPA
Barbados	850	22/2/02	268,000	317	Criminal justice expert, Barbados
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	15,340	2/01	8.6m	178	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	4,288	30/6/99	2.5m	170	ILANUD, from NPA and others
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)	243	9/10/02	36,600	664	NPA
Guadeloupe (France)	599	1/5/02	432,000	139	French Ministry of Justice
Martinique (France)	666	1/5/02	386,000	173	French Ministry of Justice
Neth. Antilles (Netherlands)	780	11/98	214,000	364	Dutch NPA
Puerto Rico (US)	15,105	15/5/02	4.1m	368	NPA
Virgin Islands (UK)	43	19/8/99	20,000	215	Prison reform coordinator, UK Overseas Territories
Virgin Islands (US)	494	31/12/01	123,000	402	US Bureau of Justice Statistics
<b>South America</b>					
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	233,859	12/01	175.0m	133	NPA
Chile	31,600	1/02	15.4m	205	NPA
Colombia	57,068	31/5/99	37.28m	153	ILANUD, from NPA and others
Ecuador	8,520	30/6/99	12.41m	69	ILANUD, from NPA
Guyana	1,507	6/7/01	861,000	175	NPA
Paraguay	4,088	/99	5.48m	75	ILANUD, from NPA
Peru	27,452	30/6/99	25.62m	107	ILANUD, from NPA
Suriname	1,933	30/6/99	442,000	437	ILANUD, from NPA and others
Uruguay	4,012	28/11/99	3.26m	123	ILANUD, from NPA and others
Venezuela	15,107	/00	24.2m	62	United Nations 7th Survey
French Guiana/ Guyane (France)	532	1/5/02	194,000	274	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
<b>Western Asia</b>					
Bahrain	911	31/12/97	589,000	155	United Nations 6th Survey
Israel	9,421	1/00	6.15m	153	NPA
Jordan	5,448	2/02	5.1m	107	PRI
Kuwait	1,735	/97	1.7m	102	Conference paper, January 1998
Lebanon	8,285	1/02	3.6m	230	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)		
<b>Central Asia</b>					
Kazakhstan	84,000	30/4/01	16.1m	522	Ministry of Justice, Kazakhstan
Kyrgyzstan	19,500	3/02	5.0m	390	NPA
Tajikistan	c.11,000	5/01	6.3m	c.175	BBC, from Uzbek Radio, Tashkent
Turkmenistan	c.22,000	10/00	4.5m	c.489	BBC, from Interfax
Uzbekistan	65,000	3/02	25.3m	257	NPA
<b>South Central Asia</b>					
Bangladesh	c.70,000	3/01	129.2m	c.54	Criminal justice expert, Bangladesh
India	281,380	/99	998.1m	28	National Crime Records Bureau
Iran	163,526	4/02	71.4m	229	NPA
Maldives Is.	1,098 *	/96	265,000	414 *	Ministry of Justice, Maldives Islands
			*(sentenced prisoners only)		
Nepal	5,878	/99	23.4m	25	UNAFEI, from crim. just. expert, Nepal
Pakistan	78,938	31/12/99	154.4m	51	UNAFEI, from crim. just. expert, Pak'n
Sri Lanka	19,085	mid-01	19.1m	100	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
<b>South Eastern Asia</b>					
Brunei Darussalam	401	mid-01	335,000	120	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Cambodia	6,179	mid-01	13.4m	46	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Indonesia	62,886	mid-01	214.8m	29	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Malaysia	27,299	mid-01	22.6m	121	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	14,704 *	mid-01	4.1m	359 *	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
			*(does not include those in drug rehabilitation centres run by the Singapore Prison Service)		
Thailand	217,697	mid-01	63.6m	342	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Vietnam	55,000	mid-98	77.6m	71	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
<b>Eastern Asia</b>					
China	1,428,126 *	mid-01	1,285.0m	111 *	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
			*(sentenced prisoners only)		
Japan	61,242	mid-01	127.3m	48	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Korea (Republic of)	62,732	mid-01	47.1m	133	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Mongolia	6,656 *	mid-01	2.6m	256 *	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
			*(sentenced prisoners only)		
Taiwan	56,225	11/01	22.5m	250	Ministry of Justice
Hong Kong (China)	12,238	30/9/01	7.0m	175	NPA
Macau (China)	855	mid-01	440,000	194	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
<b>Northern Europe</b>					
Denmark	3,150	1/9/01	5.36m	59	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
Estonia	4,723	1/11/01	1.4m	337	Ministry of Justice, Estonia
Finland	3,040	1/9/01	5.19m	59	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
Iceland	110	1/9/01	286,000	38	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
Ireland	3,378	10/4/02	3.92m	86	NPA
Latvia	8,486	14/10/02	2.35m	361	NPA
Lithuania	11,216	1/11/01	3.7m	303	NPA, C of E steering group
Norway	2,666	1/9/01	4.5m	59	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
Sweden	6,089	1/10/01	8.9m	68	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
United Kingdom					
– England & Wales	72,669	25/10/02	52.43m	139	NPA
– Northern Ireland	1,058	28/10/02	1.72m	62	NPA
– Scotland	6,417	25/10/02	5.08m	126	NPA
Faeroe Is. (Denmark)	9	/00	43,000	21	Danish NPA
Guernsey (UK)	88	9/10/02	60,100	146	NPA
Jersey (UK)	136	14/10/02	87,200	156	NPA
Isle of Man (UK)	92	25/10/02	76,300	121	NPA
<b>Southern Europe</b>					
Albania	3,053	11/01	3.4m	90	NPA
Andorra	48	1/9/01	66,300	72	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
Bosnia & Herzegovina					
– Federation	1,372	31/7/02	2.5m	55	Ministry of Justice, Federation of B+H
– Republika Srpska	876	31/5/02	1.3m	67	Ministry of Justice, B+H Rep. Srpska
Croatia	2,584	31/12/01	4.38m	59	NPA
Greece	8,343	1/9/01	10.6m	79	Ministry of Justice, Greece
Italy*	55,136	1/9/01	57.95m	95	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
* (by agreement with Italy, persons imprisoned by San Marino and Vatican City are held in Italian prisons.)					
Macedonia (F Yug Rep)	1,413	1/9/01	2.02m	70	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
Malta	257	1/9/01	384,000	67	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
Portugal	13,384	15/2/02	10.25m	131	NPA
Slovenia	1,120	1/9/02	2.0m	56	NPA
Spain	50,656	31/5/02	40.2m	126	NPA
Yugoslavia – Serbia					
– Montenegro	710	25/4/02	680,000	104	NPA
– Kosovo	521	5/01	1.9m	27	Criminal justice expert, Kosovo
Gibraltar (UK)	19	13/9/01	30,800	62	NPA
<b>Western Europe</b>					
Austria	6,915	1/9/01	8.13m	85	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
Belgium	8,764	1/9/01	10.28m	85	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
France	50,714 *	1/5/02	59.4m *	85	French Ministry of Justice
* (metropolitan France, excluding departments and territories in Africa, the Americas and Oceania)					
Germany	78,707	30/11/00	82.19m	96	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
Liechtenstein	24	30/6/99	32,000	75	President of Crim. Court, Liechtenstein
Luxembourg	357	1/9/01	444,000	80	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
Monaco	13	10/98	33,000	39	Information from Pierre Tournier
Netherlands	14,968	1/9/01	16.05m	93	NPA
Switzerland	4,985	4/9/02	7.23m	69	Swiss Federal Statistical Office
<b>Europe/Asia</b>					
Armenia	7,428	1/1/01	3.5m	212	PRI Newsletter 44, 2001
Azerbaijan	23,504	31/12/00	8.1m	290	United Nations 7th Survey
Cyprus *	369 *	1/9/01	661,000 *	56	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 760,000 in 2001, plus about 100,000 Turkish settlers.)					
Georgia	7,688	1/1/02	3.9m	196	NPA
Russian Federation	919,330	1/9/02	144.0m	638	NPA
Turkey	61,336	1/9/01	66.0m	93	C of E Annual Penal Statistics

**Table 4 cont. EUROPE**

## Central and Eastern Europe

Belarus	56,000	5/01	10.1m	554	Nils Christie, from NPA
Bulgaria	9,283	1/9/01	8.13m	114	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
Czech Republic	19,320	31/12/01	10.25m	188	NPA
Hungary	17,890	9/5/02	10.0m	179	NPA
Moldova	10,633*	1/1/02	3.7m*	287	NPA
*(does not include the internationally unrecognised Transdnistria. Including Transdnistria the national population of Moldova is estimated at 4.3 millions.)					
Poland	82,173	24/4/02	38.63m	213	NPA
Romania	51,528	1/6/02	22.4m	230	NPA
Slovakia	7,509	1/9/01	5.4m	139	C of E Annual Penal Statistics
Ukraine	198,885	1/9/01	49.0m	406	C of E Annual Penal Statistics

**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	22,458	30/6/01	19.3m	116	Australian Bureau of Statistics
Fiji	1,102	mid-01	823,000	134	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Kiribati	63	mid-01	85,000	74	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	5,980	29/6/01	3.8m	157	NPA
Papua New Guinea	3,296	mid-01	4.9m	67	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Samoa	176	mid-98	174,000	101	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Solomon Is.	134	mid-99	430,000	31	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Tonga	113	6/02	104,000	109	David Biles, report on prison system
Tuvalu	6	mid-00	10,800	56	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
Vanuatu	46	mid-99	183,000	25	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
American Samoa (US)	155	31/12/01	67,000	231	US Bureau of Justice Statistics
Cook Is. (NZ)	33	mid-01	20,000	165	NPA, Asia-Pacific annual conference
French Polynesia (France)	265	1/5/02	239,000	111	French Ministry of Justice
Guam (US)	585	31/12/01	157,600	371	US Bureau of Justice Statistics
New Caledonia (France)	299	1/5/02	215,000	139	French Ministry of Justice
Northern Mariana Is. (US)	102	31/12/01	74,600	137	US Bureau of Justice Statistics
(No information Nauru, Palau.)					

Continued from page 1.

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 a consultant to HEUNI (the European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control, affiliated to the United Nations) and an Associate of the International Centre for Prison Studies (King's College London). At ICPS he is research 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](http://www.prisonstudies.org)