



## Data UNODC - Metadata Information



### Prisons and Prisoners

The tables on access and functioning of justice include national figures on persons suspected/arrested/cautioned, persons prosecuted, and persons convicted for all crimes and for selected crimes. They also include data on persons brought before criminal court by type of legal representation. National data are submitted by Member States to UNODC through the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems (UN-CTS) or other means.

#### Dataset characteristics

Access link: <https://dataunodc.un.org/dp-prisons-persons-held>

Last update: 15/05/2025

Base period: Calendar Year

Data source(s): National data on offences and victims collected through the UN-CTS, Population data from United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. Please see below for National data collection sources.

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#### Statistical concepts and definitions

The UN-CTS is the source of the definitions for the following variables disseminated in these tables.

##### *Prisons and other types of facilities*

**Persons, Penal Institutions or Correctional Institutions:** All institutions, under the authority of the prison administration, where persons are deprived of their liberty. The institutions may include, but are not limited to, penal, correctional and psychiatric facilities and may be either publicly or privately financed. Community-based correctional facilities that are not detention facilities and centres for the detention of foreign citizens held pending investigation into their immigration status, or for the detention of foreign citizens without a legal right to stay should be excluded.

**Other types of supervision:** Sanctions and measures which maintain convicted offenders in the community and involve some restrictions on their liberty through the imposition of conditions and/or obligations. The term designates any sanction imposed by a judicial or administrative authority as a way of enforcing a sentence of imprisonment outside a prison establishment.

##### *Persons held in prisons, penal institutions or correctional institutions*

**Persons held:** Persons held in Prisons, Penal Institutions or Correctional Institutions on a specified day and should exclude non-criminal prisoners held for administrative purposes, for example, persons held pending investigation into their immigration status or foreign citizens without a legal right to stay.

**Persons held sentenced:** Persons held in prisons, penal institutions or correctional institutions after a first instance decision or a final decision on their case has been made by a competent authority. This includes sentenced prisoners with a final decision and persons

held who are awaiting the outcome of an appeal in respect of verdict or sentence or who are within the statutory limits for appealing and persons held who have been convicted but who have not received a sentence yet. Persons held who have received a custodial sentence for one crime but are still under trial and unsentenced for another crime should be counted as sentenced persons held.

Persons held unsentenced: Persons held in prisons, penal institutions or correctional institutions who are untried, pre-trial or awaiting a first instance decision on their case from a competent authority regarding their conviction or acquittal. Persons held before and during the trial should be included. Sentenced persons held awaiting the outcome of an appeal in respect of verdict or sentence or who are within the statutory limits for appealing their sentence should be excluded

Persons entering prisons: All persons entering prisons, penal institutions or correctional institutions during the course of the year. This includes persons entering pre-sentence detention and persons entering prisons after a sentence was pronounced by a competent authority, as well as entries that occurred after the revocation, suspension or annulment of a conditional release or probation and entries that occurred due to transfers from a foreign country. Entry following a period of authorised absence or temporary prison leave should be excluded.

#### *Persons held for selected crimes*

The [International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes \(ICCS\)](#) is the source of the definitions for these categories. The classification includes more information on what is included and excluded for each of the acts defined below:

Bribery (ICCS 07031): Promising, offering, giving, soliciting, or accepting an undue advantage to or from a public official or a person who directs or works in a private sector entity, directly or indirectly, in order that the person act or refrain from acting in the exercise of his or her official duties.

Drug possession (ICCS 06011): Unlawful possession, purchase, use, cultivation or production of controlled drugs for personal consumption.

Drug trafficking (ICCS 06012): Unlawful offering, offering for sale, distribution, sale, delivery, brokerage, dispatch, dispatch in transit, transport, importation, exportation, cultivation, production, manufacture, extraction or preparation of controlled drugs or precursors not in connection with the use or possession of drugs for personal consumption.

Intentional homicide (ICCS 0101): Unlawful death inflicted upon a person with the intent to cause death or serious injury.

Rape (ICCS 03011): Sexual penetration without valid consent or with consent as a result of intimidation, force, fraud, coercion, threat, deception, use of drugs or alcohol, abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability, or the giving or receiving of benefits.

#### *Mortality in prison*

Deaths due to external causes: Death caused by environmental events or by circumstances suggestive of environmental causes, including death due to intentional injury, such as homicide or suicide, and death caused by unintentional injury in an accidental manner. Deaths due to acute alcohol or drugs intoxication should be included. Persons sentenced to death by a competent authority and who were executed on the basis of a legal ruling while in prison should be excluded.

Deaths due to natural causes: Death by natural causes that are primarily attributable to an illness or an internal malfunction of the body not directly influenced by external forces, for example death from age-associated diseases, heart attacks or complications from virus infections.

## Indicator definitions, statistical and measurement units

**Persons held:** The counting unit is the individual person. Data provided on persons held in prisons and held under other types of supervision reflect the total number (the “stock”) of persons held on a specific cut-off date, typically 31 December of the reference year.

**Persons entering prison:** The counting unit is the individual person. Each person is counted once. These data reflect the total number of new prisoners entering prison within a specific year (the “flow”).

Male and female rates are calculated based on the male or female populations while the total rate is based on the total population (both sexes).

$$Rate_{total} = 100,000 * \frac{Persons\ held_{total}}{Population_{total}}$$

**Mortality in prison:** The counting unit is the individual. Each death is counted once. These data reflect the number of deaths of detainees within a specific year.

### Regional estimates:

The methods used for estimating the number of persons held, total, by sex, sentenced and unsentenced, at the global and regional level aim to make the best possible use of available data. For each regional aggregate, the number persons held should correspond to the sum of all national data of such in the region, in each year. However, for many countries, data on persons held are not available, or data are available only for some years (see table ‘Persons held in prisons, penal institutions or correctional institutions’). As a result, the sample of countries with available data is different for each year. If left unaddressed, this issue would result in inconsistencies, as regional aggregates would be drawn from a different set of countries each year.

Imputations for total persons held are performed on the country-level rate of total persons held per 100,000 population. If a country has just one available data point since the year 2000, all missing values are set equal to this single available data point. This approach therefore accounts for population growth over time and does not mean that the series is constant in absolute terms.

If a country has two to eight available data points, the missing values between two data points are estimated by linear interpolation, and if there are missing values that are temporally before (or after) the earliest (or latest) available data point, the values at the beginning (or end) of the series are filled with the earliest (or latest) available data point. If a country has more than eight available data points in the respective time series, the missing values between two data points are estimated by linear interpolation, and if there are missing values that are temporally before (or after) the earliest (or latest) available data point, the values at the end of the time series are imputed using an exponential smoothing approach (for more information, see [https://afit-r.github.io/ts\\_exp\\_smoothing](https://afit-r.github.io/ts_exp_smoothing)).<sup>1</sup>

Once the series have been computed at the national level, they are aggregated at the regional level. Regional counts for persons held are calculated for each year by multiplying the regional rate per 100,000 population with the total population of the respective region (divided by 100,000).<sup>2</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> Imputations for disaggregated series (e.g. female persons held, or unsentenced detainees) follow the same approach as the one for total persons held, except that the imputations are done on the ratio of the disaggregation over the total number of persons held, rather than the rate per 100,000 population.

<sup>2</sup> For countries without any data points since the year 2000, this means that the regional rate is applied.

regions are the ones from the United Nations “[Standard Country or Area Codes for Statistical Use](#)”. Each country or area is included in one region only. Finally, regional estimates are aggregated to compute the global number of persons held.

### Use and interpretation of data

Multiple factors such as the types of facilities and age groups covered by these statistics may have an impact on these data. Nonetheless, these figures allow comparison between countries and the analysis of trends over time.

### Data sources and method of collection

#### *National data*

The data come from prisons/probation services. In some countries, the data for juvenile prison population is missing as their facilities are managed by different services.

These data are collected from national authorities with the annual [United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems \(UN-CTS\)](#). National focal points working in national agencies responsible for statistics on crime and the criminal justice system and nominated by the Permanent Mission to UNODC are responsible for compiling the data from the other relevant agencies before transmitting the UN-CTS to UNODC. Following the submission, UNODC checks for consistency and coherence with other data sources. Member States which are also part of the European Union or the European Free Trade Association, or candidate or potential candidate to the European Union are sending their response to the UN-CTS to Eurostat for validation.

Data submitted by Member States through other means or taken from other sources are added to the dataset after review by Member States.

The population data is sourced from the World Population Prospect, Population Division, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

### Suggested citation

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