

## PRISON POPULATION

Crime causes great suffering to victims and their families, but the costs associated with imprisonment can also be considerable. These costs are normally justified by reference to a combination of three societal “needs”: to inflict retribution; to deter others from behaving in a similar way; and to prevent re-offending. The size of the prison population depends on the level of crime, the legislative measures and the efficiency of the enforcement measures.

### Definition

Not everyone in prison has been found guilty of a crime, especially those awaiting trial or adjudication. The indicator here considers the total prison population, including pre-trial detainees and remand prisoners.

### Long-term trends

Over the last fifteen years, most OECD countries have experienced a continuous rise in their prison population rates. On average, across the 30 OECD countries, this rate has increased from a level of 100 persons per 100 000 unit of the total population in the early 1990s to around 130 persons in 2004. The prison population rate is highest in the United States, where more than 700 per 100 000 population were in prison in 2004: such level is three to four times higher than the second highest OECD country (Poland), and has increased rapidly. This increase extends to most other OECD countries. Since 1992, the prison population rate has more than doubled in the Netherlands, Mexico, Japan, the Czech Republic, Luxembourg, Spain and the United Kingdom, while it appears to have declined only in Canada, Iceland and Korea.

There are large differences across countries in the make-up of the prison population. On average, one in four prisoners is a pre-trial detainee or a remand prisoner, but these two categories account for a much higher share of the prison population in Turkey, Mexico and Luxembourg. Women and youths (aged below 18) account, on average, for 5% and 2% of the prison population respectively. A much larger share of prisoners is accounted for by foreigners (close to 20% of all prisoners, on average), with this share exceeding 40% of the total in Luxembourg, Switzerland, as well as Australia, Austria, Belgium and Greece. In several countries, the rapid rise in the prison population has stretched beyond the receptive capacity of existing institutions; occupancy levels are above 100% in more than half of OECD countries, and above 125% in Greece, Hungary, Italy, Spain and Mexico.

### Comparability

The indicator here considers the total prison population, including pre-trial detainees and remand prisoners, per 100 000 of national population. This information has been collected by the International Centre for Prison Studies, every 3 years or so since 1992.

Additional comparative information is available from the above source, such as shares in total prison population of pre-trial detainees/remand prisoners, female prisoners, young prisoners, foreign prisoners, and occupancy levels in percentage (based on official prison capacity).

### Source

- Walmsley, R. (2005), *World Prison Population List (sixth edition)*, International Center for Prison Studies, London, [www.prisonstudies.org](http://www.prisonstudies.org).

### Further information

#### Analytical publications

- OECD (2007), *Society at a Glance: OECD Social Indicators – 2006 Edition*, OECD, Paris.
- UN Office on Drugs and Crime (2004), *United Nations Surveys on Crime Trends and the Operations of Criminal Justice Systems (ninth survey)*, UNODC, Vienna, [www.unodc.org/unodc/crime\\_cicp\\_surveys.html](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/crime_cicp_surveys.html).

#### Websites

- OECD Social and Welfare Statistics, [www.oecd.org/statistics/social](http://www.oecd.org/statistics/social).
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, [www.unodc.org](http://www.unodc.org).



### Prison population rate

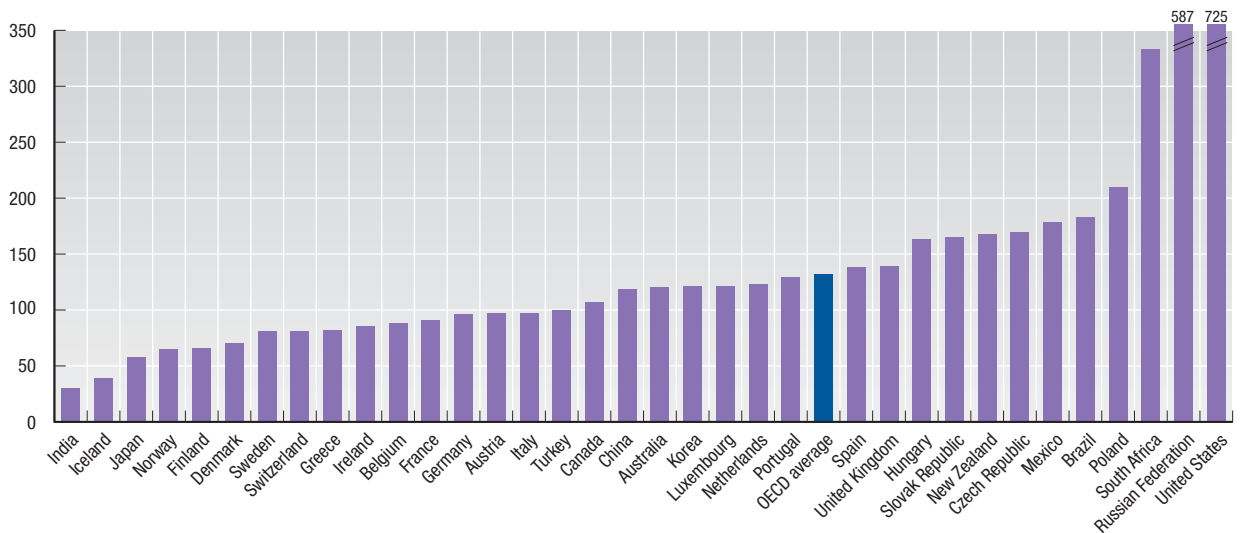
Number per 100 000 inhabitants

	1992	1995	1998	2001	2004
Australia	89.0	96.0	107.0	116.0	120.0
Austria	87.0	77.0	86.0	85.0	96.5
Belgium	71.0	75.0	81.0	85.0	88.0
Canada	123.0	131.0	126.0	116.0	107.0
Czech Republic	123.0	181.0	209.0	210.0	169.0
Denmark	66.0	66.0	64.0	59.0	70.0
Finland	65.0	59.0	50.0	59.0	66.0
France	84.0	89.0	86.0	78.0	91.0
Germany	71.0	81.0	96.0	96.0	96.0
Greece	61.0	56.0	68.0	79.0	82.0
Hungary	143.0	124.0	132.0	152.0	163.0
Iceland	101.0	119.0	103.0	110.0	39.0
Ireland	61.0	57.0	71.0	78.0	85.0
Italy	81.0	87.0	85.0	95.0	97.0
Japan	37.0	37.0	40.0	48.0	58.0
Korea	130.0	136.0	152.0	133.0	121.0
Luxembourg	89.0	114.0	92.0	80.0	121.0
Mexico	98.0	102.0	133.0	164.0	177.5
Netherlands	49.0	66.0	85.0	95.0	123.0
New Zealand	129.0	128.0	146.0	157.0	168.0
Norway	58.0	55.0	57.0	59.0	65.0
Poland	153.0	163.0	148.0	183.0	210.0
Portugal	93.0	124.0	146.0	131.0	129.0
Slovak Republic	119.0	138.0	138.0	129.0	165.0
Spain	90.0	102.0	114.0	117.0	138.0
Sweden	63.0	65.0	60.0	68.0	81.0
Switzerland	79.0	80.0	85.0	71.0	81.0
Turkey	54.0	82.0	102.0	89.0	100.0
United Kingdom	90.1	100.2	124.5	124.4	138.7
United States	505.0	600.0	669.0	685.0	725.0
OECD average	102.1	113.0	121.8	125.0	132.4
Brazil	74.0	92.0	102.0	133.0	183.0
China	..	101.0	115.0	111.0	118.0
India	..	..	28.0	30.0	30.0
Russian Federation	487.0	622.0	688.0	638.0	587.0
South Africa	282.0	280.0	387.0	409.0	333.0

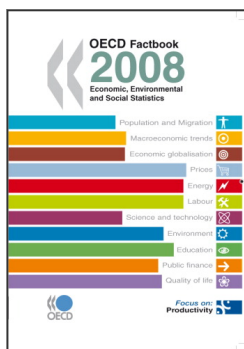
StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/275761175242>

### Prison population rate

Number per 100 000 inhabitants, 2004



StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/271280416364>



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