

Crime and prisoners

On average in 2013, 2 100 persons per 100 000 were brought into formal contact with the police and/or criminal justice system. Crime rates among total population declined slightly on average (by almost 3%) from 2008 to 2013 (Figure 7.10). The declines were highest in Japan, Netherlands and the United States by more than 20%, while the increase was strongest in Luxembourg and Turkey. During the same period, crimes among juveniles declined even further, by almost 20% on average. The declines were highest in the Czech Republic and the Netherlands by more than 50%, while the increase was strongest in Turkey by almost 50%, and in Australia as well among youth.

Prison population stood at 147 per 100 000 people in the mid-2010s on average in the OECD. There are large variations across countries (Figure 7.11). For instance, the United States reports the highest rate at almost 700 per 100 000 population in 2013 down from a peak at 755 in 2008. This is three times higher than second highest country (Israel). The prison population rate is also high in key partner countries, except in China, India and Indonesia where it is below the OECD average.

Youths (aged under 18) represent only 1.3% of the prison population (Figure 7.12). They account for less than 1% in 22 OECD countries, but almost 3% in Germany, 4% in Canada and up to 14% in Mexico. This may reflect the specific forms of correction applied to minors in different OECD countries – i.e. forms which may fall outside the scope of the statistics used here. These youth are typically not included in statistics on NEETs since they are not covered by surveys.

Most OECD countries have seen their prison population rates rise in the 1990s and the 2000s followed by a slight decrease in the early 2010s. On average across the 35 OECD countries, this rate increased from 117 persons per 100 000 in the early 1990s to 156 persons in 2010; it then declined slightly to 147 in the mid-2010s (Figure 7.11). Since 1992, the prison population rate has more than doubled in Mexico and Turkey, while it has declined only in Canada, Estonia, Korea, Latvia and three Nordic countries Denmark, Finland and Sweden. Since 2010, the prison population rate has decreased in two-thirds of the OECD countries, including in the United States.

In several countries, the rise in the prison population has stretched beyond the receptive capacity of existing institutions (Figure 7.12). Occupancy levels are above 100% in almost half of OECD countries, and above 120% in Belgium, Hungary and Mexico. Occupancy rates are also generally high in non-European key partner countries. Such overcrowding feeds violence and rebellion against institutions.

Definition and measurement

Data on crime rates are based on the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) Database, based on administrative data. UNODC collects data on crime and the operation of criminal justice systems in order to make policy-relevant information and analysis available in a timely manner to the international community. The index is based on the total number of persons – and juveniles aged under 18 – brought into formal contact with the police and/or criminal justice system, all crimes taken together, per 100 000 population. Data may include persons suspected, or arrested or cautioned. Any cross-national comparison should be conducted with caution because of the differences that exist between the legal definitions of offences in countries, or the different methods of offence counting and recording.

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 the need to inflict retribution to offenders, 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. The basic indicator of the size of the prison population is each country is the number of persons in prison (including pre-trial detainees and remand prisoners) per 100 000 of national population. Data on the prison population can also be broken down according to their demographic characteristics and legal status, including the share of juveniles under age 18. It should be noted that not everyone in prison has been found guilty of a crime, due to the inclusion of those awaiting trial or adjudication. The occupancy level refers to the prison population as a percentage of the official capacity. The indicators shown here are gathered in the World Prison Brief by the Institute for Criminal Policy Research (www.prisonstudies.org).

Figure notes

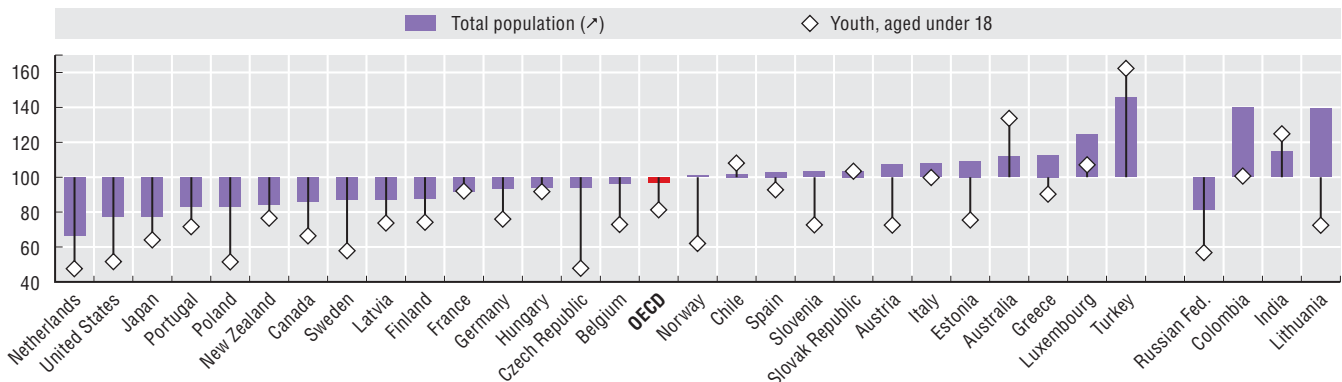
Figure 7.10: 2012 in Chile, New Zealand and Turkey; 2011 in Estonia, Greece and Luxembourg instead of 2013.

Figures 7.11 and 7.12: Instead of 2016: 2015 for Australia, Austria, Chile, Japan, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Korea, Luxembourg, Mexico, Norway, Slovenia, Sweden, China, Indonesia, Lithuania, and South Africa; 2014 for Belgium, Canada, Iceland, Netherlands, Switzerland, Brazil, Costa Rica, India and Latvia; 2013 for United States. 2000 instead of 1992 for China, Colombia, Costa Rica, India, Latvia and Lithuania.

Figure 7.12: No youth data for Brazil and Colombia; no occupancy level for China.

7.10. Downward trends in crimes in most OECD countries between 2008 and 2013, particularly among youths

Rate of persons brought into formal contact with the police and/or criminal justice system per 100 000, in 2013 (or nearest year), all crimes taken together, index 100 in 2008

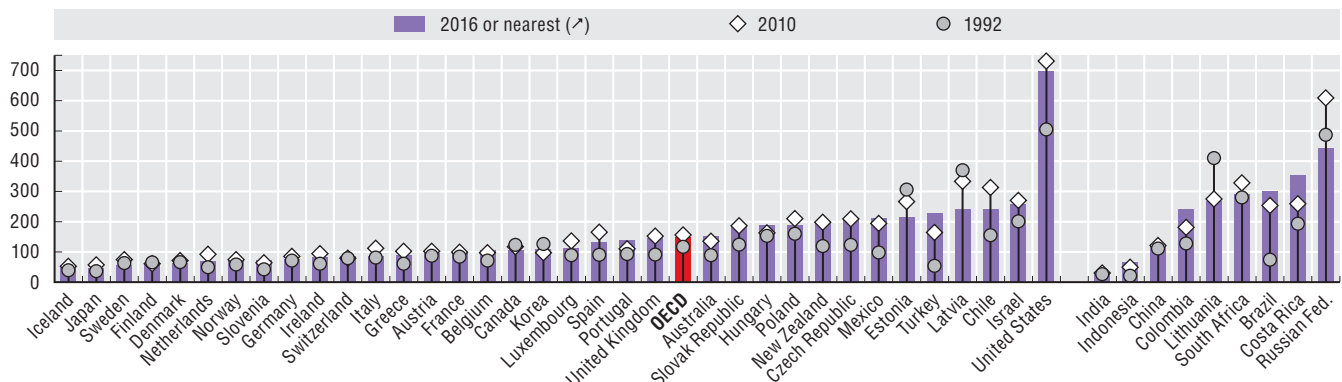


Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) Database (www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/statistics/crime.html) accessed on 15 March 2016.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933405777>

7.11. Prison population rates increased till 2010 then slightly decreased

Prison population per 100 000 population, in 1992, 2010 and 2016 (or nearest year)

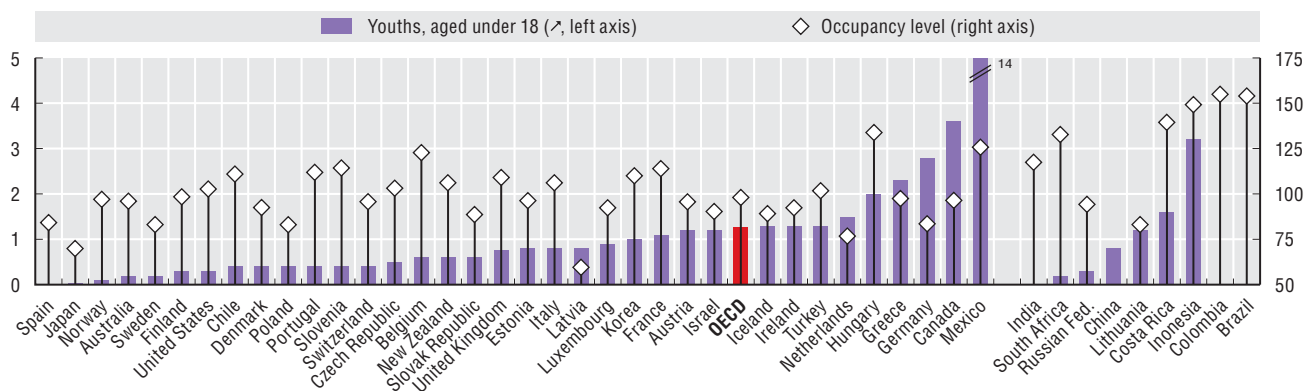


Source: World Prison Brief, Institute for Criminal Policy Research, World Prison Brief (www.prisonstudies.org) accessed on 15 March 2016.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933405783>

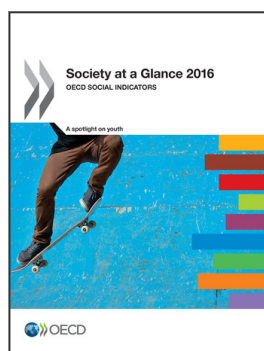
7.12. Variation in share of youth in prisons and prison occupancy rates

Percentage of youth (under 18) in the prison population and share of prison population in percentage of official capacity, in 2016 (or nearest year)



Source: World Prison Brief, Institute for Criminal Policy Research (www.prisonstudies.org) accessed on 15 March 2016.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933405797>



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