



UN Special Rapporteur on Torture – Upcoming report on “Current issues and good practices in prison management”

Prison Insider’s inputs

Prison Insider is an information platform on prisons in the world. Its objective is to inform, compare and share testimonials on conditions of detention, with regards to fundamental rights. Its work contributes to the fight against torture and the prevention of human rights violations.

The platform collects, verifies and synthesizes existing data. It produces knowledge and makes it accessible to the greatest number of people - in accessible language and in English, French and Spanish. All our information is made public via our website, with dissemination via newsletters and social media.

Prison Insider's global scope enables the team to provide input and information on a wide range of issues of interest to the Special Rapporteur.

This document is divided into sections, covering the areas of particular focus mentioned in the Call for Input. To obtain and compare information and data on all aspects of prison conditions between countries, Prison Insider also offers a comparison tool. By choosing the country and the year, and selecting the criteria, you can access all the information available in a summary table and do more in-depth research on a particular theme or geographical region. The information displayed comes from Prison Insider’s country profiles, which are an exhaustive overview of prison conditions in a given country based on almost 380 indicators inspired by on the main international texts on detention (Convention against Torture, Nelson Mandela Rules Bangkok Rules, Beijing Rules, etc.). You can use [this link](#) to find out the answers for 15 different country profiles.

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1. Measures to reduce overcrowding

Prison Insider has led an extensive comparative work on one of the most pressing issues of the prison systems in the world: overcrowding. Amongst other analyses, we have identified several measures put in place by the States to reduce overcrowding. Beyond the mere presentation of the measures, we seek to analyse the long-term effects of such policies and their effect on the rights of prisoners. We present some of these measures, country by country.

- Norway

The administration prevents overcrowding by using waiting lists. Sentenced prisoners can have their incarceration postponed for up to several months. They are only admitted to prison when a place becomes available, in order to prevent overcrowding. The waiting list system in the Norwegian context concerns sentences that are not, or will not be, initiated within 60 days, and for which there is no postponement/suspension or request for placement under electronic surveillance.

Several researchers have pointed out that this method raises a number of questions, particularly in terms of respect for fundamental rights. A study is devoted to this question and the issues it raises, particularly for the people concerned. In 2008, Pratt described this measure as emblematic of the authorities' refusal to compromise the "one person, one cell" principle and the resistance to any expansion of the prison estate. However, in the second part of his article, the author points out that the lack of places has led to a large queue in Norwegian prisons since the 1980s, with an absolute record of 6,900 sentences pending in 1990. The size of this queue began to be seen as a political problem in the 2000s, particularly as media interest in the queue grew. This list was subsequently reduced, thanks to the adoption of several measures, including the "renting" of prison places in the Netherlands. A [2020 study](#) points out that some people in the waiting list have (or have had) the impression of living "a sentence before the sentence". Kristian Mjåland, Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology and Social Work at the University of Agder (UiA) and researcher at Cambridge University also notes: "*Short prison sentences are often presented as a humane feature; however, we see that offenders often spend more time waiting for prison than they do in jail. Some say the waiting was a crueller element of the punishment than the sentence itself. This raises the question whether the formally short sentences in Norway are not really that short*".

Norwegian prisoners spend relatively short periods in prison, but this too could conceal a more complex reality if some of them are actually waiting for a longer period than their short sentence. According to the Norwegian Prison Service, of all prisoners released in 2017, 56% had spent less than three months in prison and 71% less than six months.

- **Netherlands**

The Dutch prison population has been steadily declining over the past decade. The incarceration rate fell from 125 inmates per 100,000 inhabitants in 2006 to 54 in 2018. This represents a drop of over 50%. This trend can be explained by the fall in recidivism, budget cuts and more frequent use of non-custodial sentences. The decrease can be explained by a deliberate policy of decriminalizing a number of offenses. But it's worth noting that the figures have fallen especially since the Dutch authorities extracted the figures for "immigration detention" and people deprived of their liberty in closed psychiatric establishments.

In the Netherlands, community service is a very common sentence, with eight community service sentences for every ten prison sentences, compared to France where the proportion is one community service sentence for every ten prison sentences.

For a time, the Netherlands introduced a *numerus clausus* system: once the number of available places had been reached, the judge had to decide whether to release an inmate before sentencing a new one. This system, considered too rigid, has been abandoned, but Dutch judges are still careful not to exceed the number of available places.

- **Brazil**

A pilot project (but already attempted in the state of Paraná) in 15 (of 47) institutions in the state of Maranhão was implemented with the National Council of Justice and UNDP. The project includes several aspects:

- Spatial: aims to determine the actual maximum capacity of each facility as well as geographical areas for the administration of criminal justice and deprivation of liberty

- Technological: setting up a real-time information system to provide judges with information on the occupancy rate of facilities. This information must be taken into account in every decision, complemented by an alert system. Magistrates must therefore have real-time access to prison occupancy rates before deciding whether to send the person to one prison or another, place them in a "queue" or opt for a non-custodial sentence. At the same time, "multirões" will also be implemented, i.e. collective reviews of trials to ensure that cases progress more quickly at judicial level (and that fewer people are held in pre-trial detention due to the current slowness of the judicial system).

Brazilian law prohibits the placement of a person in a penitentiary facility that operates in inadequate conditions or in violation of the law (due to overcrowding, undignified conditions, etc.). However, the limits of this approach have been clearly identified in the context of the present project (notably by the UNDP and CNJ).

- **Spain**

In Spain, jurisprudence has been developed to give preference to fines for many categories of offence, whereas French judges tend to impose prison sentences more systematically. The prison population has been declining since the early 2010s. This is due to the growing number of non-custodial sentences. Legislative reforms are also reducing the length of sentences for certain

offences. However, there has been an increase over the last year. In its 2017 report, the CPT notes the Spanish authorities' efforts to end prison overcrowding. However, the prison population is unevenly distributed. Some establishments or wards are still overcrowded.

Major reforms to the Penal Code were introduced in 2010. These include:

- Lowering maximum sentence lengths and reducing the number of people incarcerated. The revision of sentences mainly concerns drug offences and serious road safety offences.
- Increased use of alternative penalties, such as community service
- The introduction of the principle of proportionality, applied to the seriousness of the offence, and of the "exceptional nature" of recourse to imprisonment, has led to a reduction in the number of remand prisoners.

2. Designing daily life in prisons – focus on small scale detention

The [Changing the scale](#) series explores new insights concerning alternative forms of detention that are integrated into the community, small-scale, increasingly focused on the needs of individuals and designed to promote human connection.

- ["Building bridges through education"](#), interview with Sergio Grossi, researcher at the Center for the Study of Violence at the University of São Paulo.

"I have studied the APAC (Association for the Protection and Assistance of the Convicted) system in Brazil a lot. In these prisons there are no armed security staff. They are community-based prisons, co-managed by volunteers and the prisoners themselves. The prisoners are involved in the running and organisation of prison life. The idea is to create an educational community with them and not for them, and where volunteers and prisoners can create close relationships. It is not just the staff that can accompany prisoners to a life without crime but also the prisoners themselves. We are not used to thinking of prisoners as an integral part of education, but they have great educational power that should not be underestimated. Since they themselves have committed crimes, they understand what other prisoners have been through, what their difficulties are, and thus have a greater capacity to influence them in a positive way.

(...) I think we have a very strict view of what education is in our prison system and in society in general. When we talk about education we think of a school. This is really problematic because school is not the only form of education. We have to put education in a broader, more informal framework and not limit it to just one form. In the APAC system, for example, it is interesting to note that there is not a separate space dedicated to education. The whole space is considered an educational space. (...)

When you put education in this broader context, all staff have an educational role to play, whether they know it or not. But in traditional prisons we don't see staff as having educational roles, but rather security roles. We train and select staff specifically for security and punishment, for restraining people who cause problems of violence. We promote the pedagogy of violence and mistrust.

I believe we should select the staff based on their motivation to do educational work and train them accordingly for the role of social educator. In facilities for juvenile offenders in Rio de Janeiro, which

have been placed under the supervision of the Minister of Education, some of the security staff have a PhD in education or philosophy.

(...) Education is central when rethinking prison. (...) Prisoners also have a fundamental part to play in this reflection. Enabling them to take part in educational programmes, to improve their symbolic position, to talk about their experience using academic language, is essential to challenge the hegemonic discourse on prison. In the APAC system, many prisoners have started to go to university and think critically about what imprisonment is. From this, a broader social movement can emerge, linking the inside with the outside, and influencing community members, including those who are not experts in the field. (...).”

- ["Can prisons be changed?"](#), interview with Valérie Icard, associate researcher at the Centre for Sociological Research on Law and Penal Institutions (*Centre de recherches sociologiques sur le droit et les institutions pénales*, CESDIP).

“Respect modules are a new approach to detention that originated in Spain in 2001, initiated by a local programme within the Mansilla las Mulas prison. They gradually spread and are now institutionalised and implemented in all penitentiary facilities in Spain. They are touted as one of the cornerstones of the Spanish prison system and were applied to nearly 40% of the incarcerated population in 2017.

According to information given by the Spanish authorities, the respect modules aim to empower prisoners and make them more accountable. This involves adhering to additional behavioural requirements outlined in the prison’s internal regulation, participating in daily detention management, and promoting various activities. To join a respect module, prisoners must volunteer and then be selected by the prison administration.

This system works on the principle of give-and-take. Prisoners benefit from advantages over conventional detention, such as greater freedom of movement or a wider range of activities. In exchange for being placed in a respect module, they agree by “contract” to follow the administration’s recommendations, respect the rules of the module (which include numerous regulations, even on the number of pairs of socks allowed), participate in cleaning tasks for free and undergo systematic evaluations of their behaviour by the professional team. If they do not comply with these requirements, they risk being dismissed from the respect module.

(...) This system is based on granting privileges, so there must be a flip side: areas where prisoners are deprived of them. This logic of differentiating detention types requires a physical separation between conventional detention and the respect modules. Implementing the respect modules also requires the surveillance staff to redefine their professional practices: now that they have the authority to evaluate behaviours, they must also support prisoners in their rehabilitation efforts.

In conclusion, my research on the respect modules in France and Spain shows that they rely on a subtle balance between behavioural requirements and formal and informal privileges that can be withdrawn at any time. This carrot-and-stick system encourages prisoners to adopt self-monitoring behaviours and submit to the institutional project. Indeed, it is a new and effective tool for *behaviour management* (...).”

- ["Norway: bridging the gap"](#), interview with Johan Lothe, director of WayBack Oslo.

“There are various types of small-scale facilities, but they remain a minority compared to high-security prisons that still exist in our country.

Small-scale detention centres are facilities that hold between 10 and 25 prisoners. They are generally located in remote areas. The prison service is still too afraid to build prisons close to places where people live. Many of the small-scale facilities are halfway houses: establishments designed to serve as a transitional stage between prison and society. People serving long sentences can spend their last nine to three months in a halfway house. They work outside during the day and sleep in the facility overnight. Some of them come to WayBack during the day to socialise. They might also look after the garden, and prepare lunch, coffee or meetings. It isn't a job, but rather a social function that helps them learn how to communicate.

(...) We also have drug rehabilitation centres. Of the 58 prisons in Norway, 18 offer some form of drug rehabilitation service. Half of the drug rehabilitation units are in small scale facilities, with no more than 60 people. These units focus on cognitive programmes such as re-establishing links with the community, problem solving, reflection, behaviour, overcoming drug cravings or saying no to drugs. There are also medical treatment programmes using Methadone, Subutex and Suboxone. Around 10% of the prison population takes one of these drugs. Prisoners can also ask to spend their remaining three to six months in rehabilitation clinics outside prison. Some of these clinics are in the countryside, others in towns. Ultimately, everyone is different: some need to be away from the city to get off drugs, while others need the stimulus of city life to keep their minds occupied.

(...) We call WayBack the foundation for life after incarceration. I was formerly incarcerated, as were all those who work for WayBack. The main purpose of our organisation is to help former prisoners reintegrate into society. We visit them during their incarceration to establish a relationship and begin the preparations for their release. The Norwegian welfare system is quite good, but the problem is the gap between the prison and the community. What we're doing is bridging the gap between the two, using the experience we have of our own transition back into society. The key focus is on providing support and stability during transitional periods to help individuals feel safer and increase their chances of success.”

- ["Belgium: intersecting approaches"](#), interview with Wendy Mercelis, assistant director at Hoogstraten Penitentiary School Centre (open prison with a community-based regime) and Petra Colpaert, the Governor of the Kortrijk detention house.

Wendy Mercelis. “We regularly organise activities in which community members can participate. Everything is open and the community is used to prisoners coming in and out. They see that we are normal people. Since Hoogstraten is a small town, our existence mainly supports the local community. People can do internships and voluntary work on the outside. The challenge is that we now need official authorisation for each prisoner from Brussels [*central prison administration*], whereas previously we could grant it ourselves.”

Petra Colpaert. “In Kortrijk, as a new facility, we adopted a proactive approach towards the community. They are treated as partners rather than outsiders. They were involved from the beginning, working together to create an inclusive environment for the residents, which is different from a typical prison in Belgium. Additionally, a ‘boarding community’ was established where professionals from different fields collaborate to determine and implement the necessary steps for providing services within Kortrijk.”

Wendy Mercelis. "Another ongoing project is the 'scouts group' kerngroep, a group of twenty men and five women whose aim is to set a good example for other prisoners. They organise activities, volunteer inside and outside, and have extra privileges, such as access to additional sporting activities. We go out with them once a month, most of the time to work with organisations for people with special needs.

(...) Our facility has an open character, with lots of nature and greenery. The security regime is very low and the day-to-day schedule for prisoners is fairly flexible. Our goal is to make their lives resemble the outside as much as possible."

Petra Colpaert. "It is really important to understand that a lot of people who commit offenses often have low self-esteem. They do not believe in themselves and have had lots of problems in their past. With time, they begin to see themselves the way community sees them: bad people who cannot and will never contribute anything of value to society.

We made a choice not to be solely risk-focused in our rehabilitation programmes. We've implemented the "Good Lives Model" developed by Tony Ward, a New Zealand professor. He developed an approach to interacting with prisoners that considers not only their risk factors but also their strengths and aspirations in life. In fact, if you look at the risk principle, you are always focusing on negative aspects, whereas if you look at what the prisoners want to achieve, their response is going to be much more positive. In our philosophy, we look at both angles. If inmates say they need help, a detention officer will help them, but it is not our aim to systematically accompany them.

One of our residents initially struggled to connect with others due to past trauma. To help him regain confidence, the staff identified his strengths and offered him a job. However, he found it challenging to adapt, so a detention officer accompanied him until he became comfortable. This support enabled him to excel in his work and avoid potential relapses into criminal behaviour. Now, every time he does something new, an officer will accompany him the first time to put him at ease. Once he is settled, he becomes very much independent. This example illustrates how someone could have easily ended back up in prison without the proper approach. We really have to read between the lines."

See also: "[Is dynamic security a realistic utopia?](#)", interview with Guillaume Brie, the head of the Interdisciplinary Centre for Applied Research in the Penitentiary Field (Cirap) at the École nationale d'administration pénitentiaire (Enap).

3. Challenges for providing mental health provision

It is estimated that more than 40 % of prisoners in Italy suffer from at least one mental disorder, 35% in England, and 60% in the Netherlands. In Ireland, 7 out of 10 persons admitted in prison suffer from an addiction.

Does prison make you go mad? For some, this is no doubt true. For others, it reveals a pre-existing condition. With imprisonment comes the break-up of social and family relationships, the violence of overcrowded, loud prisons. This contributes to triggering or worsening existing psychiatric problems.

Prison Insider has recently published two papers: [Walling up Madness](#), a paper on the care provided to prisoners with mental health problems (Belgium, England and Wales, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland) and [Problems of Substance](#) (Belgium, Canada, France, Ireland and Moldova), on addictions in prison. In addition to these two papers, the issue of mental health care in prisons [is also covered](#) in sections about mental health from our country profiles, and series of interviews and testimonials.

- **Gaps between theory and practice: punishment or care?**

In principle, people who have been convicted or found to be criminally irresponsible are not punishable with a prison sentence. In practice, many countries impose **both** a prison sentence and a duty of care are imposed.

In several countries, the deprivation of liberty can be extended after the end of the prison sentence. This indefinite internment is very concerning in terms of rights, and takes various forms in Switzerland, in Belgium (social defense systems) or in Poland for instance (centres for the prevention of dissocial behaviours), for instance. According to a Swiss prisoner: *"The hardest part is the uncertainty. Never having a date, never seeing the end of the tunnel. I feel like I'm suffocating."*

A series of reforms are progressively establishing a security-based management of mental illness. The criminalisation of people with mental health problems is becoming more and more systematic, while the number of individuals declared criminally irresponsible is generally decreasing. Public opinion is said to be suspicious or even hostile towards the mentally ill. People suffering from a mental problem who commit an offence are no longer seen as patients in need of care, but as [dangers](#) *"which threaten or compromise the security or existence of somebody or something"*. Leaving such a person at large involves risks. At the same time, psychiatric treatment has been developing in prisons. These facilities are viewed as a secure and [economical means](#) to "manage" this population of ill persons that are reduced to a prisoner ID number.

- **Blurred boundaries**

All over Europe, prisons have been and are still setting up psychiatric care units or dedicated facilities (Spain, France, Belgium, etc.). These hybrid structures combine prison management and psychiatric care. The risk is that the specific difficulties of detention are doubled with inadequate/insufficient care.

- Mentally unwell people are often placed in the general population sections of prison facilities - even in collective dormitories in Romania.
- It is difficult or sometimes impossible for prisoners suffering from acute mental crises to be admitted to psychiatric hospitals, due to lack of places, to widespread stigma etc.

— **Shortage of staff**

Prison staff are severely ill-equipped and undertrained. Medical staff are almost systematically under-staffed.

- Care is mostly about medication: In France, a majority of prisoners treated for mental issues receive neuroleptic treatments. Some of them do not consent. In Romania in 2018, the CPT had noted that prisoners were given excessive medication (21% of the population) and not the right ones.

- There is a widespread recourse to isolation, in cases of psychological crisis: prisoners are placed in isolation cells while awaiting transfer, often with long delays due to the lack of places, particularly in psychiatric hospitals.
- Excessive use of restraints

— **Underprivileged amongst the underprivileged:**

Women, sexual orientation and gender identity minorities (SOGI), children and youth, minority ethnic or linguistic groups, prisons in oversea territories and other groups in situation of vulnerability remain an afterthought. For example, in **Belgium**, women are denied access to psychiatric annexes. They wait in ordinary prison regime for a psychiatric assessment before being declared criminally responsible or not. Women recognised as being criminally irresponsible are the only ones who have access to specialised units.

— **What promising practices can be noted?**

- In the Netherlands, individual plans are designed for each prisoner upon entering prison. They complete 2/3 of their treatment before going to prison. There are “extra care units” present in every prison, a system which has been commended by the CPT. Still, the waiting time for placement is very long.
- Guards working in the Dutch extra care units receive special training and work in cooperation with psychologists/psychiatrists. The staff/prisoner ratio is higher than elsewhere. In Berlin, “group leader” guards are trained to handle prisoners with mental health disorders. In Norway, staff learns to deal with people who self-harm, monitor and encourage them to talk.
- For prisoners suffering from addictions, rehabilitation services and substitution treatments are being increasingly created and now exist in numerous countries (*for example, see above the interview with Johan Lothe, director of WayBack Oslo*).

4. The use of solitary confinement

Prison Insider’s country profiles gather in on the prison systems on different aspects of life in detention, including the solitary measures and its consequences. You can check and compare these practices in 15 countries using our comparative tool ([link to access the data](#)).

5. Laws, policies, special measures identified to respond the specific needs of groups in vulnerable situations

Prison Insider’s work is attentive to the situation of groups in vulnerable situation in the prison setting. We identify 8 groups in particular: women, minors, foreign prisoners, long-term prisoners, minorities or indigenous people, LGBTIQ people, elderly people, people with disabilities.

Our analysis focuses on the specific challenges faced by prisoners due to their vulnerable situation. We also seek to identify laws, policies put in place by the States to respond to their specific needs. We present below some comparative findings regarding special measures put in place in the world:

— **Women**

In **Norway**, “mothers of young children may be granted a suspension of sentence. They may spend a few months outside with their child before serving the end of their sentence or being granted an alternative measure.”

— **Minors**

In **Spain**, “minors aged between 14 and 17 do not serve their sentence in a correctional facility. They are placed in an interment facility for young offenders (*centros de Internamiento de menores infractores*, or CIMI). CIMIs are not managed by the prison administration.”

— **LGBTIQ**

In **Norway**, it is estimated that placement of LGBTIQ prisoners in specific or general cells “depends on the facility governor’s assessment regarding personal safety.” On another hand, in **Romania**, “sexual orientation is one of the criteria of vulnerability identified by the prison service.” However, LGBTIQ persons are not systematically separated from other prisoners.

— **Elderly prisoners**

In **Norway**, “older persons are eligible, where appropriate, for special care. “On another hand, in **Romania**, elderly prisoners do not benefit from specific arrangements or care.” In this country, “prisoners over the age of 65 at the time of their trial cannot be sentenced to life in prison. The maximum sentence for them is 30 years.” (Articles 57 and 58, [Penal code](#)).

— **Prisoners with disabilities**

In **Norway**, “facilities built after 2010 are equipped with cells adapted for the use of wheelchairs.” In **Romania**, “no particular accommodations are provided to prisoners with physical disabilities. Prison staff are trained to care for inmates with disabilities. The prison service sometimes employs prisoners to provide support to prisoners who need assistance because of a disability. Some prisoners may also have a guide dog (Articles 257 and 283 of the [Prison Regulations](#), in Romanian). The presence of an interpreter is mandatory at the hearings of deaf and hard-of-hearing prisoners.”

6. Preparing for the next pandemic – the COVID-19 case

In March 2021, Prison Insider published "[Managing uncertainty in prison: diverse responses to Covid-19](#)". The study provided an overview and analysis of how prison administration around the

globe reacted to the sanitary crises and its consequences. It proposed an analysis of the first year of the pandemic in prisons in eleven countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, France, Ireland, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, South Africa and Thailand. The study highlighted some practices regarding:

— **Coordination between different level of authorities**

Argentina has strived to coordinate local and national responses to the crisis. The Supreme Court (Corte Suprema de la Nación) issued an Order early in the pandemic. Following international recommendations, it allowed for different prison administration, both Provincial and Federal, to implement the same set of measures.

A similar coordinated response was observed in other countries, with constructive outcomes. In Costa Rica, the Emergency Committee (Comando de Atención de Emergencias), under the responsibility of the Ministry of Justice and Peace, has worked closely with the Ministry of Health since the beginning of the pandemic. They decided jointly on protocols to be put in place in prison and adjusted them to the evolution of the situation. Ireland established an Emergency Response Planning Team (“ERPT”) early on, in mid-February. The ERPT consisted of senior staff with skills and experience in healthcare and infection control. It worked in partnership with the National Public Health Emergency Team and the Irish Red Cross. Civil society organisations commended the open and efficient communication between these bodies, which enabled a very fast policy response and implementation of measures. A similar efficient coordination was also reported in New Zealand. In several other countries, the authorities’ unpreparedness paved the way for spontaneous responses: cross-learning, bottom-up initiatives by various stakeholders including prison directors, and sometimes unprecedented efforts of cooperation between prison administrations across borders.

— **Beyond governmental responses**

Independent initiatives by external actors were set up and proved to be particularly essential in countries with insufficient State response. This demonstrated how much a pragmatic collaboration was necessary between State bodies and external actors. For instance, the Irish Red Cross worked closely with the Prison Administration to produce accessible information leaflets. They involved prisoner volunteers in raising awareness with other prisoners about physical distancing gestures and identification of high-risk practices.

— **Personal protective equipment**

In Ireland, PPE was distributed to staff as of mid-February, and training sessions on the recommended use were organised. Prior to the crisis, the Spanish prison administration had already in stock around 100,000 surgical masks, dating from other previous epidemics. It received at least 40,000 additional masks from the Ministry of Health.

— **Transfers and movements**

In Costa Rica, transfers were reduced to a minimum, based on lessons learnt from the management of a mumps epidemic in 2019. A senior Costa Rican prison officer describes the procedure: ‘We have set up a system of sub-groups to organise the movement of prisoners. This enabled us to avoid contacts between groups when we had to move them from one wing to another. We were then able to submit each sub-group to a 14-day quarantine and make sure the dormitories were fully disinfected in the meanwhile.

— **Releases as a means for relief**

Prisons around the world have experienced, with the sanitary crisis, an extraordinary increase of measures that can be qualified as an opening. The high number of prisoners and the impossibility to respect physical distance have led authorities to a pragmatic and extraordinary use of sentence adjustments: early, compassionate and conditional releases, suspensions of sentence, house arrests, electronic surveillance, massive pardons.

> In many countries, however, the decrease of the prison population and overcrowding during the pandemic was not sustainable: by the end of 2021, the prison population started increasing again. In France, for instance, by the end of 2020, Prison Insider noticed that the number of prisoners began to rise again. This growth, which has been noticed since the start of the summer, shows that the decrease in the prison population was just temporary. The French prison population [decreased](#) from 70,651 prisoners in January 2020, to 60,614 by the end of April. As of January 2023, there were 72,173 people held in French prisons.

— Family ties

Compensatory measures were necessary to mitigate the impact of the absence of visits. In Brazil and Thailand, computers and tablets were provided in some facilities for the first time, allowing videocalls between prisoners and their families. The use of videocalls brought a relief for many families, but its use remained unequal: prisons and families struggled with poor internet connection and access was complex. Many problems were reported such as the short time allocated or the lack of confidentiality.

In France, calls were facilitated by a 50-euro increase of prison telephone credit. While mobile phones are banned in prison in the vast majority of countries, authorities in Argentina and Chile authorised its use, in the Province of Buenos Aires and in all Chilean prisons, to ensure prisoners' rights to communicate with the outside world during the pandemic.

— Mental health

In Ireland, between April and the end of June, people over the age of 70 and those with chronic illness were automatically isolated. Many were held in the so-called cocooning cells for periods of up to 30 hours. [...] the Prison Inspector reported that many prisoners held in cocooning expressed suicidal and depressive feeling. In Norway, the Ombudsman noted that prisoners placed in quarantine or medical isolation were subjected to an excessive use of measures akin to solitary confinement: that 'mental health problems were amplified by the COVID-19 crisis. The anxiety of inmates regarding their situation and that of their families, the extreme measures of restriction and the management of addictions have led to situations of riots in some prisons. The lack of psychological and social support proved to be a major weakness of this crisis.'" On this topic, you can also refer to the following video coproduced by Prison Insider and the Institute for Crime & Justice Policy Research (based at Birkbeck, University of London): [Solitary confinement, COVID-19 and mental health impacts](#)

7. Climate change and prisons

Prison Insider is currently conducting, in collaboration with the French prison administration, a comparative study on how prison administrations around the world are taking into account environmental changes and their impacts. The research work began in summer 2023 and will continue until winter 2024. It already highlights a large number of measures adopted with a view to both adapting to and mitigating climate change. We have observed that the actions taken and the

priorities in terms of sustainability vary greatly from region to region. For example, we have observed that plans to mitigate the impact of natural disasters have been put in place in Asia, and numerous measures to reduce heat have been adopted in Oceania. In Latin America the focus has been on recycling, and in Europe, many prison administrations have committed to reducing energy consumption and/or waste.

Prison Insider's international perspective will provide an opportunity to cross and broaden perspectives by bringing to the various prison administrations practices that have been observed on all the topics of interest mentioned. The research work will be based on concrete cases, such as the use of biogas in Nepalese and Rwandan prisons, the functioning of a recycling centre within a Chilean facility, the creation of a dedicated sustainability team in New Zealand, the introduction of sustainable development training modules for prisoners in USA (Washington), and the development of renovation programmes to increase energy efficiency in Irish prisons. It will also highlight how respect for prisoners' rights may be affected by these various measures and policies and how their needs and concerns are taken into account.