

Prisoners are people who are forcefully detained and deprived of their liberty, after a lawful criminal justice process. In other words, people who are put in [prisons, penal-, correctional-, psychiatric- or similar institutions](#) of the official criminal justice system.

Prisoners include people who are detained before the final verdict in a court of law, charged with a criminal offence. Note the difference from being detained (arrest, jail) during a criminal investigation before formally charged; and detained for other reasons, such as investigation of [immigration status](#) .

This explanation is for statistical purposes, and may differ from national regulations and definitions.

The number of prisoners at any given time depends on:

- the number at previous count
- how many were admitted since the previous count
- how many were released since the previous count (also: died, escaped, etc.)

Changes in those figures depend on:

- how widely imprisonment is prescribed (for which crimes)
- how many convicted are actually sentenced to prison
- length of sentences received
- alternative sanctions, early release, amnesties, etc.

Further information

- [Crime and criminal justice metadata 2008-now](#)
- [Crime and criminal justice metadata 1993-2007](#)

Related concepts

- [Prison](#)

Statistical data

- [Crime statistics](#)
- [Police, court and prison personnel statistics](#)
- [Prison occupancy statistics](#)
- [Prison statistics](#)

Source

- [United Nations Surveys on Crime Trends and the Operations of Criminal Justice Systems](#)
- [United Nations standards and norms in crime prevention and criminal justice](#)