

YUNMUN XXXI
United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime
Topic 1: Prison Reform

In 2020, the global prison population¹ reached a record total, with over 11 million prisoners recorded worldwide, 20% of whom are based in the United States alone. Over the past eighteen years, the number of prisoners worldwide has increased 20%. This includes² at least 700,000 women (an increase of 50% over the past 20 years) and 400,000 children.

One can imagine the space required by prisons across the world in order to accommodate the large number of prisoners, especially with such an increase. However, most prison systems find themselves overcrowded,³ including the United States. Haiti, with a prison system that is filled 4.5 times its maximum capacity, has between 80 and 100 prisoners jammed into a single cell at once. The Philippines, whose prison system is almost as overcrowded as Haiti's, has a prison facility, originally built to hold 262 prisoners, that houses over 3,000 people.

Although many prisoners are restricted to a certain extent by being in prison, they are still humans with rights to basic liberties. There are many violations of these liberties caused by these congested prison systems, aside from a general lack of space. Disease prevention is much more challenging in overflowing prisons, as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴ Sleep and physical exercise, two activities that can promote health, are also compromised with less individual space. Additionally, it may affect the division of resources accorded to individual prisons.

As serious as a problem as it is, overcrowding in prisons barely scrapes the ice over the issues involving penitentiary systems. Many incarcerated people come from poorer socioeconomic backgrounds and make much less money than their non-incarcerated counterparts.⁵ Still, their families typically lose a source of income for a considerable amount of time going forward; this doesn't even include the costs of attorneys, food, and transportation for prison visits.⁶ Even after a prison sentence is completed, these people find jobs difficult to find and many resort to crime, sticking themselves into a long-term cycle of crime and poverty.

¹ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/262961/countries-with-the-most-prisoners/>

² <https://www.prison-insider.com/en/articles/global-prison-trends-2020>

³ <https://www.statista.com/chart/12717/the-worlds-most-overcrowded-prison-systems/>

⁴ <https://ejournal.org/news/covid-19s-impact-on-people-in-prison/>

⁵ <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/income.html>

⁶ <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/justice-and-prison-reform/prison-reform-and-alternatives-to-imprisonment.html>

Other issues that arise from the prison system include⁷ negative social consequences for inmates and ignorance of inmate's needs, such as not allowing family visits.

It's a tough balancing act: on the one hand, there are certain luxuries that can't be afforded to those who broke the law and are paying their dues with a prison sentence, while at the same time, recognizing the value of human life in inmates and allowing them basic human rights.

Not all these problems can necessarily be solved with money. In the US alone, the cost of maintaining public correction agencies and their inmates, including staff, food, and healthcare totals over \$80 *billion* dollars⁸ every year, much of that being the result of tax dollars. This figure doesn't include the cost of police or the judicial systems, which begin the incarceration process.

Regardless, the system needs a change, and our task, as the UNODC, is to adopt a unified policy on prison reform, to target these problems, and find a solution that will improve prisoner quality of life, while not compromising the safety or livelihood of the non-incarcerated population. Delegates should learn as much as they can about the issues revolving around prison reform, **especially as they pertain to their country**. Delegates should consider how might these individual issues be combatted and practical solutions that can have international ramifications to the penitentiary system.

Our goal is to pass a sweeping policy that will change prisons throughout the world for the better. Aside from doing the research, be prepared to collaborate with fellow delegates. Not only will their knowledge and opinions strengthen your positions, but they have the votes, and every vote counts!

I look forward to meeting each of you at the conference. As stated in the welcome letter, feel free to reach out to me, jchill@mail.yu.edu, if you have any questions about the topic, the conference, YU, or anything on your mind. I wish you all the best of luck.

Jonah Chill
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Certified Chiller

⁷ <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/justice-and-prison-reform/prison-reform-and-alternatives-to-imprisonment.html>

⁸ <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/money.html>