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UNODC-KOSTAT

Centre of Excellence for Statistics
on Crime and Criminal Justice
in Asia and the Pacific

REGIONAL SNAPSHOT 2 PRISON POPULATION

SOUTH-EASTERN ASIA

Key finding

The South-eastern Asia prison population showed **the largest increase** among subregions in Asia and the Pacific during the period 2000 to 2019.

Prison population



- In 2019, approximately **1.19** million people in South-eastern Asia were detained in prison, a rise of **120%** since 2000.
- The number of prisoners significantly **increased** during the 10 years of **2010-2019**, compared with 2000-2009.

Imprisonment rate



- In 2019, 179 persons for every 100,000 population in South-eastern Asia were in prison.
- This number has grown by **74.3%**, the **highest increase** among the Asia-Pacific subregions from 2000 to 2019.
- In 2019, the **female** imprisonment rate was the **highest** in the Asia-Pacific region.

Unsented detainees (SDG 16.3.2)

- More than **406,000 detainees** had not received a sentence in 2019.
- Since 2000, the proportion of the unsentenced detainees has remained stable at approximately **34.2%**, which suggests that there has been **little progress** towards SDG indicator 16.3.2 Unsented detainees as a proportion of overall prison population.



HISTORICAL TRENDS | Imprisonment rate

Both the number of prisoners and the total population in South-eastern Asia grew over the past two decades. However, the prison population showed a much steeper increase. In 2019, about **1.19 million people were held in detention**, more than two times larger than the 0.54 million in 2000; **a 120% increase**. By comparison, total population growth over the same period was 26.1%.

TOTAL PRISON POPULATION



Imprisonment rate
persons held per 100,000 population

103
2000

96
2005

113
2010

148
2015

179
2019

Since **2008**, the South-eastern Asia imprisonment rate has been consistently **higher** than the Asia-Pacific rate.

Since **2016**, the South-eastern Asia imprisonment rate has been consistently **higher** than the global rate.

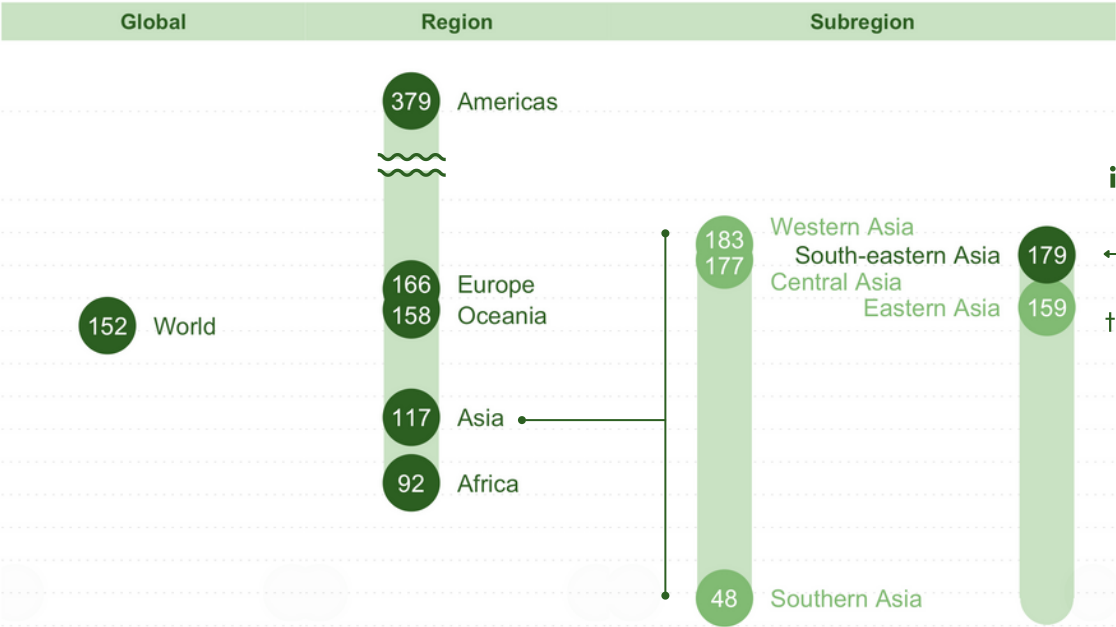
74.3%

The South-eastern Asia imprisonment rate was 103 in 2000 increasing to 179 in 2019.

This represents a 74.3% increase; **the highest relative increase among Asia-Pacific subregions** during the period.

** Figures have been rounded, and all percentages have been calculated using unrounded figures.*

WORLD COMPARISON | Imprisonment rate in 2019



In 2019, the South-eastern Asia imprisonment rate was **relatively high** compared to the global rate of 152, to the other regions, and to the other subregions in Asia.

HISTORICAL TRENDS | Difference between decades

The **prison population** in South-eastern Asia was approximately 540,000 in 2000, rising to 641,000 in 2009, representing an increase of **18.7%**. Between 2010 and 2019, the prison population went from about 672,000 to 1,188,000, increasing by **76.6%**. This shows a considerable growth rate during the more recent decade in South-eastern Asia prison population.

**Figures have been rounded, and all percentages have been calculated using unrounded figures.*

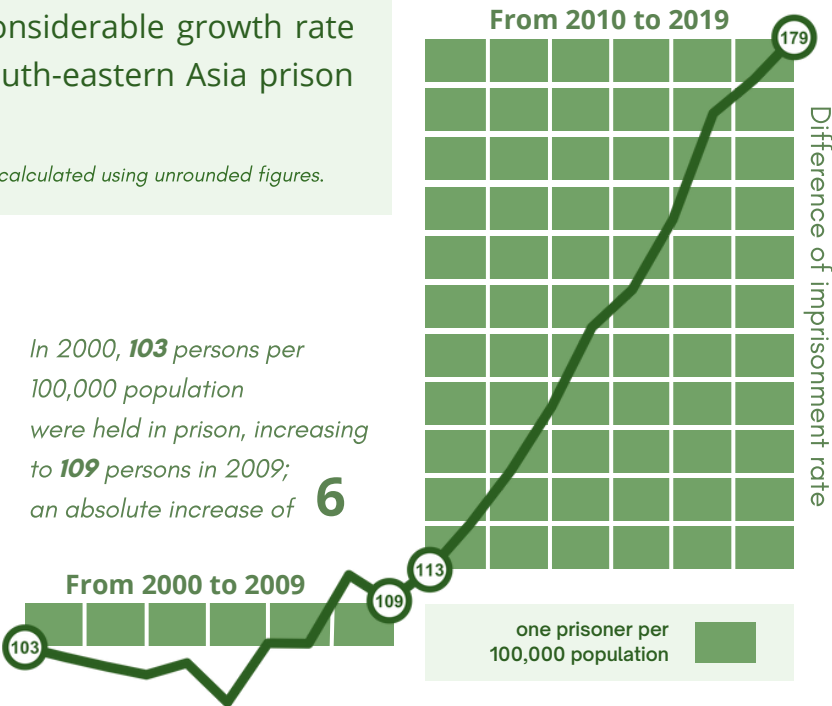
The number of detainees has risen since 2000, but significantly since 2010 in South-eastern Asia.

Imprisonment rate

$$= \frac{\text{prison population}}{\text{total population}} \times 100,000$$

In 2000, **103** persons per 100,000 population were held in prison, increasing to **109** persons in 2009; an absolute increase of **6**

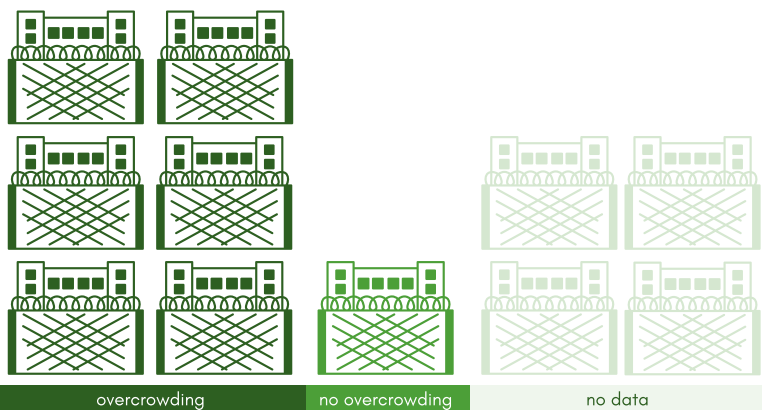
In 2010, **113** persons per 100,000 population were held in prison, increasing to **179** persons in 2019; an absolute increase of **66**



CHALLENGE | Prison overcrowding

Prison overcrowding is a big challenge in South-eastern Asia.

Between 2015 and 2019, prison occupancy data was available from 7 of the 11 countries in the region. In six of those countries, the number of prisoners was higher than the national prison capacity.

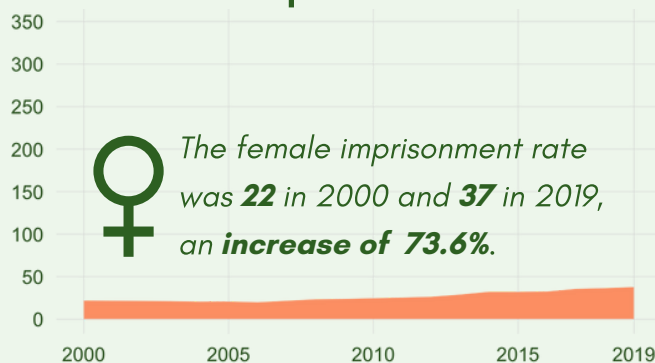


COVID-19 | Releasing prisoners

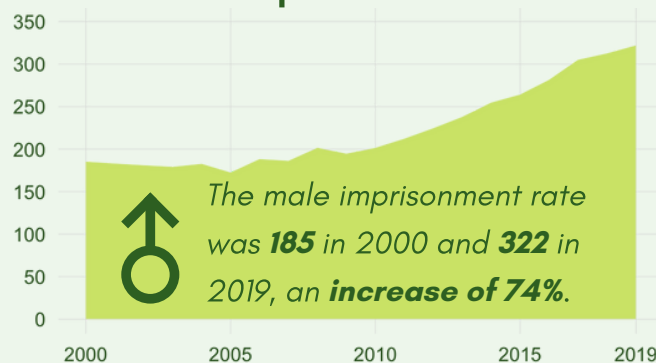
In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, countries around the world **released prisoners** from correctional facilities, including some countries in South-eastern Asia. According to **2020 Year-End data** provided by countries to UNODC, the number of prisoners in five South-eastern Asia countries **has decreased by more than 20%** compared to 2019.

HISTORICAL TRENDS | Sex disaggregation

Female imprisonment rate

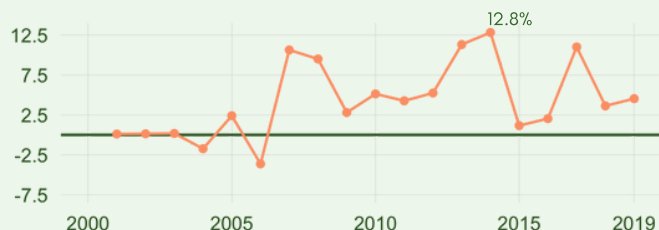


Male imprisonment rate



The growth rate of the female and male prison populations from 2000 to 2019 saw a **comparable increase**. The female prison population increased by **118%**, while the male increased by **120%**, albeit at much lower baseline levels for the female prison population.

Annual growth rate (%) of the female prison population



Annual growth rate (%) of the male prison population



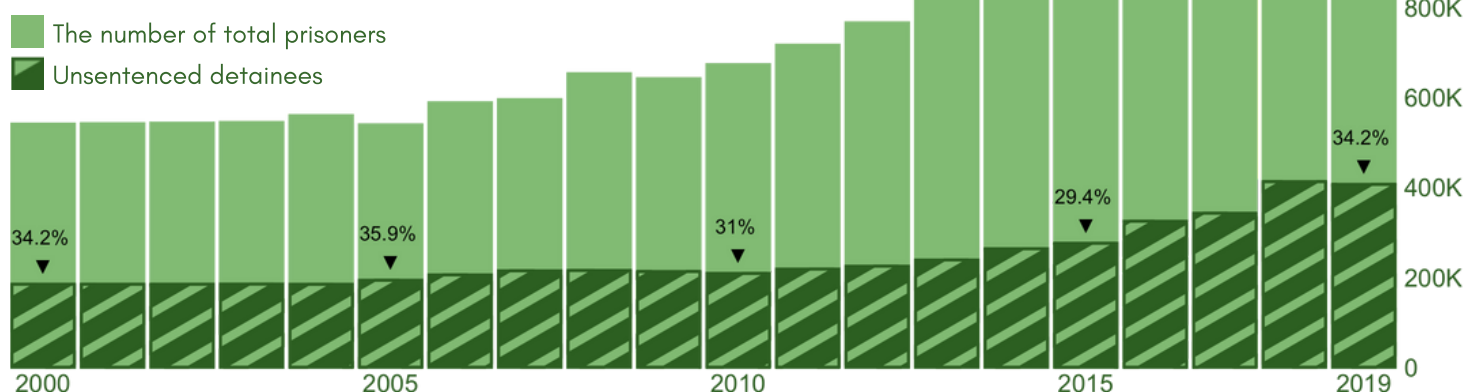
The year-on-year percentage change above describes the variation of imprisoned females and males since 2000. The highest increase in the **female** prison population was **12.8%** in 2014, but the highest for the **male** was **10.6%** in 2006.

**Figures have been rounded, and all percentages have been calculated using unrounded figures.*

SDG 16.3.2 | Unsentenced detainees

The proportion of unsentenced detainees is a key Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicator to monitor the rule of law and equal access to justice for all.

In 2019, the South-eastern Asia share of unsentenced detainees was **34.2%** which is greater than the global share of 31.5% and the second highest in the Asia-Pacific region. Moreover, although the prison population doubled from 2000 to 2019, the proportion **has remained constant**.





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Methodological note

Data

The data used for this document was collected by Member States via the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems (UN-CTS) and the World Prison Brief. Subregional estimates were developed by UNODC. The dataset is publicly available at the UNODC data portal (dataunodc.un.org).

Geographic classification

For subregional classification, the analysis used the United Nations M49 system.

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