



UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime



UNODC-KOSTAT

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

REGIONAL SNAPSHOT 4 PRISON POPULATION

SOUTHERN ASIA

Key finding

Two out of three people who were **detained in prisons** have **not received a sentence** in Southern Asia, consistently **the highest share** across the world since 2000.

Prison population



- Southern Asia is home to approximately 25% of the world population as of 2021.
- Nearly **920,000 people** in Southern Asia were held **in prisons**, 7.8% of the world prison population as of 2019.
- The imprisonment rate was **48 per 100,000 population**, the **lowest rate** compared to any other region in 2019.

Unsented detainees (SDG 16.3.2)



- Nearly **620,000 people** in Southern Asia were held in **prisons without a sentence** in 2019.
- The share of unsentenced detainees in the total prison population was **67%** as of 2019, **the highest rate** in the world.
- Since 2000, the share of unsentenced detainees has slightly but continuously **increased from 63% to 67%**.

Covid-19 pandemic



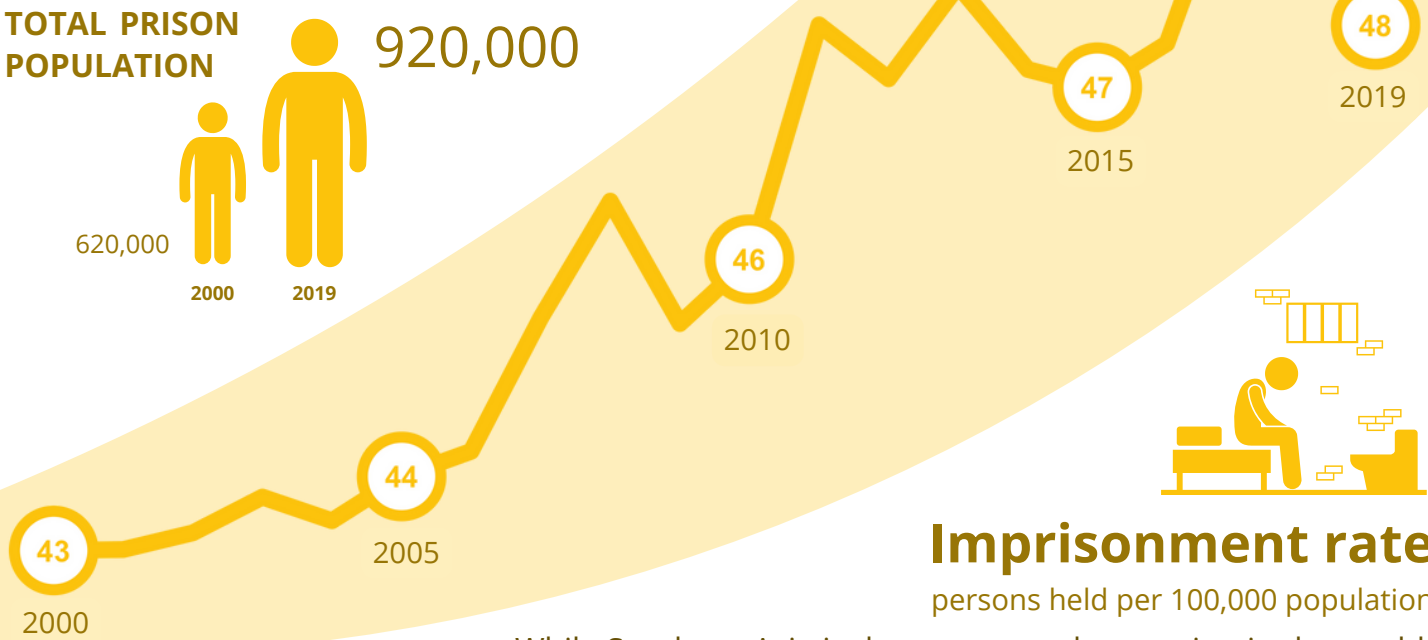
- The total prison population in Southern Asia **has risen after the outbreak of Covid-19**, despite efforts by the international community to reduce it.
- Based on the available data from six countries in Southern Asia before and after covid, the number of prisoners **increased** by almost **100,000 people**, from around 700,000 in 2018 to 800,000 in 2021.



HISTORICAL TRENDS | Imprisonment rate

In **Southern Asia**, UNODC estimates approximately **920,000** people were **detained in prisons** as of 2019. The prison population progressively **increased by 47%** over the last two decades from 620,000 in 2000, while the total population grew by 31.7% during the same period.

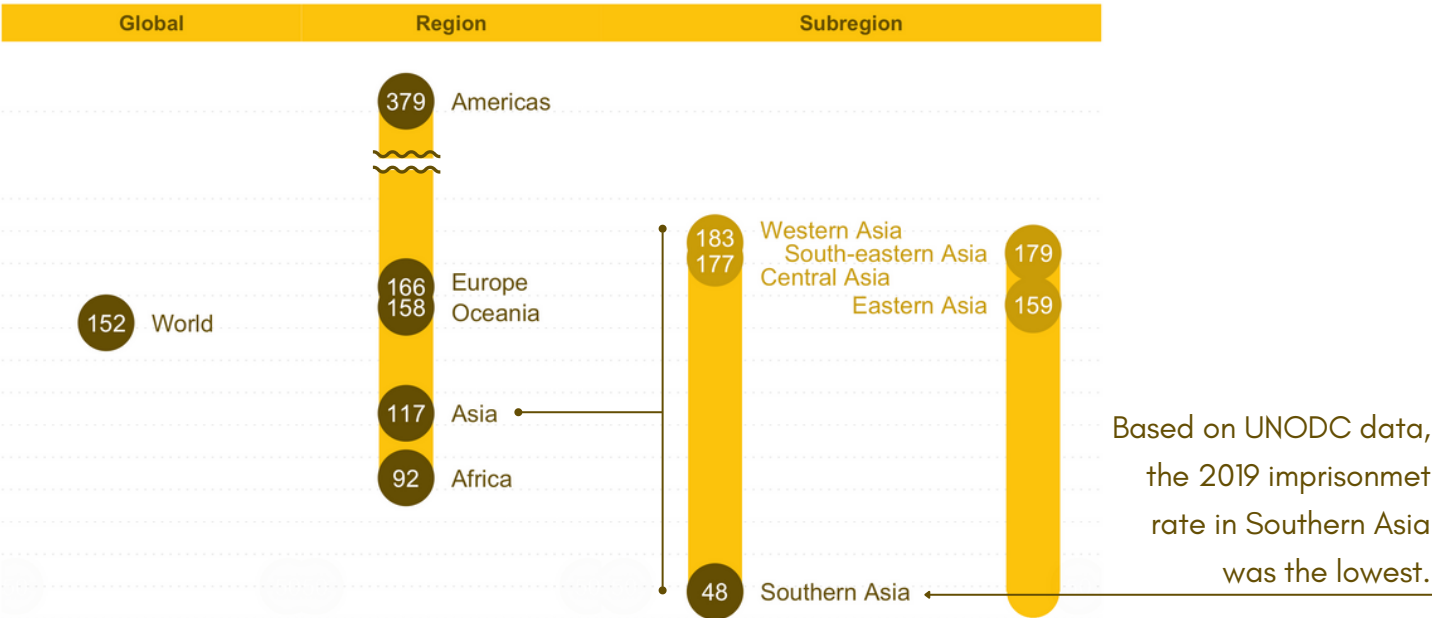
TOTAL PRISON POPULATION



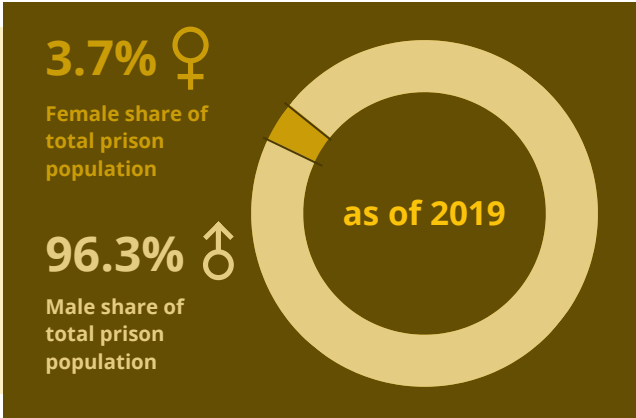
While Southern Asia is the most populous region in the world, the number of prisoners was not the largest. Among the Asia-Pacific subregions, the Southern Asia prison population was less than the Eastern and South-eastern Asia. Indeed, Southern Asia had **the lowest imprisonment rate of 48 prisoners per 100,000 population** compared to 152 at the global rate and the other regions between 92 to 379 according to the UNODC data.

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

WORLD COMPARISON | Imprisonment rate in 2019



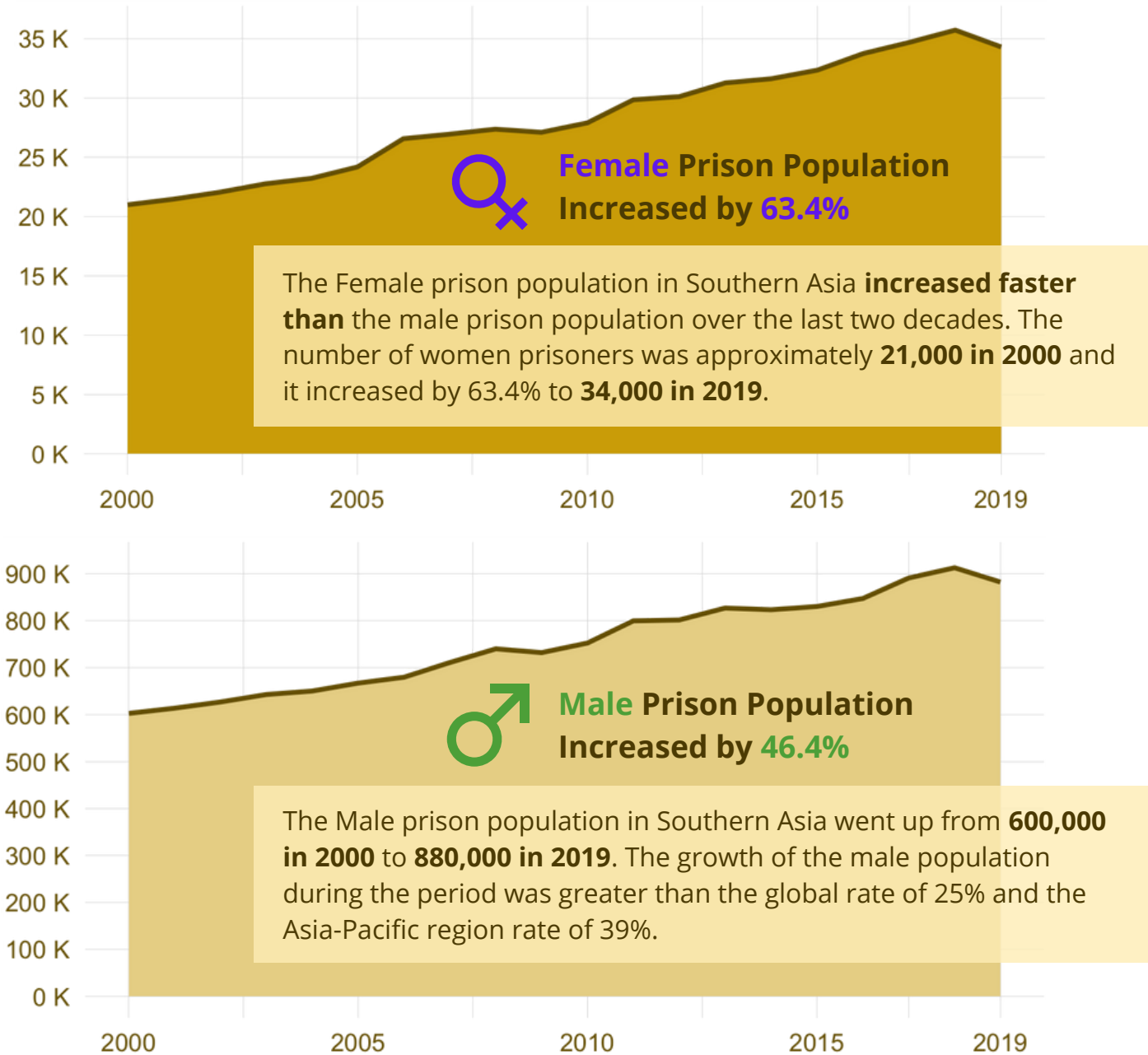
GENDER COMPARISON | Share of prison population



In Southern Asia, **Female prisoners** accounted for about **3.7%** of the total prison population as of 2019. Compared to the global share of 7.2% and other subregions in Asia and the Pacific, ranging from 4.1% to 10.5%, Southern Asia showed **a relatively low share** of female prisoners out of all prisoners.

HISTORICAL TRENDS | Sex diaggregation

The number of **women prisoners** has grown faster by 17 percentage points than the **men prisoners** from 2000 to 2019.

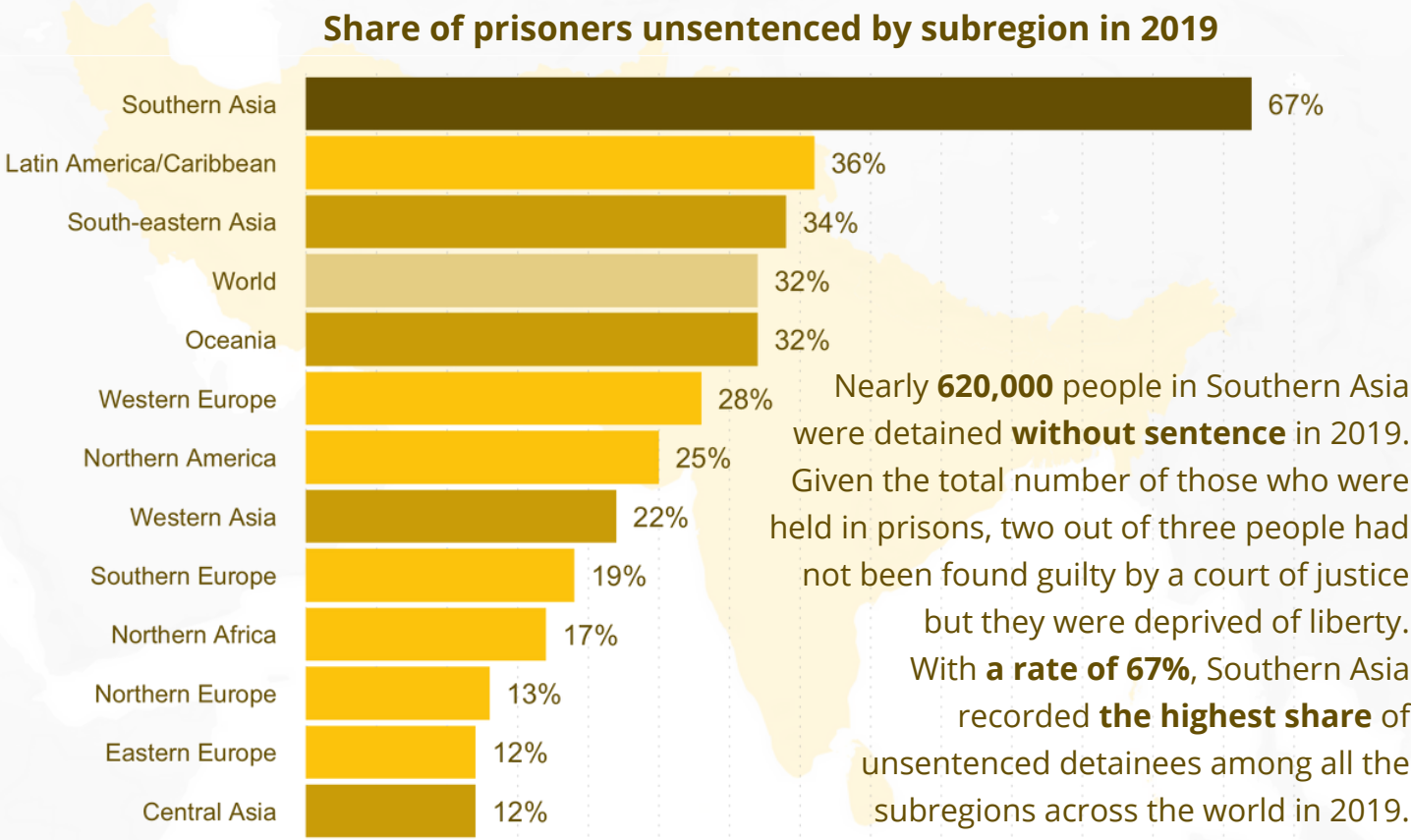


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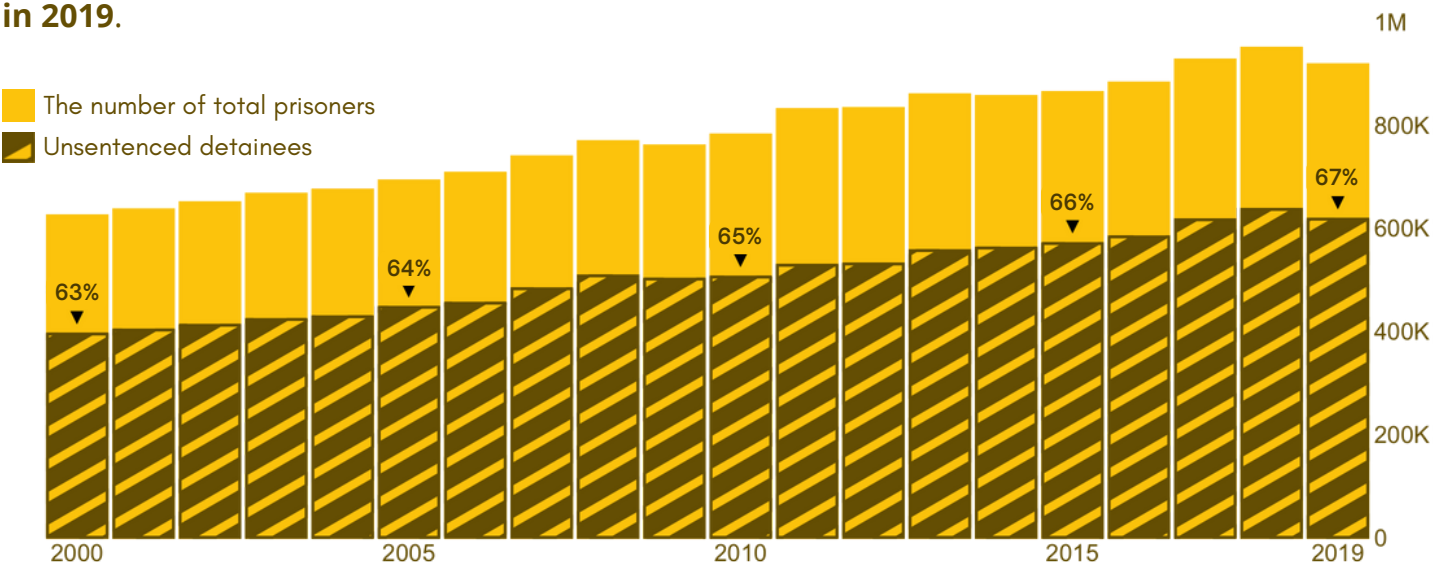
SDG 16.3.2 | Unsented detainees



Unsented detainees as a proportion of overall prison population
The proportion of detainees who have not been sentenced among all prisoners is one of the key indicators to measure the efficiency of the justice system, aiming to monitor **the rule of law** and **equal access to justice**.



The number of unsented detainees in Southern Asia had been on the rise from **390,000 in 2000** to **620,000 in 2019**. Even considering that the total number of detainees also grew by 47% during the same period, the unsented detainees showed a greater extent, a **56% increase**. This can be represented by **the share of unsented detainees** up from **63% in 2000** to **67% in 2019**.



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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. Southern Asia: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

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General coordination

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Comments

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