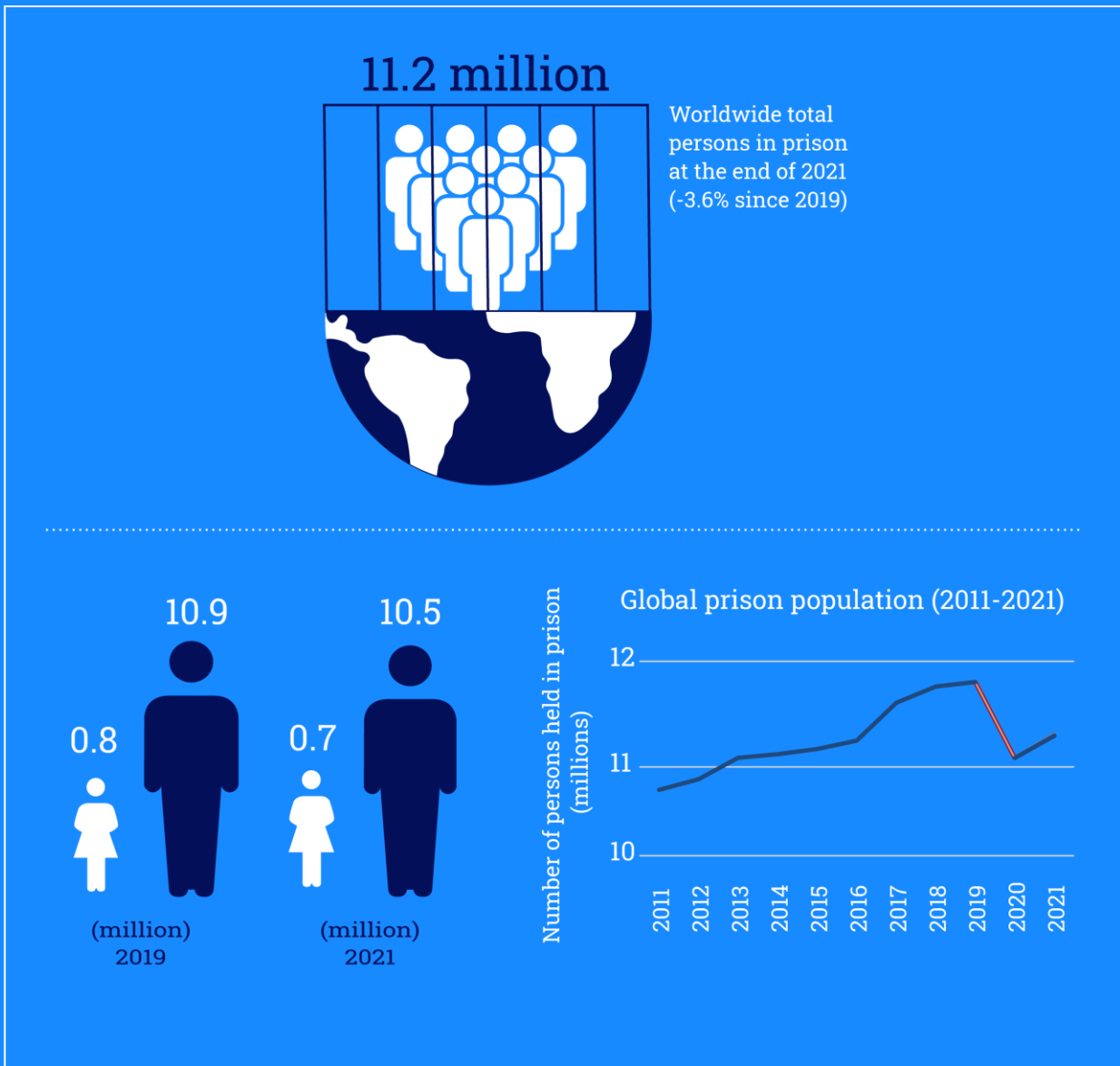




Artwork © Hardy Darwesh

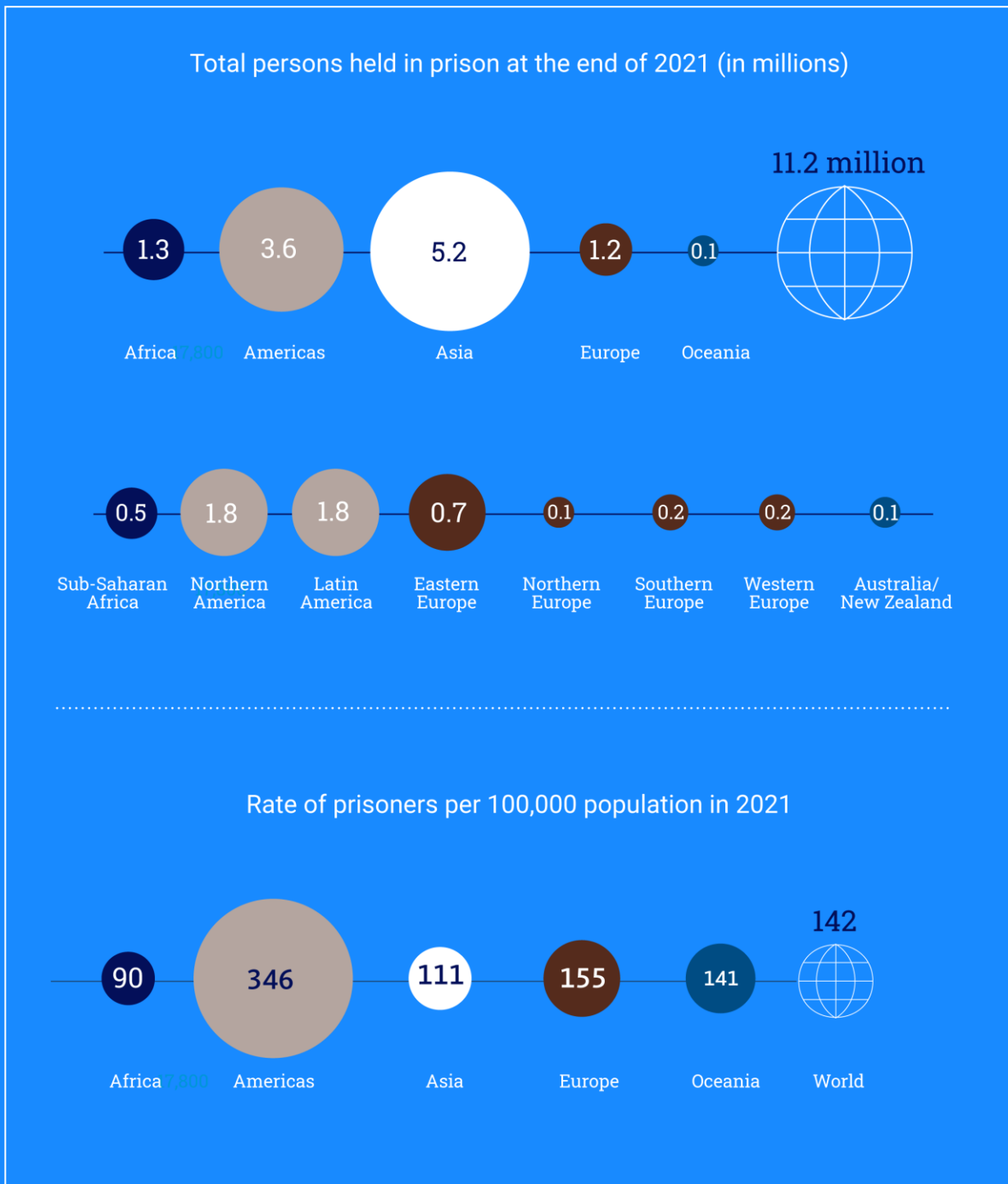
**DATA MATTERS SNAPSHOT:
GLOBAL PRISON POPULATION AND TRENDS
NELSON MANDELA INTERNATIONAL DAY, 18 JULY 2023**



- ➔ An estimated 11.2 million persons were held in prison globally by the end of 2021.
- ➔ During the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of prisoners reported globally decreased by more than 600,000 in 2020, down from 11.7 million in 2019.
- ➔ The prison population began to increase again in 2021 in most regions of the world, suggesting that release measures introduced in response to the pandemic were not sustained.
- ➔ The global prison population represents more than double the number of people living in Central African Republic, Norway or Singapore and roughly equals the populations of the Dominican Republic and Jordan.
- ➔ Most people held in prison globally are men (94 per cent) but over the last two decades the number of women in prison has increased at a faster pace (+35 per cent) than men (+16 per cent).

COVID BLIP? GLOBAL PRISON POPULATION ON THE RISE AGAIN

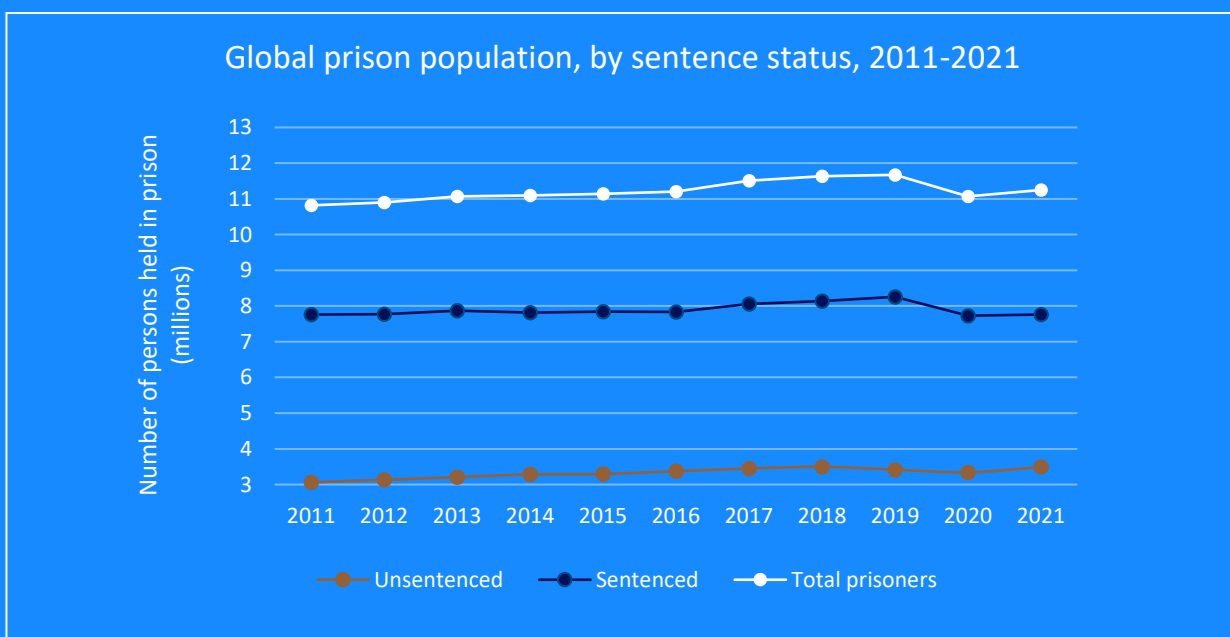
- ➔ Notwithstanding the decrease in 2020, overall the global prison population has increased by 17 per cent since the start of the 21st century.
- ➔ As of 2021, there were an estimated 142 prisoners for every 100,000 population globally.
- ➔ Taking into account population growth over time, Northern America, Sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern Europe have experienced long-term decreases in imprisonment rates, with decreases as high as 33 per cent since 2000, while other regions, such as Latin America and Australia/New Zealand, have seen prison populations growing over the last two decades (up to 70 per cent).



- ➔ The decrease by the end of 2020 was largely accounted for by Northern America, where the number of people held in prison plummeted by 21 percent from 2.1 million at the end of 2019 to 1.7 million at the end of 2020. However, by the end of 2021, the number of prisoners had already started to rise again, to reach 1.8 million people (+5.4 per cent).
- ➔ Of the sub-regions, only Eastern Europe registered a further, albeit modest, decrease in the number of prisoners from 2020 to 2021 (-1.7 per cent). Asia saw the number of people held in prison increase by 0.5 per cent, Northern, Western and Southern Europe by 1.3 per cent, Oceania by 1.9 per cent, Latin America by 1.9 per cent and Africa by 2.8 per cent.

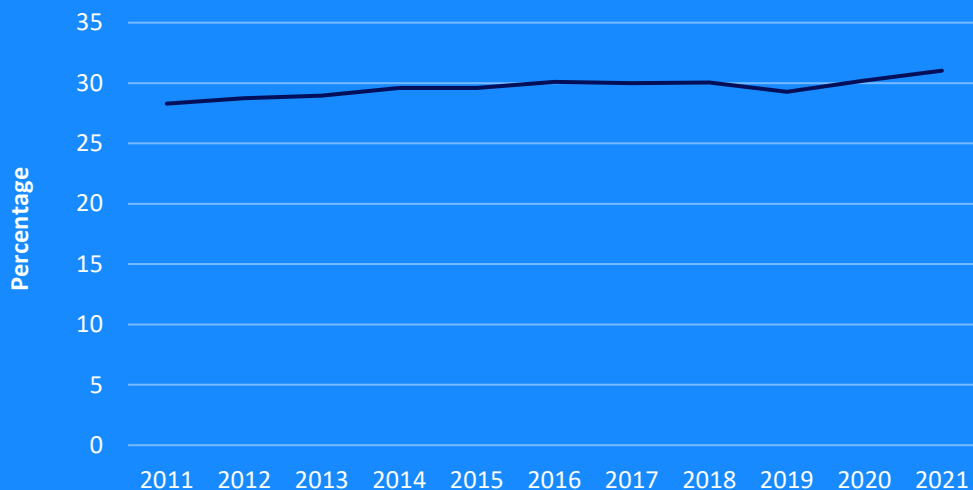


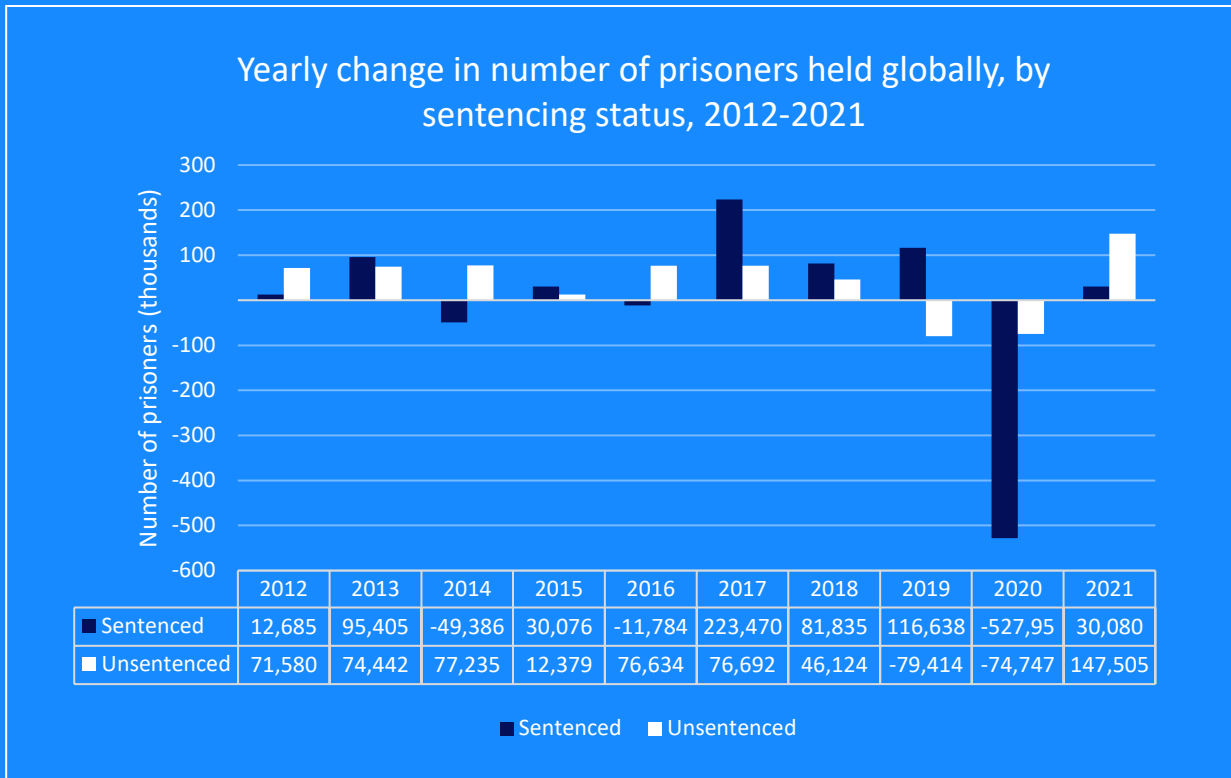
“JUST” EFFICIENCY AND SDG 16.3: MORE UNSENTENCED PEOPLE IN PRISON



- ➔ The number of unsentenced prisoners is rising, from 3.4 million people in 2019 to 3.5 million in 2021, raising concerns about gaps in access to justice. Moreover, the dynamics following the onset and development of the COVID pandemic appear to have triggered a short-term increase in the share of unsentenced prisoners, from 29 per cent in 2019 to 31 per cent in 2021, as the number of sentenced prisoners declined while the number of unsentenced prisoners increased shortly afterwards.
- ➔ Sustainable Development Goal target 16.3 – Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all – looks at the number of unsentenced detainees as a proportion of the overall prison population (indicator 16.3.2) as a measure of the efficiency of the justice system.
- ➔ Unsented prisoners were largely excluded from the benefits of COVID release schemes, with prisoners already convicted of a crime accounting for nearly 90 per cent of the reduction in the absolute numbers of prisoners between the end of 2019 and the end of 2020.
- ➔ The increase in the total number of prisoners between the end of 2020 and the end of 2021 is largely due to growth in the number of unsentenced prisoners (83 per cent of the yearly change between 2020-21).
- ➔ Halfway to 2030, with unsentenced prisoners accounting for nearly a third of the global prison population, there has been little progress towards achieving SDG 16.3.2 and increasing access to justice for all.

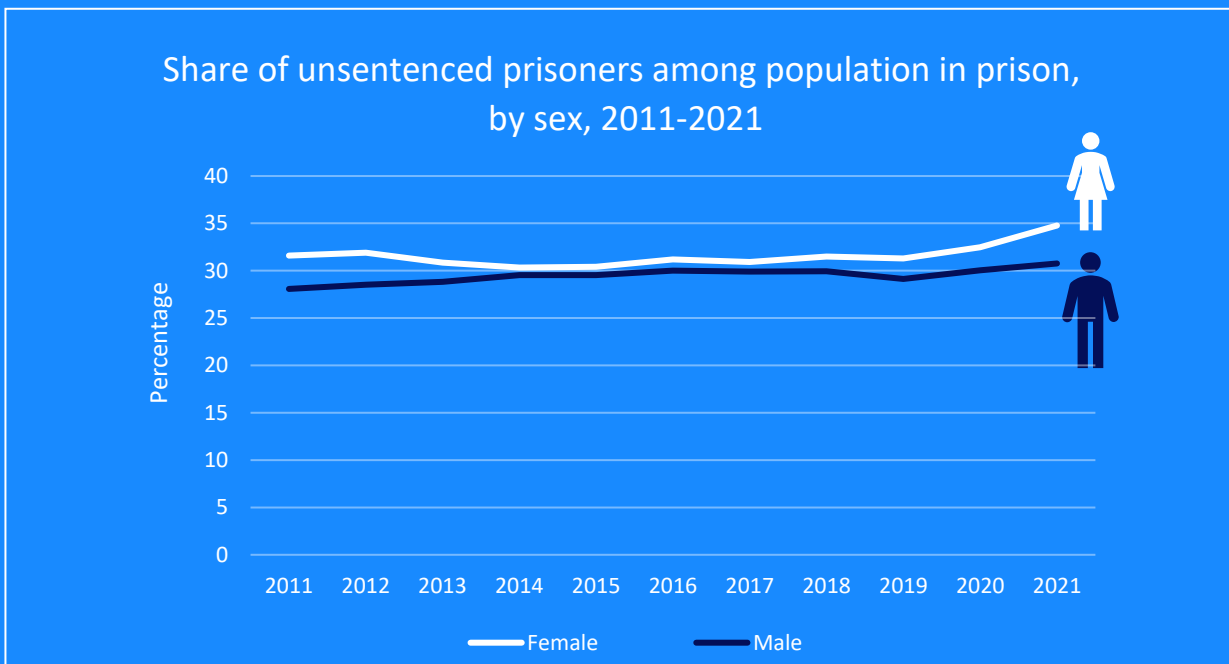
Global share of unsentenced prisoners among overall population in prison, 2011-2021

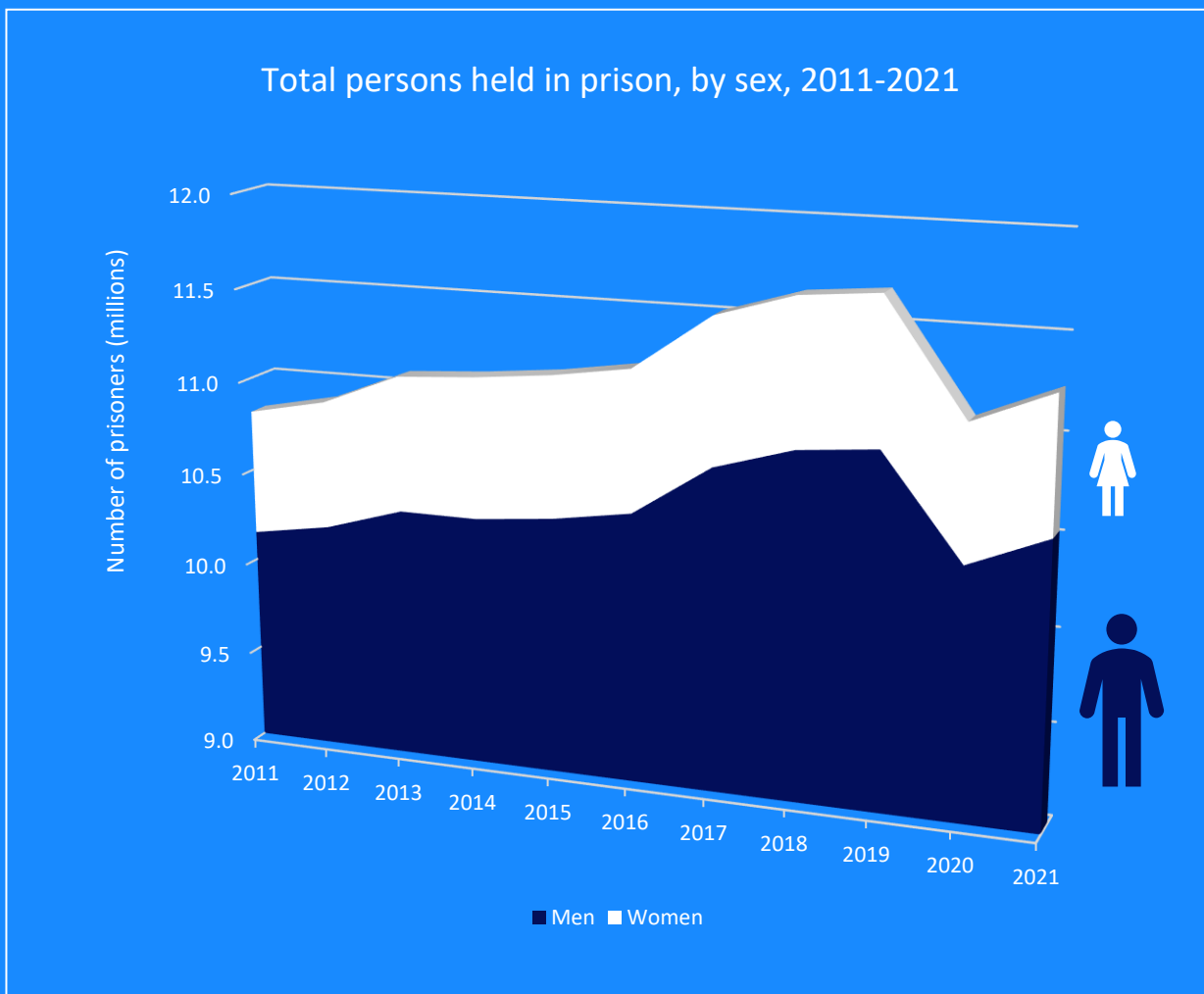




INTERSECTING VULNERABILITIES: UNSENTENCED WOMEN IN PRISON

- ➔ The share of women held in prison without a sentence also appears to be increasing in recent years, from 31 per cent in 2019 to 35 per cent in 2021. In comparison, the share of male unsentenced prisoners has remained relatively stable, increasing marginally from 29 per cent in 2019 to 31 per cent in 2021.
- ➔ Women – in prison in greater numbers over time and with a growing share of unsentenced prisoners compared to men - may be doubly vulnerable, and more research is needed to understand the dynamics as well as potential disadvantages and structural inequalities that could be contributing to this concerning trend.



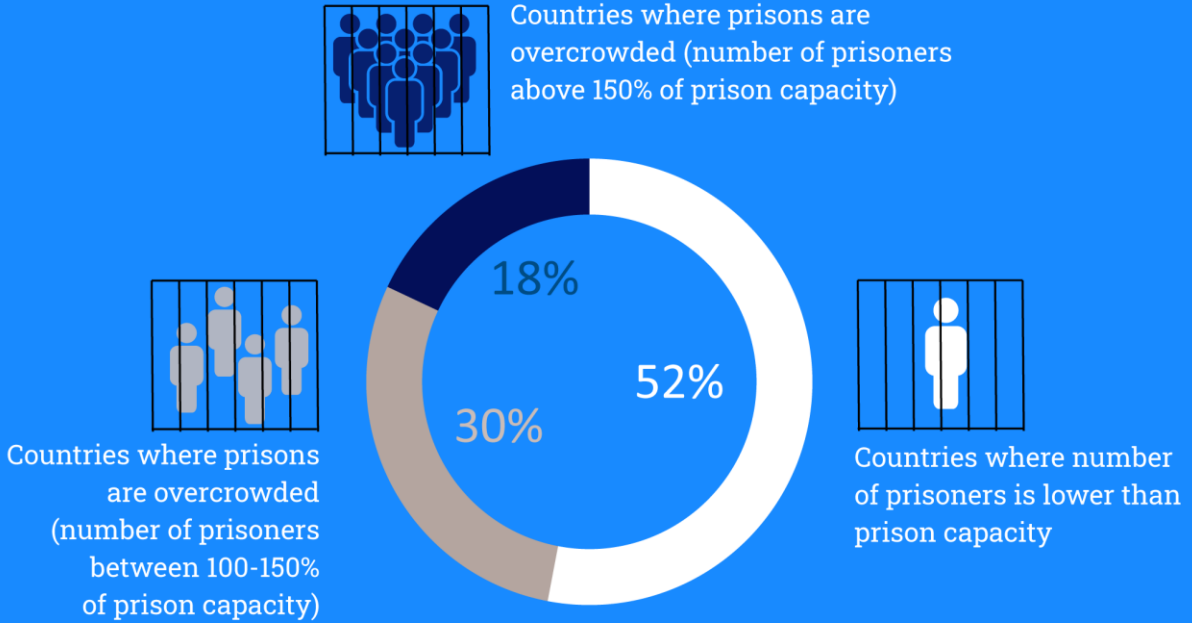


NO RELIEF FOR OVERCROWDED PRISON CONDITIONS

- ➔ People are being held in overcrowded prisons in nearly half of all countries, despite calls¹ during the pandemic to reassess resort to imprisonment to prevent the spread of COVID and relieve dangerously overcrowded conditions.
- ➔ Nearly one third of reporting countries are operating over 100 per cent of intended capacity, and some one in five countries are operating at more than 150 per cent.
- ➔ Global prison conditions are falling short of the commitments contained in the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules), which recommend that “Member States continue to endeavour to reduce prison overcrowding and, where appropriate, resort to non-custodial measures as alternatives to pretrial detention, to promote increased access to justice and legal defence mechanisms, to reinforce alternatives to imprisonment and to support rehabilitation and social reintegration programmes”.

¹https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/UNODC_Position_paper_COVID-19_in_prisons.pdf

Distribution of countries by overcrowding status, latest available year during 2015-2021 (N=96)



*Based only on adult prison population and capacity, not taking into account juvenile detention