

Prisons in Hong Kong

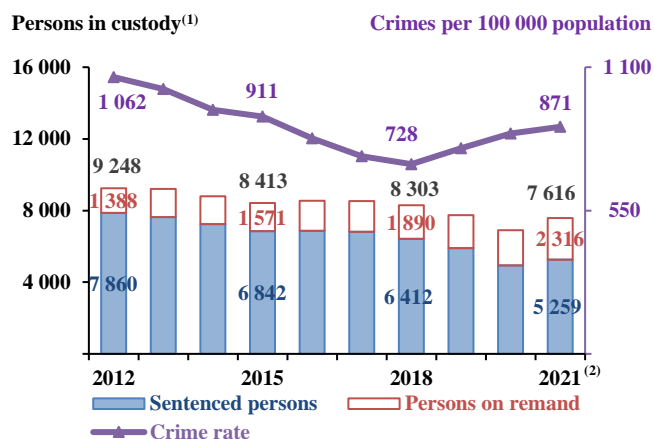
Figure 1 – Correctional facilities at end-2021

Type	Number	Persons in custody
Correctional institutions	24	7 867⁽¹⁾
- Prisons	14	7 235
- Rehabilitation centres	4	75
- Drug addiction treatment centres	3	297
- Training centre	1	0
- Detention centre	1	48
- Psychiatric centre	1	212
Half-way houses	3	21⁽²⁾
Custodial Wards	2	17
Total	29	7 905

Notes: (1) Including 97 detainees detained in Tai Tam Gap Correctional Institution under the Immigration Ordinance. They are neither sentenced persons nor persons on remand.

(2) Persons under CSD management.

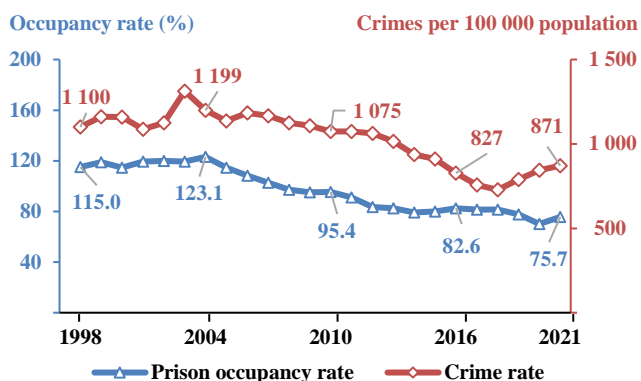
Figure 2 – Average daily number of persons in custody



Notes: (1) Total persons in custody include detainees, who are neither sentenced persons nor persons on remand.

(2) Figures reflect average daily numbers during 2021 as a whole, unlike the snapshot on 31 December 2021 shown in Figure 1.

Figure 3 – Occupancy rate of prisons

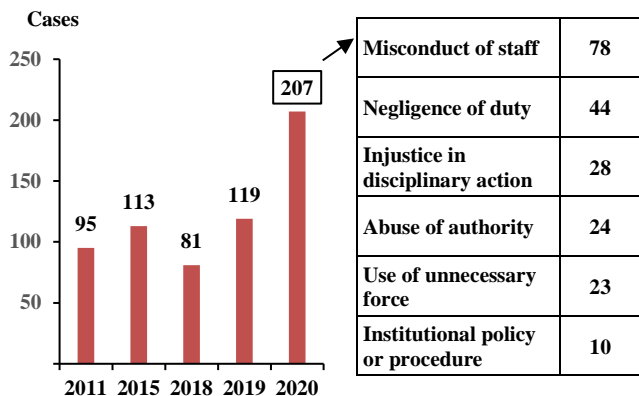


Highlights

- The Correctional Services Department (“CSD”) currently manages altogether 29 correctional facilities, comprising 24 correctional institutions (e.g. prisons and rehabilitation centres), 3 half-way houses and 2 custodial wards in public hospitals (**Figure 1**). At end-2021, these institutions housed altogether 7 867 persons in custody (“PIC”) and the majority (92%) of them were kept in prisons. This short piece focuses on PIC in prisons.
- Between 2012 and 2021, the average daily penal population declined by a total of 18% to 7 616 persons, in line with the concurrent decline (also by 18%) in crime reported to the Police (**Figure 2**). More recently, penal population continued to fall during 2018 to 2020, partly because of sporadic adjournment of court proceedings amidst the pandemic during 2020 and 2021. Court businesses were fully resumed for a period starting March 2021, but there was another round of adjournment in March-April 2022 due to the fifth wave of infections.
- Analyzed by type, the average daily number of sentenced persons fell by 33% in nine years to 5 259 persons in 2021, along with falling crime rates. On the other hand, the average daily number of persons on remand pending trial surged by 67% to 2 316 over the same period, resulting in a doubling of the proportion of remands amongst PIC from 15% in 2012 to 30% in 2021. More recently, the average daily number of persons on remand climbed up by 6% in 2020 and 18% in 2021, upon progressive initiation of legal proceedings against accused persons related to the social incidents in 2019. According to CSD, there was a total of 241 remands related to the social incidents during 2020, representing 4% of all persons put on remand during the course of that year.
- There are occasional concerns over the capacity constraints of prisons, as overcrowding could affect the quality of custody and management of facilities. During 1998 to 2007, the overall occupancy rate of prisons did remain elevated at above 100% (**Figure 3**). However, the occupancy rate then dropped significantly from the peak of 123.1% in 2004 to 75.7% in 2021, along with falling crime rates. That said, the occupancy rate of Lai Chi Kok Reception Centre was still above 100% in 2021, partly because more remands were kept there.

Prisons in Hong Kong (cont'd)

Figure 4 – Complaints about CSD entailing investigation by CIU⁽¹⁾



Note: (1) Including complaints from PIC and members of the public. Figures as from 2015 include complaints from CSD staff.

Figure 5 – Recidivism rate of local persons in custody

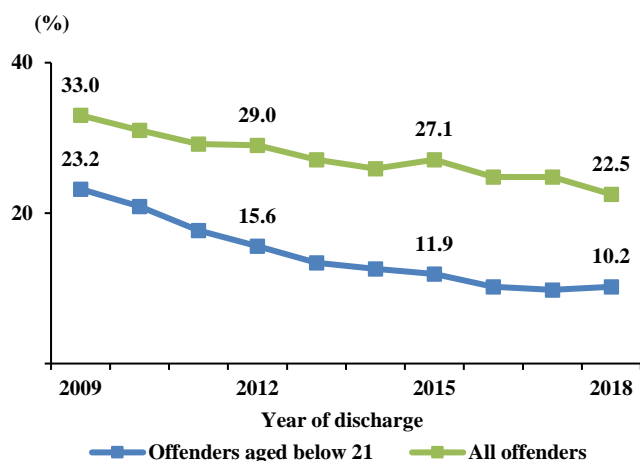
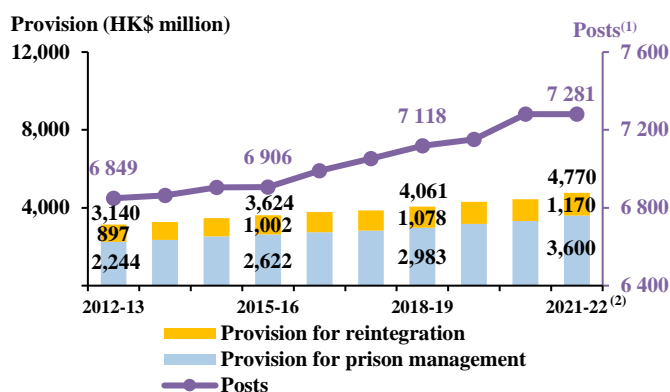


Figure 6 – Annual resources of CSD



Notes: (1) Number of posts as of the end of the respective fiscal year. (2) Revised estimate.

Highlights

- PIC may lodge complaints through multiple channels, such as (a) the Complaints Investigation Unit (“CIU”) of CSD, (b) visiting Justices of the Peace; and (c) the Office of The Ombudsman. More specifically on the number of complaints received by CIU entailing subsequent investigation, it surged by 118% in nine years to 207 cases in 2020, the highest since 2003 (**Figure 4**). Most complaints were related to misconduct of CSD staff (38%), followed by negligence of duty (21%) and injustice in disciplinary action (14%).
- On investigation outcome, among the 178 complaints investigated by CIU and endorsed by the CSD Complaints Committee within the year 2020, only 10 complaints (6%) were determined to be substantiated. While there are allegations that the complaints handling mechanism is not transparent enough, CSD remarks that it has faced “organised and planned malicious allegations” in recent years.
- Helping PIC to reintegrate into society is a core mission of correctional services. CSD is providing many rehabilitative programmes (e.g. counselling, vocational training and education). Among local PIC discharged during 2009 to 2018, their recidivism rate (i.e. the share of PIC readmitted into correctional institutions due to conviction of new offences within two years after discharge) has dropped steadily from 33.0% to 22.5% (**Figure 5**). For young offenders aged below 21, recidivism rate has even more than halved, from 23.2% to 10.2%.
- On manpower requirement, the number of CSD posts increased by 6% in nine years to 7 281 in 2021 (**Figure 6**). Annual expenditure of CSD registered a larger cumulative increase of 52% over the same period, reaching HK\$4.77 billion, of which about three-quarters were provisions for prison management and the rest for reintegration of PIC. Looking ahead, the CSD is modernizing prisons, with Tai Tam Gap Correctional Institution just converted into a “Smart Prison”, the first in Hong Kong, in 2021.

Data sources: Latest figures from Correctional Services Department and the Hong Kong Police Force.

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29 April 2022
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