



Mapping Solitary Confinement: Honduras country report

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1. Country general Criminal Justice System facts & numbers

Honduras has a centralized prison system under the administration of the National Penitentiary Institute [Instituto Nacional Penitenciario, INP] and the authority of the Secretary of Human Rights, Justice, Governance and Decentralization [Secretaria de Derechos Humanos, Justicia, Gobernación y Descentralización].

The prison system has a total of 26 correctional facilities with an official capacity of 13.000 prisoners. As of 2023, a total of 19.481 people were incarcerated in Honduras, leading to a prison occupancy rate of 150% and an incarceration rate of 189 per 100.000 inhabitants. Of the total prison population, 49.2% were pre-trial detainees, while 6.1% were female prisoners. Additionally, foreign nationals accounted for 117 inmates, representing 0.6% of the prison population ([World Prison Brief](#), [Prison Insider](#)).

Table 1. Honduras's prison population trend (2000-2023)

| Year | Prison population total | Prison population rate |
|------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| 2000 | 11,500 | 175 |
| 2004 | 10,931 | 148 |
| 2008 | 11,390 | 141 |
| 2012 | 12,095 | 139 |
| 2016 | 17,253 | 186 |
| 2020 | 21,675 | 218 |
| 2023 | 19,481 | 189 |

Source: [World Prison Brief](#)



2. Legislative and administrative bases for use of solitary confinement

Solitary confinement in Honduras can be applied under two distinct legal frameworks: as a disciplinary sanction for prisoner misconduct, or as a part of a high-security prison regime.

First, solitary confinement is recognized as one of the prison security regimes, alongside the minimum and medium regimes (article 32 National Penitentiary System Law). It is regulated in Chapter IV, Section III (articles 48-60) of the General Regulation Implementing the National Penitentiary System Law.¹ Within this regulation, it is described as an exceptional and temporary regime that can be used in specific cases (article 49) and intended to promote behavioural change and ensure safety of both the individual and other prisoners (article 48). In this context, it is a security-based classification applied to prisoners considered dangerous or high-risk, either due to the crimes committed or maladaptation to the regular regime (article 51 of the General Regulation Implementing the National Penitentiary System Law).

This type of confinement is further regulated under specific provisions in the Law on Prison Labor and Permanent Confinement for High-Risk and Highly Aggressive Prisoners,² along with its Special Regulation (Special Regulation on the Permanent Regime for High-Risk and Highly Aggressive Persons Deprived of Liberty³), which establishes stricter conditions and procedures for its application.

Solitary confinement is also included among the disciplinary sanctions that can be applied in response to prisoner misconduct (article 74 of the National Penitentiary System Law). In this framework, it is an infraction-based measure, involving the transfer of the inmate to a high-security unit within the prison or a separate facility, and it is regulated by the Prison Disciplinary Regime Regulation.⁴

¹ [Reglamento General de la Ley del Sistema Penitenciario Nacional](#)

² [Ley del Trabajo para personas privadas de libertad y de permanencia para reos de alta peligrosidad y agresividad](#). (Hereafter: *Law on Prison Labor and High-risk Confinement*).

³ [Reglamento Especial del Régimen de Permanencia para Personas Privadas de Libertad de Alta Peligrosidad y Agresividad](#). (Hereafter: *Special Regulation on High-Risk and Aggressive Prisoners*).

⁴ [Reglamento del Régimen Disciplinario de las personas privadas de libertad en el Sistema Penitenciario Nacional](#)



3. Reasons for use, process, and administrative regulations for each 'type' of solitary confinement.

a. Solitary confinement as punishment

The National Penitentiary System Law includes in article 74 a set of disciplinary sanctions applicable to prisoners, which includes the transfer to a maximum-security regime as a punishment. This disciplinary measure may be imposed when an inmate commits one of the serious infractions (article 50 of the Prison Disciplinary Regime Regulation) listed in article 46. These include possessing or distributing weapons, drugs or other unauthorized objects; attempting to escape or inciting riots; damaging prison infrastructure; disobeying authorities; engaging in violence or coercion; committing sexual offenses, and; obstructing the rights of other prisoners.

Among the list of sanctions, the transfer may consist of either being transferred to a "high security unit within the same prison, to another prison with a "high security module" or to a high security correctional facility (article 74 of the National Penitentiary System Law and article 51 of the Prison Disciplinary Regime Regulation).

This decision needs to be determined by the Interdisciplinary Technical Board [Consejo Técnico Interdisciplinario], which determines both the location and the duration of the placement (article 51 of the General Regulation Implementing the National Penitentiary System Law). This decision must be based and supported by a report on the inmate and can be appealed against before the Execution Judge [Juez de Ejecución] (article 52).

Once an inmate is placed under this regime, their status is held to a review process: there is an initial review after 60 days. If the decision is upheld, a second review will take place 90 days after the initial decision has been made. If it gets maintained again, then there is a monthly revision of the situation. Nonetheless, in all cases the maximum duration an inmate can be under this regime cannot exceed 6 months, with no legal provision for an extension (article 53 of the General Regulation Implementing the National Penitentiary System Law).

Under this regime, there are strict limitations on movement, but also on social interaction and communication. Prisoners have the right to leave their cell for a minimum of 3 hours a day and may participate in activities included in their Individual Treatment Plan [Plan de Atención Integral], which need to have prior authorization (articles 55 and 60).

They are allowed to keep in their cells all necessary hygiene objects, bedding and other objects necessary for their treatment (article 56). Meals will take place in their cells (article 57) and prisoners are required to clean their own cells with the materials provided by the prison staff (article 58).



Communications can be restricted and monitored, except for communication between prisoners and their legal representatives, judicial authorities and human rights organizations (article 49). Visitation is also restricted. Family visits are allowed monthly for a maximum of three hours, while conjugal visits limited to once every two months (article 267).

In addition, prisoners are subjected to security measures, which include constant surveillance and prison personnel regularly doing unannounced inspections of the cell and other common spaces (like the patio or visits area). Only authorized personnel and human rights observers can enter the unit and must undergo security screening and give their electronic devices (article 60). The use of force can only be authorized by the Director, or the highest-ranking security officer, and it should be proportional and adhere to the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials (article 60).

b. Solitary confinement for the prisoner's own protection

There is no data available.

c. Solitary confinement as management of those labelled as 'difficult' or 'dangerous'

Prisoners considered high-risk in terms of prison management, either due to the severity of the crimes committed (offenses against life or physical integrity), or due to displaying violent conduct that disrupts life in prison making coexistence in common spaces difficult, or due to acts that endanger the prison's security, may be assigned to a high security regime (article 51 General Regulation Implementing the National Penitentiary System Law).

Being placed into this regime requires an order from a judicial authority or a transfer order from another prison based on security criteria, which must be supported by clinical assessments and determined under criminological criteria (article 9 Special Regulation on High-Risk and Aggressive Prisoners).

According to the Law on Prison Labour and High-risk Confinement, "highly dangerous" prisoners are those serving sentences for organized crime or members of criminal groups. "Highly aggressive" prisoners are defined as those who are a threat to the safety of other prisoners, prison staff or visitors, based on psychiatric or psychological evaluations (article 4).

The regulation does not establish a maximum duration for this regime but provides that the National Penitentiary Institute Board [Instituto Nacional Penitenciario, INP] will determine the length of this measure (article 10 Law on Prison Labor and High-Risk Confinement). Prisoners are to be regularly assessed, and their conduct and risk levels reviewed in order to determine their whether they should continue to be subjected to the regime (article 23). The prisoner will only leave the high security regime if: this was determined by a court order; the person's sentence has been completed; transfer to another facility; or a resolution by the Interdisciplinary Technical Board [Consejo Técnico Interdisciplinario] establishing that the



criminological criteria that justified the confinement under this regime no longer apply (article 39).

The conditions under this regime are stricter than the regular maximum-security regime, as detailed in article 8 of the Special Regulation on High-Risk and Aggressive Prisoners, as well as article 9 of the Law on Prison Labor and High-Risk Confinement. Prisoners are entitled to a daily hour of sunlight in controlled areas. They will be completely isolated from other prisoners, to prevent any physical contact between them. Physical exercise and other opportunities to leave the cell are also severely restricted.

Visits can be allowed under controlled conditions, only for family members and under no contact conditions, which can take place either in special booths or supervised video calls (article 28 of the Special Regulation on High-Risk and Aggressive Prisoners). Conjugal or intimate visits are prohibited. In terms of communication, telephone calls to external contacts are forbidden, and contact with legal representatives or diplomats is only allowed during restricted hours (articles 31-34 Special Regulation on High-Risk and Aggressive Prisoners).

Prisoners are not allowed to have televisions, radios or any type of electronic devices (article 9 of Law on Prison Labor and High-Risk Confinement and 8 of the Special Regulation on High-Risk and Aggressive Prisoners). All written material must be approved beforehand.

Food is provided by prison administration at designated hours, and prisoners cannot receive external food or prepare their own meals. Hygiene items such as toiletries and cleaning items are provided for limited time and are removed immediately afterwards (article 8 Special Regulation on High-Risk and Aggressive Prisoners).

d. Solitary confinement pre-trial

The Honduran law does not contain specific provisions regulating the use of high-security regimes or solitary confinement for pre-trial detainees.

4. Restraints and chemical irritants

Under the Honduran regulation framework, the use of restraints (such as handcuffs, shackles or other physical control mechanisms) is explicitly prohibited as a form of punishment or disciplinary sanction (article 118 of the Penitentiary Law). However, their use is permitted under exceptional circumstances when other means have failed. These situations include during transfers to prevent escape, for medical reasons when there is an order from the medical personnel, or to prevent an inmate from causing harm to themselves or others.

In all cases, the applications of restraints require the express authorization of the prison director and must be immediately reported to the facility's medical service, the National



Penitentiary Institute and the judge (article 77 and 118 of the Penitentiary Law; article 334 of the General Regulation Implementing the National Penitentiary System Law).

Regarding chemical irritants, the use of non-lethal agents such as pepper spray [“aerosols de acción no letal”] is allowed under strictly defined circumstances, including imminent threats to security, serious incidents or physical resistance to orders (article 333 of the General Regulation Implementing the National Penitentiary System Law).

While the law allows for the use of restraints and chemical irritants, there is currently no data confirming their use within solitary confinement units.

5. Protected populations

The country’s prison regulations do not include any provisions regarding the protection of individuals from vulnerable groups (such as pregnant or breastfeeding women, children, people with any kind of disability or LGBTQI+ individuals) from being placed in the special regime or being applied isolation as a disciplinary measure.

However, the country has ratified several international treaties relevant to the treatment of people deprived of their liberty, including the Convention Against Torture. International standards including the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Mandela Rules) and the Bangkok Rules, also address protected populations.

The [UN Convention Against Torture](#) prohibits any cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and obliges the states to prevent them (article 16). This includes the excessive or discriminatory use of solitary confinement. Additionally, the [Mandela Rules](#) explicitly prohibit prolonged and indefinite confinement, which should not be longer than 15 consecutive days (Rule 44), and state that these measures should never be used against individuals with mental or physical disabilities (Rule 45).

The UN Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules) prohibit the use of solitary confinement for pregnant women, women with children or breastfeeding, due to the serious health and psychological risks that it involves (Rule 22).

Regarding children and young people, Honduras signed the [Convention on the Rights to the Child \(CRC\)](#) in 1990, and incorporated it into Honduran law. The CRC establishes that detention of minors must be a measure of last resort and for the shortest period of time (article 37). Any form of solitary confinement in a juvenile detention setting is, therefore, incompatible with the best interests of the child and has been condemned.



The United Nations Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty (known as the Havana rules) prohibit the use of disciplinary measures that can be cruel or degrading treatment on minors under imprisonment, including solitary confinement (article 67).

In terms of people with disabilities, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which Honduras signed and ratified and which requires that states ensure that this people are not subjected to inhuman or degrading treatment (article 15) and to provide accommodations according to their specific needs in detention (article 14).

In terms of LGBTQI+ people, the [Yogyakarta Principles](#), a set of international principles relating to sexual orientation and gender identity, which are not legally binding but should be considered relevant. They highlight that isolation of LGBTQI+ individuals in prisons should not be subjected to isolation or segregation based on their sexual orientation or gender identity, as it can lead to discrimination and further marginalization, and recommend states to adopt other policies without resorting to segregation of these individuals (Principle 9).

[The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights \(IACHR\)](#) and the UN Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity have both condemned the use of solitary confinement as a protective measure for LGBTQI+ people as a substitute for protection mechanisms.

Also applicable are the [Yogyakarta Principles](#), a set of international principles relating to sexual orientation and gender identity, which are not legally binding but should be considered relevant. They highlight that isolation of LGBTQI+ individuals in prisons should not be subjected to isolation or segregation based on their sexual orientation or gender identity, as it can lead to discrimination and further marginalization, and recommend states to adopt other policies without resorting to segregation of these individuals (Principle 9).

There is little to no official data in Honduras on how solitary confinement is applied to these groups, and no formal safeguards are known to be in place.

6. Statistical data on use of solitary confinement/segregation

Information regarding the number of people in solitary confinement is not currently available.

7. Jurisprudence on solitary confinement

There is currently no known domestic jurisprudence in Honduras that specifically addresses the legality or constitutionality of solitary confinement. Therefore, the most applicable jurisprudence comes from the Inter-American system, where Honduras has been the subject of several landmark rulings:



- [Velásquez Rodríguez v. Honduras \(1988\)](#)
The Court established foundational standards on the treatment of detainees, noting that prolonged or unjustified solitary confinement can constitute cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment under Article 5 of the Convention.
- [Fairén-García and Solís-Corrales v. Honduras \(1989\)](#)
The Court condemned the practice of isolation in dark, solitary cells without judicial oversight, ruling that this violated the right to personal integrity (Art. 5) and due process guarantees (Art. 8) of the Convention.

8. Reports on the use of solitary confinement

8.1 National Inspection and Monitoring Bodies

Under the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT), Honduras established a National Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CONAPREV), which conducts regular inspections on detentions facilities. The reports of these visits occasionally include information about the use of solitary confinement:

- **Women in prison: Honduras - Analysis from the National Preventive Mechanism (2024)**
This report highlights concerns regarding the use of solitary confinement and high-security regime for women. It explains how isolation is often applied without addressing the causes of violent behavior and contributes to depression, anxiety and other psychological harm, especially in facilities that lack the minimum conditions for prolonged detention.
Additionally, it notes that women are not classified according to legal status or risk level, instead classification is based on space availability or gang affiliation. Disciplinary sanctions, including solitary confinement, are applied without due process. Moreover, the overall prison conditions aggravate the harmful effects of isolation and confinement.
- **Annual national report of the CONAPREV (2023)**
In its 2023 annual publication, CONAPREV documents that some prisoners were placed in prolonged cell-based confinement without legal clarity, and that certain prison authorities apply punitive isolation without proper disciplinary procedures or justification.
The report also highlights overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure and lack of ventilation in confinement areas, including the cells. It also raises concerns about the



absence of individualized risk assessments in the assigning prisoners to closed regimes and reliance on subjective criteria.

- **Annual national report of the CONAPREV (2021)**

The 2021 report from CONAPREV expresses concern about the use of prolonged cell confinement and isolation in multiple detention centers. For example, in “El Carmen” facility, prisoners were held in their cells for up to 22 hours a day, with limited time outdoors and restricted access to education and recreational activities. Similar conditions were found in the National Penitentiary for Women, where some areas lacked basic ventilation and hygiene.

8.2 Reports by non-governmental bodies

- **Report of the civil society to the Association for the Prevention of Torture (2024)**

This alternative report submitted by civil society organizations to the UN Committee Against Torture documents that prisoners are often subjected to extended solitary confinement in high-security regimes.

It also emphasized that overcrowding, poor infrastructure and lack of ventilation continue to worsen conditions, particularly in closed-regime units. These factors alongside with deficiencies in the classification systems and the militarization of prison management contribute to practices that can be considered cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

8.3 Other reports

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) regularly publishes reports to monitor and promote the protection of human rights across the Americas. The following reports specifically examine the human rights context in Honduras:

- **Report on the Human Rights Situation in Honduras (2024)**

This report explains how prisoners in maximum-security prisons have been subjected to degrading conditions, like long-term isolation, sometimes in a dark or windowless cell, under a regime with no access to sunlight, outdoor space or any form of contact with the outside world. Even though this regime is aimed for high-risk or gang-affiliated prisoners, the report notes how classification is often applied arbitrarily, without adequate individual assessments or legal oversight.

- **Report on the Human Rights Situation in Honduras (2019)**

This report documents that in some Honduran prisons, such as “La Tolva”, “El Pozo” and “Támara”, prisoners are subjects to high-security regimes in extreme restrictions. These include prolonged isolation, with prisoners being locked in their cells for up to 24 hours a day, and limited or no access to light, fresh air or outdoor spaces.

Some prisoners are held in dark and poorly ventilated punishment cells, sometimes without mattresses, as a form of discipline or control.