



Mapping Solitary Confinement: North Korea country report

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1. Country general Criminal Justice System facts & numbers

North Korea's penal system was founded soon after the Workers' Party of Korea came to power in September 1948. Today, a large network of penal facilities detains people who are awaiting trial, who have been convicted of criminal or political offences, or who are subject to administrative penalties. Overseen and funded by the Workers' Party of Korea and managed and staffed by several ministries and state organisations, the purpose of the penal system is not solely the reduction of recidivism. It is just one component of a machine that includes police and security agencies, the court system, the military, and state propaganda institutions that exist to correct the ideological alignment of citizens, to remove from society those who cannot be reformed, and to reinforce the domination of the Workers' Party of Korea. Prisoners are subject to a punitive rather than rehabilitative correctional system of reform and re-education through forced labour. Under this system, prisoners are not only deprived of their liberty. They experience physical and psychological torture, rape and sexual violence, forced starvation, extrajudicial killings, and more. Conditions of detention do not meet the most basic of international standards. Cells are overcrowded and prisoners suffer multiple forms of degrading treatment, unsanitary conditions, and the denial of medical care.

250 interviews were conducted with former prisoners, documenting 153 prisons.

The number of prisoners in North Korea is unknown.

2. Legislative and administrative bases for use of solitary confinement

Solitary confinement is routine and there are solitary confinement cells in many documented penal facilities. We have documented solitary cells that are purposefully built with ceilings half the height of a human to inflict further punishment on detainees. There are no provisions in NK's criminal code regarding solitary confinement.



3. Reasons for use, process, and administrative regulations

a. Solitary confinement as punishment

There are no legally authorised uses of SC. In our documentation, SC is used arbitrarily and as a form of punishment for detainees housed in normal cells. In some cases, ranking officials who have been arrested are detained in SC and away from 'regular' criminals. For example, in one detention centre, the SC cell measured 60cmx2m – height 1.5m and had no windows, ventilation, toilet, or furniture. Contact with the outside world is prohibited and there is no access to state assigned lawyers. Places of worship are universally denied across North Korea (NK) and religion is prohibited.

b. Solitary confinement as management of people labelled as 'difficult' or 'dangerous'

Any prisoner may be placed in solitary confinement. There is no maximum length of detention. Pre-trial detention may last for over 7 years.

c. Solitary confinement for the prisoner's own protection

N/A

d. Solitary confinement pre-trial?

Commonly documented.

e. Solitary confinement in immigration detention?

Immigration and emigration are outlawed in NK.

4. Restraints and chemical irritants

Doors to cells are close to the ground and allow for detainees to crawl, rather than walk out of a cell. They must crawl backwards out of the cell and not look up. If they look up, they are subject to physical assault with feet and fists.

5. Protected populations

None.

6. Authorisation

Unknown.

7. Statistical data on use of solitary confinement/segregation

Unknown. We have 70 cases.

8. Jurisprudence on solitary confinement

N/A

9. Reports on the use of solitary confinement

There are no known reports other than our [prison database](#)