

OVERVIEW OF THE CORRECTIONAL DEPARTMENT IN MOROCCO

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We actually know very little about prison history in Morocco because of a shortage of literature in this area. The available texts refer to the Protectorate in the beginning of the 20th Century as the period which witnessed the institutionalization of the prison system in terms of rules and procedures, human resources, construction, funding and offenders' treatment in particular. Such initiative reforms were stressed by many Acts, mainly those in 1915, 1924 and 1930 which led to the creation of a central office to ensure adequate oversight and supervision. This period saw the improvement of offenders' accommodation, health care, and food service. However, there was no trace of offenders' rehabilitation and preparation for their reintegration into society. In addition, there was much discrimination between Moroccan and European inmates in many ways.

When Morocco received its Independence, a Royal Act (*dahir cherif*) was passed on 16 October 1956, which brought corrections under the authority of the ministry of justice instead of the department of public security. Since then, the prison system has experienced many highlights and challenges. Thus, new reforms took place in 1974 and 1976 after the passing of two main Acts which managed to implement laws stressing the promotion of staff welfare and offender rehabilitation.

The most important reform carried out at the level of the prison system was thanks to the passing of the Prison Act 23-98 in 1999. This modern Act emphasized offenders' rehabilitation and reinsertion programs in accordance with human rights issues and the International Standards related to offender treatment.

Another turning point in modern history of Moroccan corrections was the Royal Act of April 2008 by means of which the prison system stopped being an integral directorate of the ministry of justice and was brought under the authority of the chief of the government. Thanks to this Act, the department of correction gained its autonomy in terms of human resources management, legislation, budget management, etc. In addition, the head of the department of corrections, the *Delegue General*, has assumed since then overall responsibility for the prison system which consists today of 80 institutions: a central office (headquarters), 9 regional offices, 2 training academies (one of them will open by the end of 2012), and 68 prisons as will be explained later in this paper.

The central office is located in Rabat (the capital) and consists of four directorates: the directorate of rehabilitation and offenders' reintegration, the directorate of security and safety of the public and correctional construction, the directorate of human resources management, the directorate of budget and equipment. These directorates in terms of organizational structure consist of 13 divisions and 35 services.

For the sake of decentralization and good governance, nine regional offices were created in 2010 to provide close supervision and to ensure adequate application of policies and procedures. Each regional office consists of four services:

- Service of offenders' rehabilitation and social programs
- Service of the security of corrections
- Service of human resources management

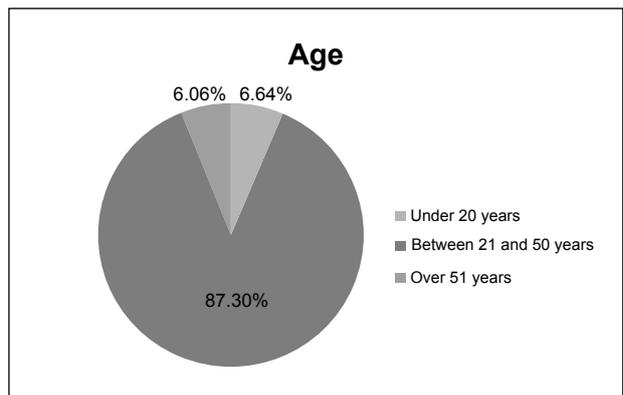
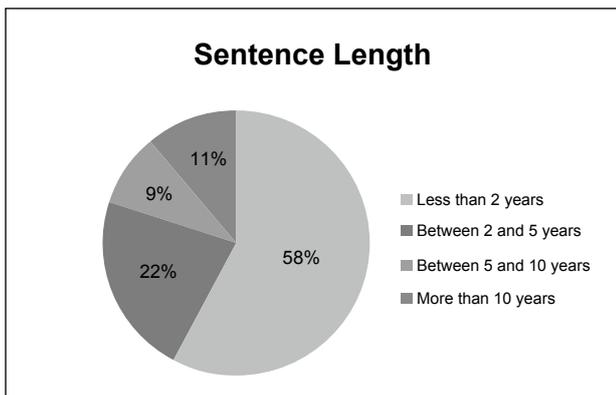
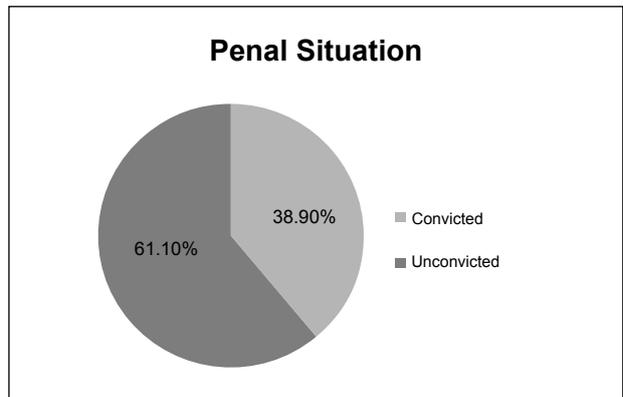
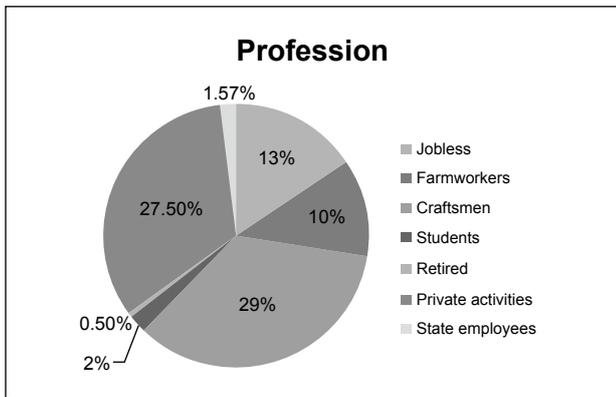
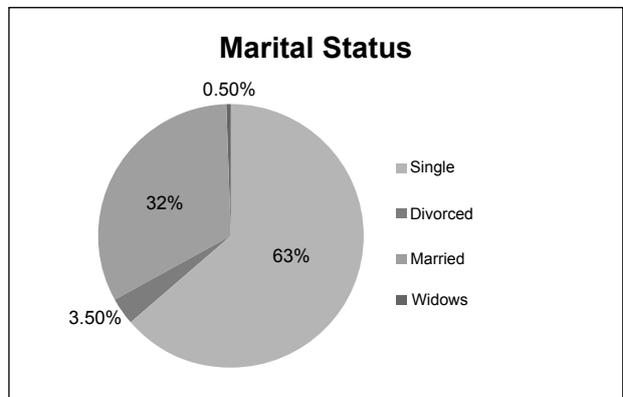
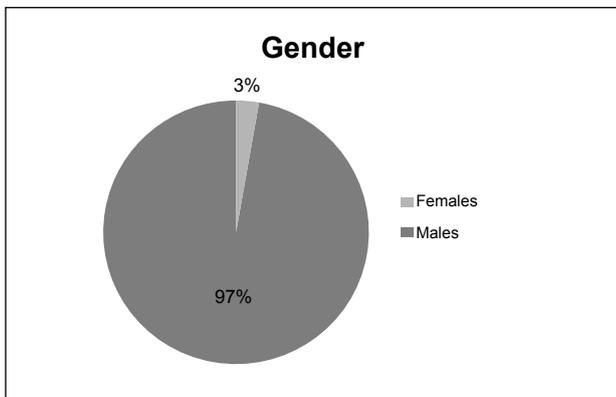
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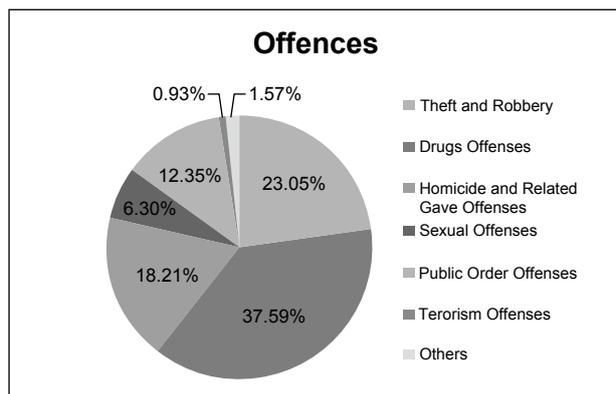
- Services of general instruments: budget, logistics, etc.

As regards corrections, the Moroccan system consists of four main categories of prisons with almost no distinctions in terms of security levels, and all of them providing offenders with various rehabilitative programs. The current prison disposition is as follows:

- 2 central prisons: accommodate only convicted male offenders serving long sentences, life sentences and some difficult offenders.
- 55 local prisons: accommodate unconvicted male and female inmates and those serving short sentences.
- 3 juvenile correctional institutions which accommodate youthful male offenders under the age of 20 years.
- 8 agricultural prisons established within different regions of the kingdom. These prisons accommodate convicted male offenders who are close to being released and provide them with vocational training in the field of farming as a preparation for their reintegration.

Today, the Moroccan population is estimated at 30 million people, while the prison population has oscillated during recent years between 57,000 and 67,000 inmates. The following statistics are intended to give an idea about the characteristics of this prison population.





Each institution of the department of corrections is vital to the overall team, and all the institutions work together for the same mission which is based on the whole correctional philosophy and criminal policy of the country as follows:

- Make prisons safer, more secure and more humane.
- Ensure inmates' rehabilitation for less reoffending.
- Enhance professionalism and efficiency in prison management.

In fulfilling this mission, there have been many of problems and difficulties to overcome by the correctional department namely:

- Overcrowding.
- Inadequacy in staff and funding.
- Staff corruption and inefficiency.
- Insufficient staff training.
- Relatively poor staff welfare and conditions of service.
- Inadequacy in infrastructure, instruments and logistics.
- Inadequate maintenance of tools, infrastructure, etc.
- Lack of adequate information management systems to guarantee smooth networking with established government databanks.

So as to overcome such difficulties and carry out correctional missions properly, the department of corrections has adopted different measures and strategies such as:

- Hiring 1,000 employees every year.
- Implementing new rules and procedures related to security, public safety and offenders' rehabilitation.
- Building more prisons with appropriate and compatible characteristics.
- Closing old prisons which are considered real barriers to prison reforms.
- Building one more training academy.
- Enhancing staff welfare for increased efficiency by promoting salaries and compensation.
- Creating job-specific and management compensation.
- Optimizing utilization of the limited correctional resources.
- Taking severe disciplinary measures in case of staff law breaking, corruption, misconduct and offender mistreatment.
- Emphasizing offenders' rehabilitation programmes.

As matter of fact, many correctional reform initiatives have been achieved in the past four years; this was basically due to the King's strong will and continuous commitment which have placed more emphasis on human rights and offender rehabilitation as a priority in governmental policies and national strategic projects for development. However, there are still more efforts and reforms to be carried out so as to achieve satisfactory results and to make corrections a department which enhances the community's safety, welfare and pride both at the national and international levels.