

OMCT Global Torture Index: A new measurement tool

Cecilia de Armas Michelis¹

Introduction

Torture and other forms of ill-treatment represent some of the most severe violations of human integrity and dignity. Yet, torture and ill-treatment remain widespread in many countries across the world and impunity for this crime is pervasive, constituting one of the primary obstacles to progress in the prevention and eradication of torture and ill-treatment. The lack of transparent, victim and survivor-centred and responsive mechanisms to process and sanction claims of torture and other ill-treatment leads to a global underreporting of such acts.

The Global SOS-Torture Index ('the Torture Index') aims to shed light on this crime by assessing the risk of being subjected to torture and other forms of ill-treatment in any given country. A thorough analysis based on comprehensive data, measuring the different dimensions of the eradication of torture, becomes crucial to identify trends and track progress and setbacks within and between countries and regions over time. The data has been collected and validated by OMCT members and partners with longstanding experience and local expertise on anti-torture and other human rights issues.

The universal anti-torture framework covers a comprehensive set of rights and obligations to eradicate torture. These are set out in the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. From prevention to accountability and victims' rights, torture and other ill-treatment take place in detention settings, but also in extra-custodial settings, such as during protests, evictions, or day-to-day police operations. This crime is often perpetrated

against individuals or communities who have been historically marginalised and discriminated against. States need to put in place specific structures and safeguards to protect the rights of those who are more exposed to violence. It is equally crucial to promote and protect the role of individuals, institutions, and civil society organisations that defend the right to be free from torture and other ill-treatment.

The Torture Index's methodology is developed in partnership with members of the SOS-Torture Network as well as leading global anti-torture experts and implemented with a bottom-up approach, in which detailed first-hand information is gathered from local civil society organisations – mainly OMCT members and partners. Given their daily experience on the front line of the fight against torture in different contexts and different parts of the world, the almost 200 SOS-Torture Network members have an incomparable legitimacy to carry out this analysis. This is combined with a rigorous analysis and scoring methodology.

The OMCT Global Torture Index will be published on the 25 of June 2025, within the OMCT Global Week Against Torture, offering a comprehensive assessment of 26 countries across all regions of the world including Africa, Americas, Europe and Central Asia, Asia and MENA, with the intention to add more countries as the Index scales-up. We have selected the Index implementing countries based on strategic criteria to ensure relevance and effectiveness. Countries were chosen with attention to geographic diversity and the presence of pressing human rights issues, allowing the Index to reflect a broad global scope. Priority was given to countries where the OMCT has established members and close partners, ensuring strong local engagement and collaboration and a substantial base of relevant data, analysis, and reports, providing a strong foundation for evidence-based monitoring and advocacy. Lastly, we have selected countries that have undergone a review by the Committee Against Torture (CAT) in recent years or during the Index implementation year, aligning the information with international human rights mechanisms.

The Torture Index captures and assesses the progress on the various dimensions and obligations regulated by international human rights law under the following seven thematic pillars:

1. Political commitment against torture: Evaluation of the state's legal obligations, treaty ratifications, and implementation of core anti-torture commitments and public policies in line with international and regional frameworks at the national level.
2. Ending police brutality and institutional violence: Assessment of safeguards and oversight mechanisms to pre-



¹ Global Torture Index Coordinator at the OMCT, correspondence to: cam@omct.org

vent torture and other ill-treatment in the context of law enforcement operations and during arrest, police custody, and interrogation.

3. Freedom from torture while deprived of liberty: Evaluation of safeguards in detention facilities, ensuring decent conditions, legal protections, and humane treatment, with mechanisms for accountability and monitoring, especially for specific groups.
4. Ending impunity: Examination of mechanisms to ensure accountability for torture and other ill-treatment, including independent investigative and judicial mechanisms, effective remedies for victims, trained forensic services, and specific mechanisms to address accountability gaps in different contexts.
5. Victims' rights: Evaluation of the state's responsibility to provide holistic redress to torture victims, along with comprehensive rehabilitation, safety, and access to specialised services.
6. Protection for all: Assessment of the state's positive obligations to ensure the enjoyment of human rights and the right not to be subjected to torture and other ill-treatment of specific groups and individuals facing a higher risk – such as children, women, LGBTIQ+ individuals, and ethnic minorities—and the implementation of effective legal and institutional measures against violations by state and non-state actors.
7. Right to defend and civic space: Evaluation of the legal framework, institutional practices and risks faced by human rights defenders and civil society organisations due to their human rights work, focusing on the ability to operate freely, document abuses, and engage in decision-making processes without restrictions.

The Torture Index reviews states' compliance with the highest international standards against torture and ill-treatment, providing an overall assessment by scrutinising laws, policies, and their actual implementation. Key anti-torture standards include provisions set forth in:

- UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and its General Comments (N° 2, 3,4)
- UN Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
- The UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners.
- The UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials.

- Other crucial international and regional human rights instruments, standards, rules and guidelines.

Methodology and approach

The Torture Index gathers first-hand information from local civil society organisations - mainly members and close partners of the SOS-Torture Network - annually. Given their daily, hands-on experience on the front line of the fight against torture in different contexts and across the world, network members are the best placed to gather quantitative and qualitative data to form the basis for the analysis.

The questionnaire is designed with a human rights-based approach, aiming to identify contexts, as well as individuals and groups, most at risk of torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment (CIDTP), e.g. women, children, LGBTIQ+ individuals, migrants and asylum seekers, ethnic and racial minorities.

The Index takes as the primary methodological reference for human rights measurement the OHCHR guide on human rights indicators. A questionnaire, designed to collect information about compliance with international standards, its implementation and impact on rights holders, based on the specific measurement objectives of the Index, includes the following types of indicators:

- Structural: reflecting a country's legal and policy framework in accordance with human rights, international treaties, instruments, and standards.
- Process: measuring the state's efforts to implement human rights commitments through public policies, regulations, programs, budgets, protocols, among others.
- Outcome: capturing groups' actual and/or perceived enjoyment of human rights and reflecting the impacts of the two indicators above.

Participatory survey and validation procedure

The Index questionnaire included several steps to ensure a participatory approach. Firstly, the OMCT Secretariat drafted the Index methodology and questionnaires in line with international human rights standards, following multiple rounds of internal review by staff. After this process, the team conducted several bilateral meetings with key OMCT partners, renowned anti-torture experts, and organisations developing similar indexes. The objective was to initiate a first validation process of the methodology, identifying gaps in the questionnaire and the implementation process.

At a second instance, the Secretariat organised a Global Torture Index expert meeting in Geneva, involving a broader audience of partners and experts working in torture advocacy,

research, statistics, and decision-making bodies to discuss the Index in depth. The meeting included participation of experts and practitioners from across the globe to ensure that diverse views and systems were considered. The aim was to discuss the drafted methodology, questionnaire, and thematic pillars and identify ways to overcome implementation challenges. After this discussion, the questionnaire was thoroughly reviewed through thematic workshops.

Lastly, following the thematic workshops and methodology adaptations, the Index has been tested in 7 countries (2023) and an additional 14 countries (2024). At the end of this process, the OMCT Secretariat held meetings with the partners involved in the piloting to adjust the questionnaire, where applicable. The OMCT has also established an Index Steering Committee, which plays a key role in guiding the implementation of the Index, providing strategic direction, and overseeing progress to ensure transparency and accountability. The Committee is composed of eight members representing all five global regions.

Index visualisation

The Index is a human rights measurement tool, and thus, for each country, the following key quantitative indicators are calculated:

- 7 thematic scores for each thematic pillar of torture and ill-treatment (score ranging from 0 to 100)
 - 1 aggregate torture and ill-treatment score, based on a weighted average of the seven pillars (score ranging from 0 to 100)
 - 1 expert-based data transparency and access to information scale, with the proportion of missing data per country to assess data reliability and transparency.
- Each of the above scores reflects the general level of compliance, implementation, and enjoyment of the right to be free from torture and other ill-treatment with a holistic approach. The scores range from 0 to 100, with 100 being the best possible (highest compliance with human rights standards surrounding the right to be free from torture and other ill-treatment) and 0 being the worst.
- Overall scores constitute the basis for the interactive online map on the Global Torture Index landing page, which will be published on June 25, 2025. The raw score will not be published in the first years, but rather five categories ranging from ‘very high’ to ‘low’ risk per country identified on a heat map using different colours, to allow users to easily and visually compare the level of compliance per country and to identify systemic issues.
- The Index webpage will include:
- Classification of risk levels across the seven thematic pillars.
 - Ten tailored recommendations provided for each country.
 - Highlighting good practices from governments and/or civil society actors.
 - Inclusion of survivor testimonies and storytelling.
 - Acknowledgement of organisations that collaborated on the Index.
 - Access to related resources and articles published on the OMCT website.

Figure 1. OMCT members and partners participated in the first Global Torture Index meeting in Geneva (January 2023)



Data challenges

While developing and testing the index methodology, we encountered several challenges related to data collection, comparison, and analysis. Some of these are the complexity in measuring torture and other forms of ill-treatment and how to categorise the data (e.g. those based on perception, judgment, etc). Moreover, in some contexts and countries, there is a lack of accurate and trusted information, figures and sources on torture, as well as a lack of understanding of the broad concept of torture by some actors. During the elaboration and implementation of the Index, we take these challenges into high consideration so that they have as little negative impact as possible. It is important to highlight that during the first three years, the Index methodology is adjusting and evolving by integrating a regular learning and review process to identify possible gaps and/or areas of improvement. This process is done with the expertise and support of the Index Steering Committee, OMCT staff, members and partners, anti-torture experts and academia.

The right of access to information's key role in the index

What is the Right of Access to Information?

Protecting the right of access to information is vital for ensuring the transparency and accountability of public institutions—cornerstones of participatory democracy and good governance. This right empowers civil society organisations, journalists, and individuals to scrutinise the conduct of public bodies, expose human rights violations, and foster informed public debate. It enhances participation in decision-making and strengthens the democratic process. Also referred to as the right to information, it is a fundamental attribute of the freedom of expression. Greater openness and transparency build trust and confidence in pub-

lic authorities while serving as powerful tools to combat corruption and misinformation, empowering citizens and human rights defenders to safeguard rights and prevent abuses. Enabling vulnerable groups to exercise their rights more effectively becomes a vehicle for promoting equality and justice.

Access to information constitutes a vital safeguard against torture and other ill-treatment. Prisons and other places of detention are, by definition, out of the public eye. Thus, authorities have an obligation to produce, publish, and disseminate data, regulations, and documents related to prisons' management, the rights and treatment of detainees, and remedies available, among other things. Major gaps in access to information in prisons were laid bare in the context of the management of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lessons learned from the Global Torture Index implementation

Within the pilot phase of the Global Torture Index implementation in 2024, we have confirmed the existence of serious challenges in access to information in all 21 measured countries, from all regions. The Index serves as a tool for identifying data gaps by highlighting the (un)availability of information across specific countries, both in the absence of a specific legislation and in the lack of availability, in practice, of data regarding number of cases of torture and investigations, protocols used by law enforcement, type of weapons used, oversight mechanisms in public offices, among others. In the figures below you will find some findings identified in the 21 countries measured in 2024: Bahrain, Belarus, Colombia, Congo, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Hungary, India, Italy, Kyrgyzstan, Libya, Mexico, Moldova, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, the Russian Federation, Spain, Togo, Tunisia and Türkiye.

Figure 2. *Right of access to information: Index pilot phase in 21 countries.*

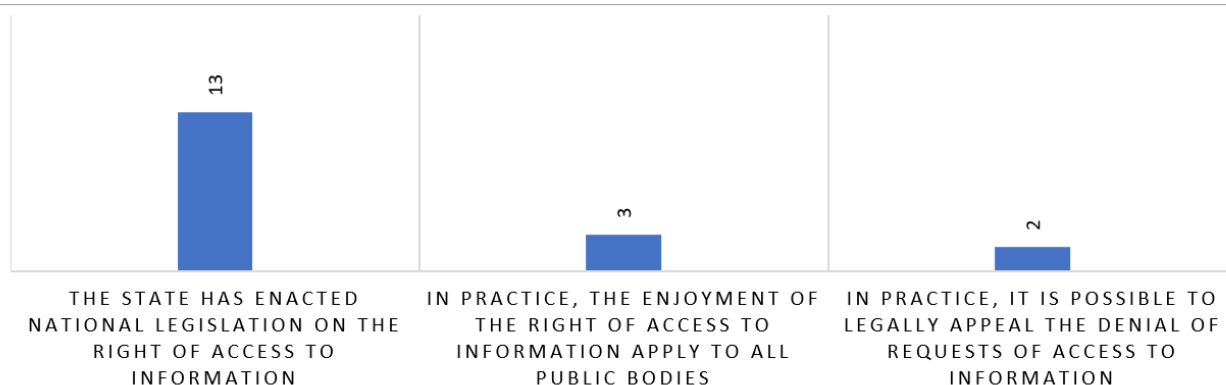


Figure 3. Information available to the public: Index pilot phase in 21 countries

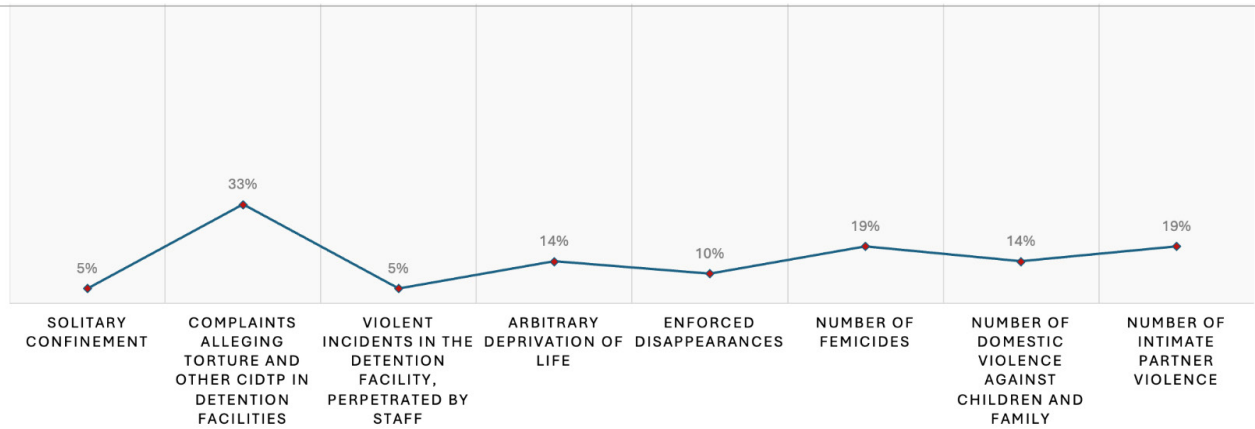


Figure 4. Challenges in Accessing Information and Data Gaps in Monitoring Torture and Ill-Treatment.



Even if there is a national law on access to information, many of these fail to meet international or regional standards due to the following issues:

- Overly broad or vaguely framed exemptions, not following international standards' definitions.
- The law is not accessible in all national languages.
- Lack of disaggregated data.
- Lack of independent oversight mechanisms.
- Inadequate or non-existent appeals mechanisms.



In practice, there are **barriers that hamper the access of the information**, including:

- Poor record-keeping.
- Inadequate capacity and resources.
- Inadequate training for public officials to handle information requests.
- Insufficient resources to respond effectively.
- Released or requested information may be delayed or incomplete.



Several challenges and gaps are recognised in the collection and dissemination of information related to the implementation of obligations set forth in the **Convention against Torture** and other instruments regulating criminal justice systems. In many countries, there is a lot of opacity when it comes to crucial data affecting persons deprived of liberty, their families and the general public, such as statistics regarding deaths in custody, number of persons that have contracted infectious diseases, regulations and restrictions in place. Beyond the deprivation of liberty context, information is often scarce when it comes to data on excessive use of force by law enforcement officials, disciplinary and criminal sanctions against law enforcement officials, among others.



Data gaps and inadequate definitions of torture, ill-treatment and other human rights violations in line with international standards, prevent the Index from fully reflecting specific challenges, risk factors, trends in the analysed countries as they are frequently hidden. This situation poses a big challenge and hampers the completeness of results, elaboration of tailored advocacy strategies and the identification of trends.

Human rights defenders (HRDs) and civil society organisations (CSOs) within their work on documentation of human rights violations and advocacy rely on data published either by governments, international organisations, victims, or other actors such as the NPM, NHRI, academia, etc. They need to access public information to publish reports, support victims, engage in dialogue with governments and denounce abuses. By accessing data on torture and ill-treatment, civil society can identify patterns of violations, groups and contexts most affected as a prevention tool, types of weapons and/or techniques that are causing more harm so as to revise laws, and protocols on the use of force and their implementation by law enforcement officials. We can also understand how the justice system is dealing with the investigation and trials of cases of torture and ill-treatment, with a focus on groups such as women and children, as well as identifying if victims' redress is adequate.

Every state has the obligation to fulfil the right to information by producing and regularly publishing statistical information that would enable the general public, civil society organisations and human rights defenders to:

- Hold human rights violations and perpetrators to account
- Formulate and add weight and evidence to submissions and human rights claims, for example, to submissions to the UN and regional human rights mechanisms, to provide contextual data.
- Publish and analyse statistics without fear of reprisal
- Measure and demonstrate human rights issues and identify trends.
- Track progress and/or regression, including early warning.
- Advocate for the compliance with international human rights and statistical standards, including the United Nations Principles for Official Statistics, for their data collection, storage and dissemination of statistical information and analysis.

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