

27 April 2021

C132138

s9(2)(a)

Tēnā koe s9(2)(a)

Thank you for your email of 19 February 2021, requesting information about gangs in New Zealand prisons. Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA). I apologise for the delay in responding to your request.

Gangs in various forms have existed in New Zealand communities and prisons for several decades and are heavily embedded in parts of the community. This is a societal issue that will take a whole of government and community response to change.

The New Zealand gang landscape is dynamic. Relationships between gangs and gang members are complicated, varied, and often contradictory. The complex nature of these relationships influences the development of traditional, and creation of new, alliances and rivalries. Within this complex environment, gang tensions flare up intermittently, often resulting in conflict and the use of violence and weapons. In recent years, gang-related violence in prisons has increased in frequency and severity and is now more planned and deliberate.

Certain gangs may be involved in greater numbers of incidents in prison or in the community largely due to a high number of overall gang members. However, some gangs with smaller numbers are often responsible for more serious acts of violence and can have a deeper reach due to the fluidity in who they align themselves to.

Gang violence and other anti-social activity is not something Corrections can resolve or manage alone. Social and welfare issues, employment, education, health and mental health services and support for families and communities all need to combine to reduce the impact of gangs. As it has in the community, the proportion of people in prison identified as gang members has steadily increased over the last thirty years.

Anti-social gang activity is an on-going problem recognised by Corrections, the New Zealand Police, other government agencies, and our wider communities. Corrections works with a range of partners on initiatives that:

- contain the negative influence of gang members in the custodial and community corrections environment;
- disrupt the efforts and capabilities of gang members to organise and commit crime from within prisons and in the community;

- reduce reoffending through meaningful rehabilitation and reintegration and engagement; and
- reduce the harm caused by gangs in prisons and in the community.

Corrections takes all reasonable steps to discourage people in prison from gang membership by providing programmes and opportunities to support them with disassociating themselves from gangs and gang-related activities. This includes supporting people to build alternative support networks, or access services such as tattoo removal. Pathways to exit gangs can also form part of a broader suite of rehabilitation programmes which support offenders to build sustainable and law-abiding lifestyles.

You requested:

Could I please get which gangs are in New Zealand prisons?

Could I please get that broken down into individual prisons?

Could I please get that broken down into decades so 1991, 2001, 2011, 2021

Information relating to the gang affiliation of people in prison was not centrally recorded by Corrections until 2009. In order to provide gang affiliations of people in prison prior to 2009, we would be required to manually review the files of prisoners during those periods. In accordance with the OIA, we have considered whether to affix a charge or extend the time limit for responding. However, given the scale of the request we do not consider that this would be an appropriate use of publicly funded resources. Therefore, this part of your request is declined under section 18(f) of the OIA, as the information cannot be made available without substantial collation or research.

Appendix One provides the gang affiliations of people in prison, broken down by gang and prison, as a snapshot at 31 December 2010 and 31 December 2020. Several prisons either opened or closed between these dates.

The information in the appendix represents the number of people in prison who identified as active affiliation with a gang. This term is used to refer to anyone who is presently recorded as having a connection to a gang, including prospects, associates and patched members. People in prison can be identified as being connected to a gang by various means, including by one or more of the following:

- Gang tattoos/markings;
- Gang documentation/paraphernalia;
- Information from other agencies;
- Admission to staff;
- Staff observations; and/or
- Intelligence information from other sources.

I trust the information provided is of assistance. Should you have any concerns with this response, I would encourage you to raise them with Corrections. Alternatively, you are advised of your right to also raise any concerns with the Office of the Ombudsman. Contact details are: Office of the Ombudsman, PO Box 10152, Wellington 6143.

Ngā mihi

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a series of connected loops and a long horizontal tail.

Rachel Leota
National Commissioner