



Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile

February 2025

These 'Bromley Briefings' are produced in memory of Keith Bromley, a valued friend of the Prison Reform Trust and allied groups concerned with prisons and human rights. His support for refugees from oppression, victims of torture and the falsely imprisoned made a difference to many people's lives. The Prison Reform Trust is grateful to the Bromley Trust for supporting the production of this briefing.

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Cover image by [AndyAitchison.uk](https://www.andyaitchison.uk)

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Introduction

It is difficult to overstate the challenges facing our prison system today. As chief executive, I have seen firsthand the human cost of overcrowded, under-resourced prisons that too often fail the people within them and the communities they serve.

This year's Bromley Briefings paints a stark picture: a 25% increase in self-harm incidents among men, the highest-ever recorded levels of self-harm among women, and a 27% rise in self-inflicted deaths among male prisoners.

With a further five prisons receiving Urgent Notifications last year, the chief inspector has turned his attention towards the lack of purposeful activity in our prisons — a direct consequence of overcrowded prisons that have lost all sense of their primary purpose, which is to create order, predictability and the opportunity to reset. Instead, the headlines have been dominated by images of filthy squalor, prisoners either acquiring addictions or worsening them and getting into the cycle of debt and violence. Organised crime within prisons is now being seen as a threat to national security.

The crisis in our prisons is particularly acute for those serving indeterminate sentences for public protection (IPP), where self-inflicted deaths have reached record levels. These figures do not just represent failures in policy — they are a sobering reminder of the suffering endured behind prison walls.

The Prison Reform Trust has been instrumental in achieving reform, helping secure legislative changes in the Victims and Prisoners Act 2024 that ended licences for 1,800 people serving an IPP sentence in the community. Yet with 1,200 still in prison, we continue to advocate for their safe release and lasting change to this unjust system.

For decades, we have packed our prisons beyond capacity without investing in the resources, programmes, or support systems needed to help people to rebuild their lives. This approach does not work. Overcrowding breeds hopelessness, fuels violence, and undermines any meaningful attempt at rehabilitation. Short sentences disrupt lives without addressing root causes, while community-based alternatives, which consistently show lower reoffending rates, remain underutilised and distrusted.

Yet even in this bleak landscape, there are glimmers of hope. A new government appears willing to confront these issues head-on. Initiatives such as the independent review of sentencing, the SDS40 scheme to ease pressure on the system, and the Probation Reset signal a willingness to turn the tide. Within some prisons, modest but meaningful improvements — such as increased time out of cells and better post-release employment and housing outcomes — show that change, while slow, is possible. The launch of the Women's Justice Board has created much needed hope within the sector — but we need to learn lessons from what has worked and move towards a solution-oriented approach to enacting the ambitions that were laid in front of us nearly 20 years ago. Now is not the time for more reviews, now is the time for action.

Incremental progress, although welcome, is not enough. To transform our prison system, we must move beyond containment toward a model that prioritises rehabilitation and reintegration. This requires a commitment to evidence-based policies: investing in programmes that strengthen family ties, expand employment opportunities, and offer community-based alternatives to incarceration. Intensive Supervision Courts and other proven initiatives must be scaled up, and we must address the backlog in our courts and the rising number of recalls.

Crucially, we must also bring the public along on this journey. Politicians often assume that the public demands harsher sentences, but the research tells a more nuanced story. When people understand the realities of our justice system, they overwhelmingly support reforms that focus on rehabilitation rather than retribution. By engaging the public — through initiatives like citizen juries, greater transparency and education — we can build a shared vision for a justice system that truly serves the interests of the whole of society.

Prisons should be places of rehabilitation, not despair. Overcrowded and unsanitary facilities punish people beyond the deprivation of liberty, stripping away the protective factors — family connections, employment, stability — that reduce reoffending and enable people to rebuild their lives.

This report is a call to action. The state of our prisons is not inevitable; it is the result of choices. By embracing reform and collaborating, we can create a system that is fair, humane and effective. This is a pivotal moment, and the decisions we make today will shape the future of our justice system.

The journey toward meaningful change begins now. Let us seize this opportunity together.

Pia Sinha

Chief Executive Officer, Prison Reform Trust

SENTENCING AND THE USE OF CUSTODY

Prison sentences explained

In 2023, the Justice Committee concluded that there is a need for greater efforts to develop public knowledge of sentencing, and that it is “incumbent on all policymakers and opinion-shapers to play a role in shaping constructive debate”.¹ In this section, we set out the main types of prison sentences used in England and Wales.

There are many types of custodial sentence, and they vary in how they are administered.

Determinate or indeterminate sentences

A determinate sentence has a definite end date. An indeterminate sentence does not.

Proportion of sentence spent in prison

Most prison sentences allow for the possibility of serving some of the sentence on licence in the community, known as conditional release. But the proportion of a sentence spent in prison and on licence varies from half to two thirds depending on the sentence. If somebody breaches the terms of their licence they can be recalled to prison for the rest of their sentence.

Automatic or discretionary release

Some prison sentences have a set date for conditional release that triggers automatically. For others, conditional release is decided at the discretion of the Parole Board, based on whether they think the person can be managed safely in the community. The amount of time served before becoming eligible for discretionary release varies by sentence.

Post-sentence supervision

Certain sentences impose supervision beyond the end of a person’s sentence, with further sanctions imposed for noncompliance.

Community sentences

Community sentences are different to custodial sentences. They impose any number of 13 requirements on a person, which they must comply with. If a person breaches the conditions of their community sentence they can be fined, have additional restrictions imposed, or could be resentenced, with the possibility of custody.²

Legend

Suspended sentence	Custodial period of sentence	Period of sentence on licence following discretionary release	Period of sentence on licence following automatic release	Period of post-sentence supervision
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Custodial sentences: Suspended

Suspended sentences are the least restrictive form of custodial sentence. They do not actually send people to prison — but they use the threat of doing so. Judges may ‘suspend’ a custodial sentence of up to two years, and may impose conditions such as a curfew or unpaid work. If someone breaches their conditions or commits a further offence within the suspended sentence time period, they can be sent to prison for the remainder of the sentence.³

Imprisonment can be triggered by breaches or further offending

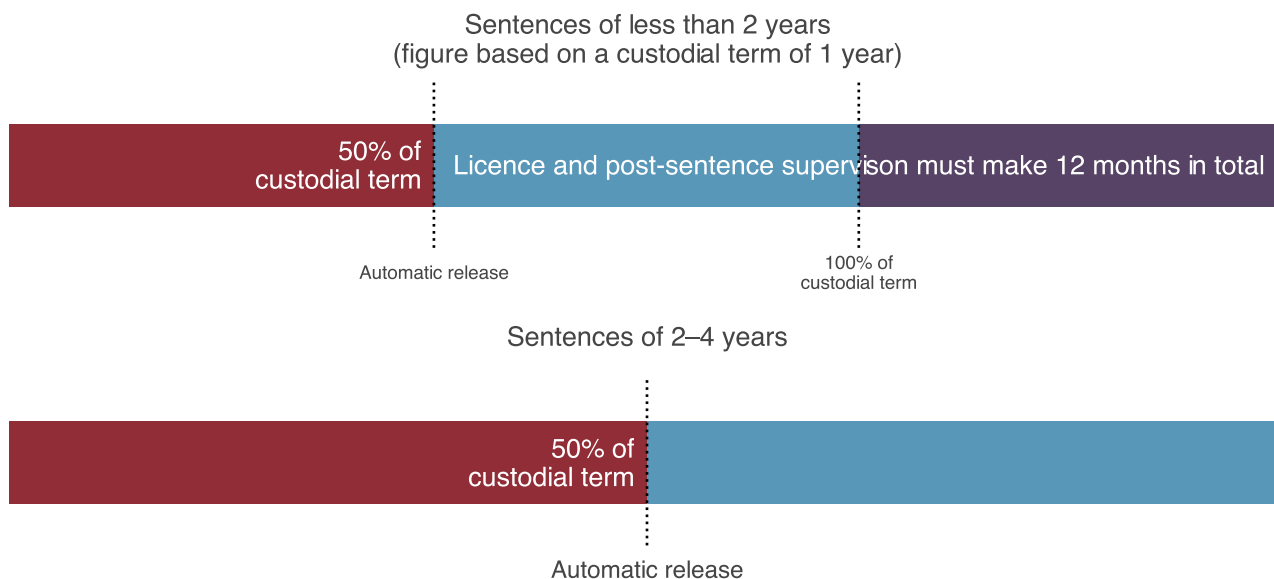
¹ House of Commons Justice Committee (2023). Public opinion and understanding of sentencing. House of Commons.

² Sentencing Academy (n.d.). Community orders. Accessed 12 February 2024.

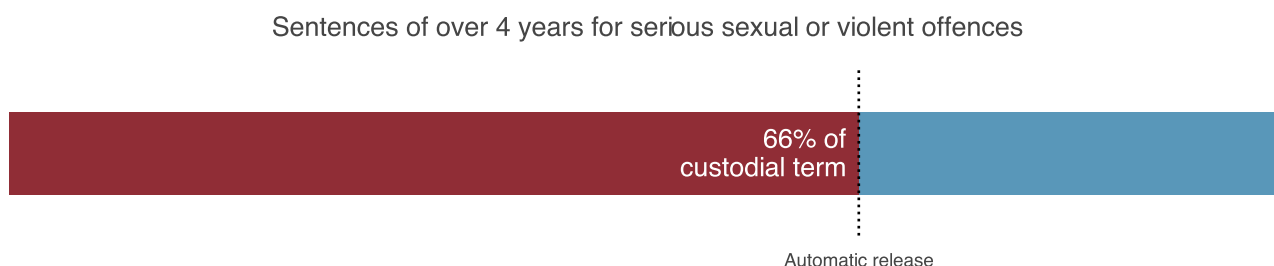
³ Sentencing Academy (n.d.). Suspended sentence orders. Accessed 12 February 2024.

Custodial sentences: Standard determinate

Standard determinate prison sentences have a set length, and an automatic release date in most circumstances. The length is decided based on the offence and certain personal and offence-related circumstances. People serving standard determinate sentences of less than four years are usually automatically released halfway through their sentence. They serve the rest under supervision by the Probation Service, which will include licence conditions. If they breach those conditions, they can be recalled to prison for the remainder of their sentence.⁴ For standard determinate sentences of less than two years, a period of post-sentence supervision is added on to any time served on licence in the community, to make a total supervision period of 12 months. In 2024, an emergency measure was passed to address the prison capacity crisis, and now certain prisoners serving a standard determinate sentence of under four years are released after serving 40% of their sentence. People convicted of sex offences, and offences connected to domestic violence, coercive and controlling behaviour, stalking, harassment, terrorism and certain other violent offences were excluded.⁵

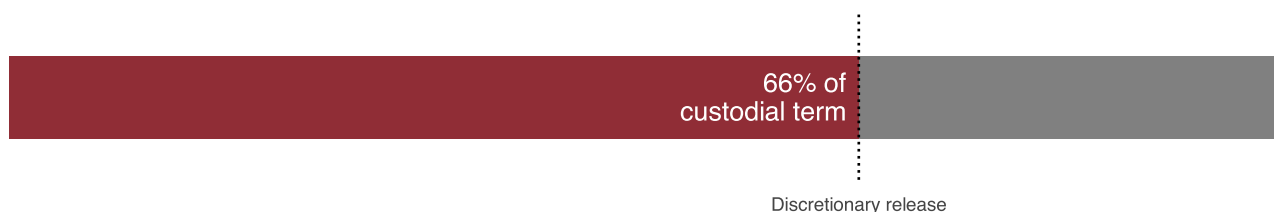


People serving standard determinate sentences of more than four years are released two-thirds of the way through their sentence if they are convicted of serious violent or sexual offences. If they are not convicted of such offences, they are released at the halfway point.⁶



People serving a standard determinate sentence for terror offences are not automatically released. They are instead assessed by the Parole Board as to whether it is safe to release them.⁷

As of 2022, people serving a standard determinate sentence can now have their automatic early release prevented if they become a significant public protection concern during their time in custody. They are instead referred to the Parole Board.⁸



⁴ Sentencing Council (n.d.). Determinate prison sentences. Accessed 12 February 2024.

⁵ Ministry of Justice (2024). Statutory Instrument to amend the standard determinate sentence automatic release point. Impact assessment.

⁶ Sentencing Council (n.d.). Determinate prison sentences. Accessed 12 February 2024.

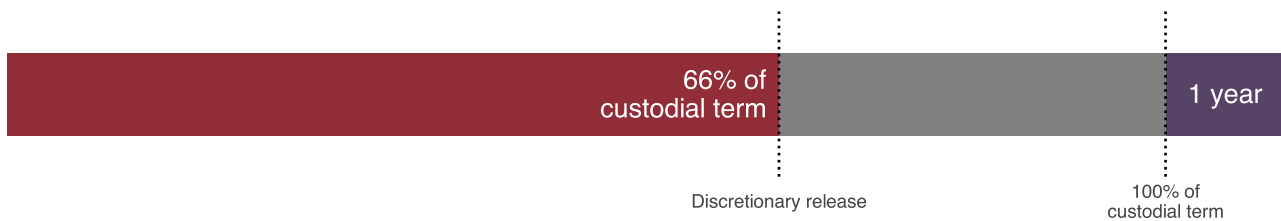
⁷ Terrorist Offenders (Restriction of Early Release) Act 2020. s1.

⁸ Police, Crime, Courts and Sentencing Act (2022). s132.

Sentences for offenders of particular concern

People convicted of certain terrorism and child sexual offences can receive a special sentence reserved for ‘offenders of particular concern’ (known as SOPC). They prevent automatic early release and add an additional year of supervision on licence at the end of the full custodial period. However, people convicted of sexual offences may be conditionally released after serving two-thirds of their custodial term.⁹

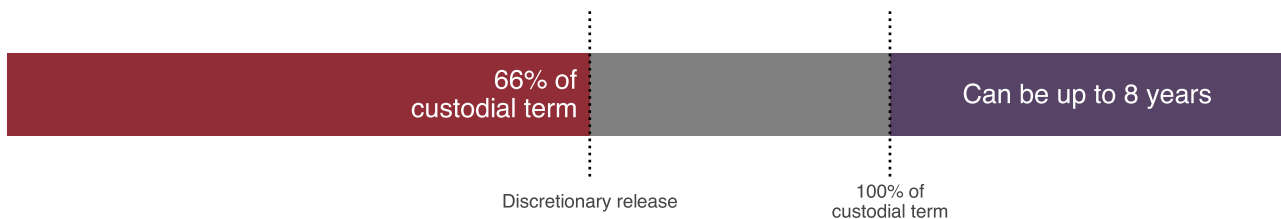
Based on a custodial term of 10 years (the average term of a SOPC in 2023)



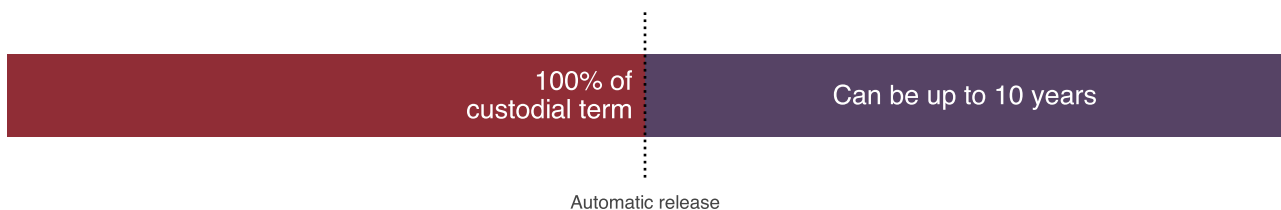
Custodial sentences: Extended determinate

Extended determinate sentences (EDS) are longer sentences with additional built-in public protection measures. People serving EDS sentences are usually not eligible for automatic early release. They are reviewed by the Parole Board two-thirds of the way through their sentence, and can be released on licence if the board thinks it is safe to do so. They serve the rest of their sentence supervised by the Probation Service, and may be recalled to prison for the rest of their sentence if they breach their conditions. People serving an EDS also have an additional period of up to eight years on licence imposed by their judge, to be served at the end of their custodial term.^{10,11} In 2021, the law was amended for people serving an EDS for certain terrorist offences. They must now serve their full custodial term in prison and up to 10 years on extended licence.¹²

Based on a custodial term of 9 years (the average term in 2023)
and an extended licence period of 4 years (half of the maximum allowable)



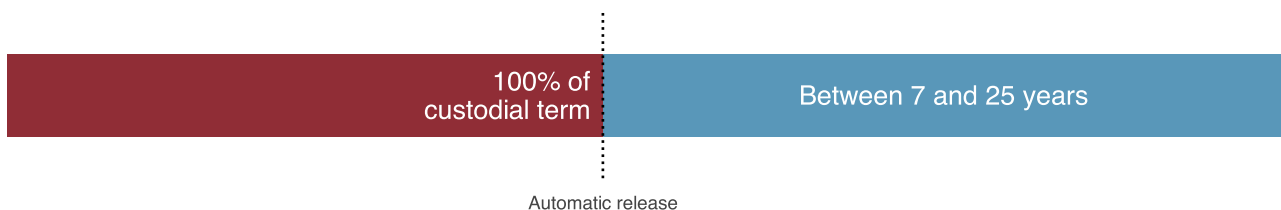
EDS for terror offences



Custodial sentences: Serious Terrorism Sentence (STS)

Serious Terrorism Sentences impose a minimum custodial period of 14 years which must be served in full, followed by an extended licence period of between 7 and 25 years.¹³

Based on a custodial term of 14 years (the set period)
and an extended licence period of 16 years



⁹ Judicial College (2023). The Crown Court compendium part II: Sentencing.

¹⁰ Sentencing Academy (n.d.). Extended sentences. Accessed 12 February 2024.

¹¹ EDS sentences work slightly differently depending upon the date of sentence, offence, and sentence length. People who received their sentence before 13 April 2015 with a custodial period of less than 10 years are released automatically at two-thirds of the custodial term, with the exception of certain specified offences. Historic versions of EDS (such as the Extended Sentence for Public Protection, or EPP) have further variations.

¹² Counter-Terrorism and Sentencing Act 2021. s16–18, s20, s27–s28 & s31.

¹³ Counter-Terrorism and Sentencing Act 2021. s4–7.

Custodial sentences: Imprisonment for public protection (IPP)

An IPP sentence imprisons people indefinitely based on what they might do, as well as what they have done. People serving an IPP have a minimum term they must spend in prison (a tariff) based on their crime. They are then detained in prison indefinitely, potentially for the rest of their life, until the Parole Board decides they are safe to release. They must then be managed indefinitely on licence in the community, and may be recalled to prison for an indefinite period. The Parole Board may lift their IPP licence after 10 years or leave it in place.¹⁴ The IPP sentence was abolished by the government in 2012, but almost 3,000 people are still in prison, despite an inquiry describing the sentence as “irredeemably flawed.”¹⁵

Based on a custodial tariff of 4 years (the average tariff of unreleased people serving an IPP in prison) and an assumption of living for 40 years after release



Custodial sentences: Mandatory life sentences

Mandatory life sentences must always be imposed for murder. All life sentences (except whole life sentences) have three parts. A judge decides the minimum term (number of years) a person must serve in prison, which is based on the seriousness of their crime. Once the minimum term has finished (known as ‘expired’) they must be detained indefinitely in prison until the Parole Board decides they can be safely managed in the community. They are then on licence, supervised by the Probation Service, for the rest of their life, and may be recalled indefinitely to prison if they breach their licence conditions.¹⁶

Custodial sentences: Discretionary and automatic life sentences

There are instances where a life sentence may be imposed for offences other than murder. These include serious violent, sexual and terrorist offences (discretionary life sentence), and when a person is convicted of a second serious offence (automatic life sentence). Certain other legal provisions must also apply, including seriousness of the offence, dangerousness of the perpetrator, and pattern of previous offending.¹⁷

Based on a custodial tariff of 21 years (the average tariff imposed in 2021) and an assumption of living for 30 years after release



Custodial sentences: Whole Life Orders (WLO)

A judge has the option to impose a Whole Life Order in any instance where a life sentence is passed, which means a person can never be released from prison. In practice they have been used very rarely, though numbers have increased in recent years. While the law allows the secretary of state to release a person serving a WLO on compassionate release in exceptional circumstances, this power has never been exercised.¹⁸



¹⁴ Sentencing Academy (n.d.). Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) sentences. Accessed 12 February 2024.

¹⁵ House of Commons Justice Committee (2022). IPP sentences. HC 266. House of Commons.

¹⁶ Sentencing Academy (n.d.). Sentencing explained: Life sentences. Accessed 12 February 2024.

¹⁷ Sentencing Academy (n.d.). Sentencing explained: Life sentences. Accessed 12 February 2024.

¹⁸ Sentencing Academy (n.d.). Whole Life Orders: Attorney General's reference. Accessed 12 February 2024.

Recall to prison on a custodial sentence

People in prison on recall have previously been released but were reimprisoned for breaching their licence conditions. This can be fresh offending, but may also be missing probation appointments, failing to keep their probation officer informed of their circumstances, breaching curfews or exclusion zones, or substance misuse lapses. The thresholds for recall are substantively lower than judicial thresholds for conviction. This means that people can be recalled on the basis of allegation, suspicion, concern, or circumstances that later prove to be false. Recall decisions are made by the Probation Service in England and Wales for all offenders subject to licence,¹⁹ unlike in Scotland and Northern Ireland where the Parole Board takes such decisions for some (Scotland) or all (Northern Ireland) cases, unless it is against the public interest to await a decision.^{20,21}

Non-criminal detention: Immigration detainees

Some people are detained in prison after their sentence has finished while awaiting a decision from the Home Office about whether they can stay in the country. They are held as immigration detainees. Inspectors have criticised the ‘prison-like’ conditions of some immigration removal centres,²² and the disadvantages faced by detainees held in prison.²³ 89% of detainees are held in immigration detention, 7% are held in prisons, and the remaining 1% in other short-term holding facilities.²⁴

Non-criminal detention: Civil offences

A small number of people are still held in prison for failing to pay debts. These can include child support and council tax. Others are imprisoned for non-compliance matters such as contempt of court.

Non-criminal detention: Remand

Remand prisoners have not yet been convicted of an offence. They are held in prison awaiting trial or sentencing, having been denied bail. They form an increasingly large proportion of the prison population and are being held in prison longer — in 2022 almost a third had been held beyond the six month time limit.²⁵ The use of prison as a ‘place of safety’ when suitable bail accommodation is not available has been criticised, especially for women.²⁶

Why don't most people spend the whole of their sentence in prison?

When judges pass a sentence of imprisonment, they must balance several objectives, including proportionate punishment, deterrence, public protection and rehabilitation.²⁷ Transitioning back into the community from prison (known as resettlement) is very difficult, especially after a long time in prison. People are known to be most at risk of reoffending in the first few days and weeks of release from custody, particularly if they have problems with accommodation, employment or substance misuse.²⁸

Releasing somebody from prison early in their sentence has well-evidenced benefits for reducing reoffending. It allows people at risk to be supervised by the Probation Service, who can take preventative measures, and signpost people to support for prison leavers. Release to supervised accommodation (known as Approved Premises) can also aid gradual resettlement, job searching, and rebuilding social ties. A person held until the very end of their custodial term may be incapacitated for a longer period, but will be less closely supervised and supported on release. Automatic release on licence partway through a sentence is therefore intended to strike a balance between punishment for previous offending and prevention of future offending.

When early release is conditional, as with most longer sentences, the Parole Board decides whether a person can be safely managed in the community. This is known as the “test for release” and is based on public protection, not whether further punishment is merited. Indeterminate sentences in particular are divided into the period that must be served in custody as punishment and the period that a person must be detained if they are thought to pose a continued risk. Risk must be deemed manageable in order for a person to serve part of their sentence in the community.

¹⁹ Ministry of Justice (2023). Recall, review and re-release of recalled prisoners policy framework.

²⁰ Prisoners and Criminal Proceedings (Scotland) Act 1993. s17.

²¹ The Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008. s28.

²² HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2023). Annual report 2022–23. HC 1451.

²³ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2022). The experience of immigration detainees in prisons.

²⁴ Home Office (2024). Table Det_D02, Immigration system statistics, year ending September 2024.

²⁵ House of Lords written question HL3408, 25 November 2022

²⁶ House of Commons Justice Committee (2022). The role of adult custodial remand in the criminal justice system. HC 264. House of Commons.

²⁷ Sentencing Council (n.d.). Sentencing basics. Accessed 12 February 2024.

²⁸ Brunton-Smith, I., & Hopkins, K. (2013). The factors associated with proven reoffending following release from prison: Findings from waves 1 to 3 of SPCR. Ministry of Justice.

What are the different types of prison in England and Wales?

Prisons are primarily used to detain people remanded and awaiting trial/sentencing, and people who have received a custodial sentence. They can also be used to detain people for their own safety, and for detaining foreign nationals at the end of their prison sentence if they are of continuing interest to the Home Office, though both practices have been criticised.

High secure and long-term prisons

This group of prisons have the highest level of security, detaining those thought to pose the most serious risk. Some also have specialist provision for people serving very long sentences.

Local prisons

Local prisons receive people sent from the courts. This may include people remanded to custody, people serving shorter sentences, people awaiting transfer to another prison to serve a longer sentence, and people about to be released.

Training prisons

Training prisons are intended to offer a constructive regime to people serving the bulk of their prison sentence, including education, vocational skills, and rehabilitative programmes.

Resettlement prisons

Resettlement prisons are a more recently designated prison function. They are intended to assist prisoners in the latter part of their sentences with reintegrating into the community, through ties with local services.

Open prisons

Open prisons allow prisoners to leave on day release to undertake various activities related to rehabilitation and resettlement, often in the latter part of their sentences, and subject to risk assessment of whether they can be safely managed in an open prison.

Women's prisons

Women are housed in a separate prison estate in England and Wales (in Scotland and Northern Ireland women are housed on separate wings in men's prisons).²⁹ The English and Welsh women's estate has both closed and open prisons.

Young Offender Institutions

YOIs are prisons used to detain children and young people aged 15–21 years old, with 15–17 year olds housed separately.

Other types of custody

Boys aged up to 14 and girls up to 16 are housed in **secure children's homes**. This can be for their safety and welfare as well as receiving custodial convictions. **Secure training centres** are secure establishments designed to hold children and young people aged 12–18 with criminal convictions and vulnerability, with an emphasis on rehabilitation. Only one is still operating.

Immigration removal centres are used to indefinitely detain foreign nationals while their right to remain in the UK, or whether to release them on immigration bail, is decided. **Short-term holding facilities** are used to detain migrants arriving in the UK for up to seven days (residential facilities) or 24 hours (non-residential facilities).

People who have been arrested can be held in **police custody** for between 24 hours and 14 days depending on the crime they have been arrested for. They must then either be charged or released.

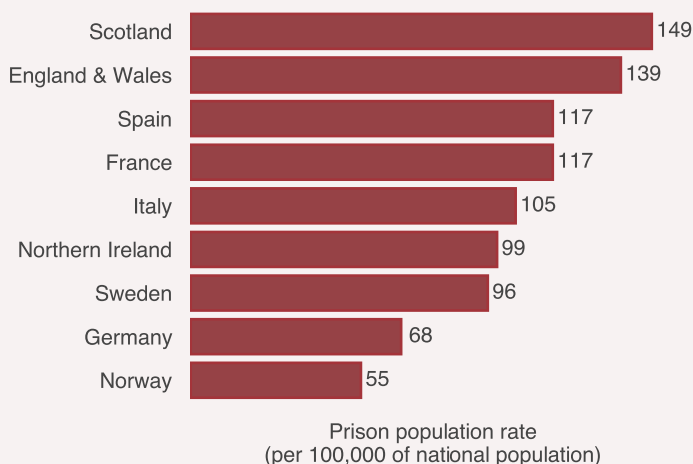
Court custody is used to hold people while they are awaiting their hearing. Individual court facilities are inspected according to a defined set of standards, just like prisons.

²⁹ With the exception of HMP and YOI Stirling in Scotland, which opened in 2023 as a specialist facility for women.

Sentencing: An overview

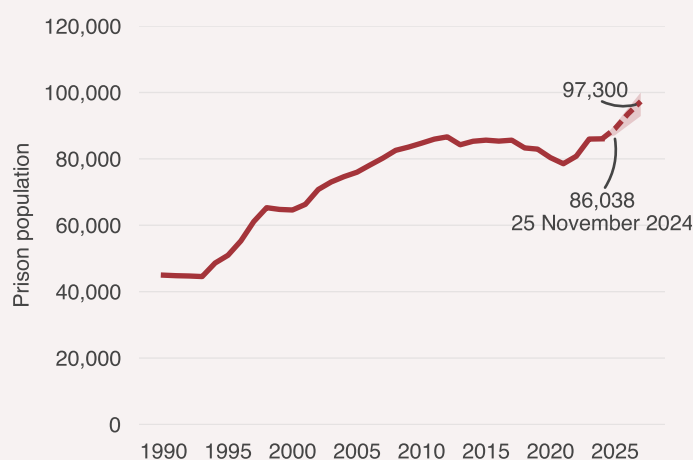
Imprisonment and crime rates

England/Wales and Scotland have the highest imprisonment rates in Western Europe



Source: Institute for Crime & Justice Policy Research (2024). World Prison Brief.

The prison population has risen by 93% in the last 30 years — it is predicted to rise by around 10,000 people by 2027



Sources (Ministry of Justice, 2024):
Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2024
Prison population: Weekly estate figures 2024
Prison population projections 2023 to 2028

Yet there is no link between the prison population and levels of crime according to the National Audit Office.³⁰ International comparisons also show there is no consistent link between the two.³¹



Sources:

Institute for Crime and Justice Policy Research (2023). World Prison Brief. Birkbeck, University of London. <https://www.prisonstudies.org/world-prison-brief-data>
Eurostat (2015). Crimes recorded by the police (1950-2000). https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/crim_hist/default/table
Clarke, S. (2013). Trends in crime and criminal justice, 2010. Eurostat.

Home Office (2023). Police recorded crime and outcomes open data tables: Outcomes open data ending March 2021.

Office for National Statistics (2022). UK population estimates, 1838 to 2020.

Statistics Finland (2023). 13ex -- Offences recorded and their solving by offence category according to the municipality of offence and year of reporting, 1980-2022.

Statistics Finland (2023). Population and society. https://www.stat.fi/tup/suoluk/suoluk_vaesto_en.html

Statistics Canada (2018). Canada's crime rate: Two decades of decline. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-630-x/11-630-x2015001-eng.htm#def1>

Statistics Canada (2023). Incident-based crime statistics, by detailed violations, Canada, provinces, territories, Census Metropolitan areas and Canadian Forces Military Police.

More than

47,000

people were sent to prison to serve a sentence in the year to June 2024³²

55%

The majority had committed a non-violent offence

37%

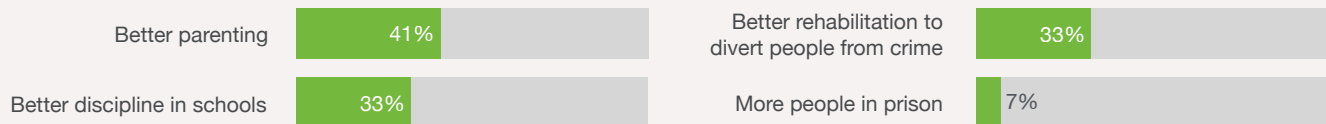
Almost two in five were sentenced to serve six months or less

³⁰ National Audit Office (2012). Comparing international criminal justice systems.

³¹ Lappi-Seppälä, T. (2015). Why some countries cope with lesser use of imprisonment. University of Helsinki.

³² Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 2.Q.8, Prison receptions: April to June 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024.

Fewer than one in 10 people surveyed said that having more people in prison was the most effective way to deal with crime. Early intervention, such as better parenting, discipline in schools and better rehabilitation, were all rated as more effective responses.³³



Short prison sentences

Short prison sentences are less effective than community sentences at reducing reoffending.³⁴ The Independent Sentencing Review, currently underway, is examining the use and impact of short sentences, as well as community alternatives.³⁵

Community sentences are particularly effective for people with many previous offences, people aged under 21 or over 50, and people with mental health problems.³⁶ Yet, their use has more than halved in only a decade. A 2023 parliamentary inquiry concluded that increasing community orders was likely to result in a decline in reoffending and cost savings. But to achieve these, it recommended expanding available services and greater support for the Probation Service.³⁷

Suspended sentences account for only 4% of all sentences — and have declined over the previous decade.³⁸

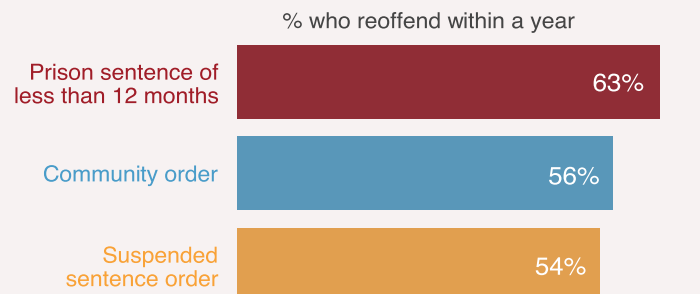
Pre-sentence reports (PSRs) provide an assessment of the nature, context and causes of a person's behaviour, the risk they pose and to whom, as well as an independent recommendation of the sentencing option(s) available to the court.

Courts are over 10 times more likely to impose a community sentence if a pre-sentence assessment is conducted by probation staff. The decline in the use of these assessments in recent years is strongly linked to the sharp fall in community sentences.³⁹

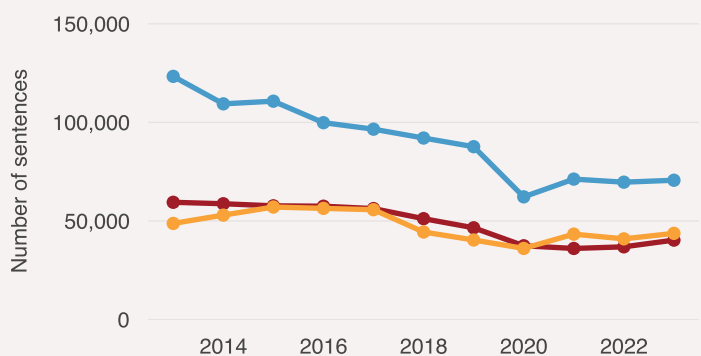
In March 2021, in response to the decline in PSRs, a pilot across 15 magistrates' courts was launched to improve quality, known as the Alternative Delivery Model (ADM). A 2023 evaluation found that pilot courts delivered a higher proportion of PSRs than non-pilot courts.⁴⁰

As well as declining in use, PSRs are declining in rigour. Standard PSRs — the most detailed type of report — have almost been entirely phased out, falling by 88% since 2013.⁴¹

In 2024, probation inspectors found that less than half of PSRs they reviewed (47%) were sufficiently analytical and personalised. This was particularly the case for ethnic minority defendants. Standard PSRs were more likely to meet the quality threshold than shorter versions.⁴²



Source: Ministry of Justice (2013). Compendium of reoffending statistics and analysis



Source: Ministry of Justice (2024). Criminal justice statistics quarterly: December 2023

³³ Crest Advisory (2018). Rewiring justice: Transforming punishment and rehabilitation for the 21st century.

³⁴ Ministry of Justice (2013). Table 1.1, 2013 Compendium of re-offending statistics and analysis.

³⁵ Ministry of Justice (2024). Independent Sentencing Review 2024 to 2025.

³⁶ Hillier, J. and Mews, A. (2018). Do offender characteristics affect the impact of short custodial sentences and court orders on reoffending? Ministry of Justice.

³⁷ House of Lords Justice and Home Affairs Committee (2023). Cutting crime: better community sentences. HL paper 27. House of Lords.

³⁸ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table Q5.1b, Overview tables: December 2023. Criminal justice statistics quarterly: December 2023.

³⁹ Centre for Justice Innovation (2018). The changing use of pre-sentence reports.

⁴⁰ Rizk, T. & Bhakta, T. (2023). A process evaluation of the pre-sentence report pilot. Ministry of Justice.

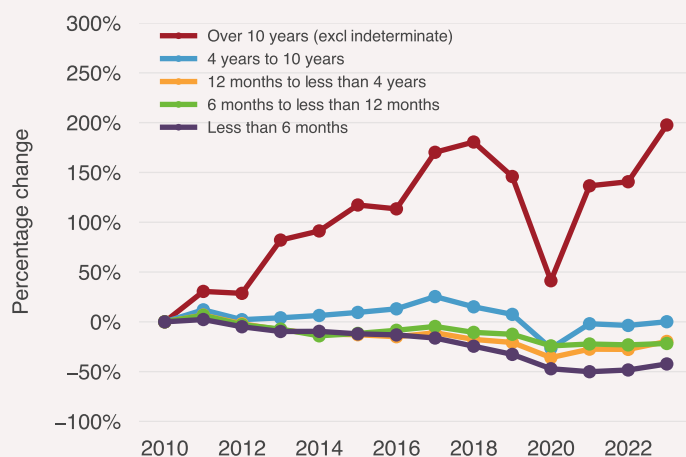
⁴¹ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table A6.24, Probation: 2023. Offender management statistics quarterly: October to December 2023.

⁴² HM Inspectorate of Probation (2024). The quality of pre-sentence information and advice provided to the courts — 2022 to 2023 inspections. Research and analysis bulletin 2024/04.

Long prison sentences

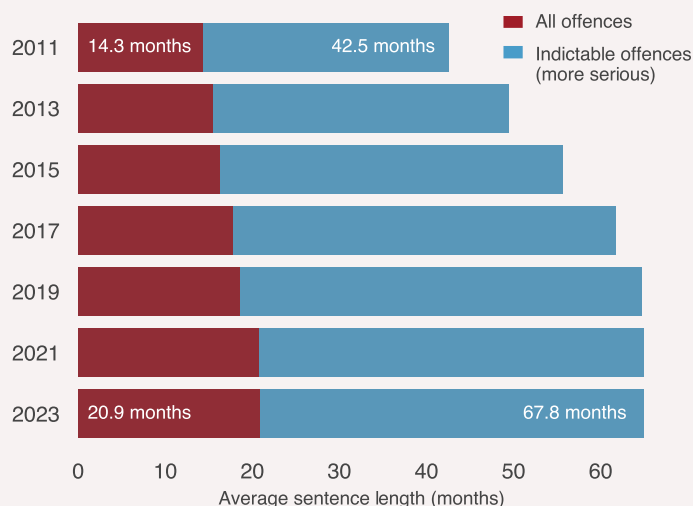
We choose to send people to prison for a long time — and it's growing. In 2024, five of the most senior former judges in England and Wales publicly stated that "there is nothing that justifies this doubling of sentence lengths."⁴³

Almost three times as many people were sentenced to 10 years or more in 2023 than in 2010



Source: Ministry of Justice (2024). Criminal justice statistics quarterly: Update to December 2023.

For more serious, indictable offences, the average prison sentence is now 67.8 months — over two years longer than in 2010

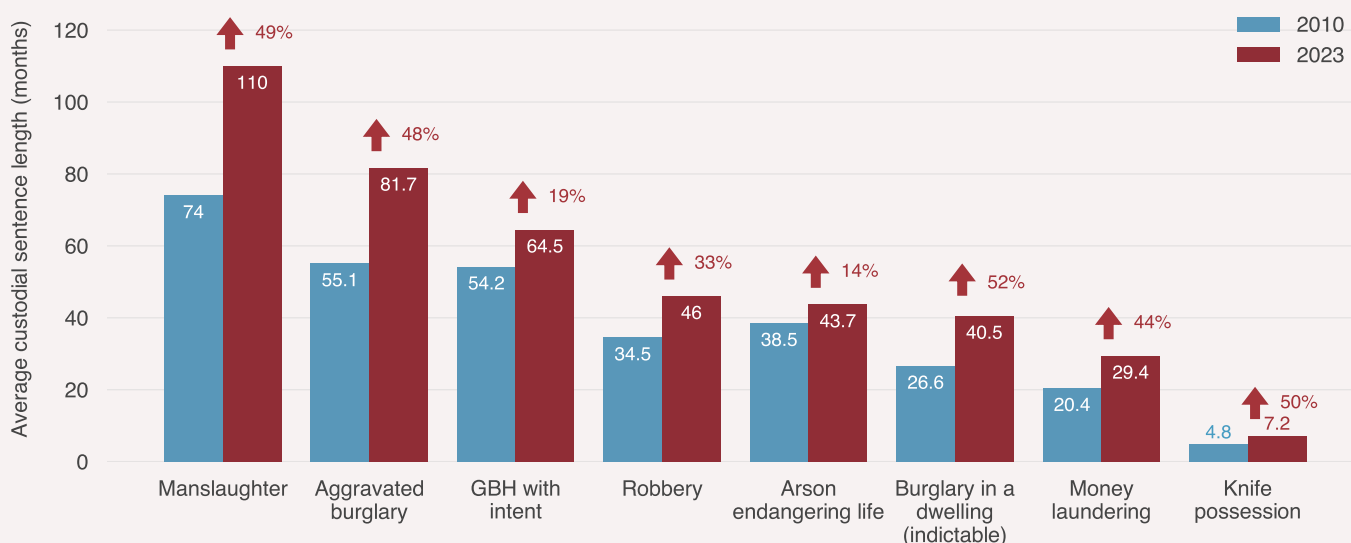


Source: Ministry of Justice (2024). Criminal justice statistics quarterly: Update to December 2023.

Almost all offences now receive a much longer custodial sentence than they used to.

Recent legislation is set to continue this trend. The impact assessment of the Police, Crime, Courts and Sentencing Act 2022 acknowledged that the legislation would lead to an increased prison population, and that longer periods in custody may negatively affect reoffending risk.⁴⁴

The current government has established an independent sentencing review to consider the use of long custodial sentencing, including minimum and maximum penalties for different offences.⁴⁵



Source: Criminal justice statistics December 2023.

⁴³ Howard League for Penal Reform. (2024). Sentence inflation: a judicial critique.

⁴⁴ Ministry of Justice (2021). Impact assessment: Policing, Crime, Courts and Sentencing Bill: Sentencing, release, probation and youth justice measures.

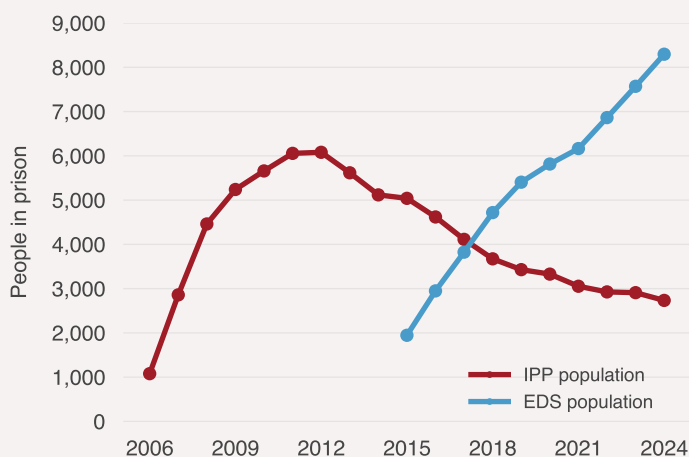
⁴⁵ Ministry of Justice (2024). Independent Sentencing Review 2024 to 2025.

Complex sentences and the decline of automatic release

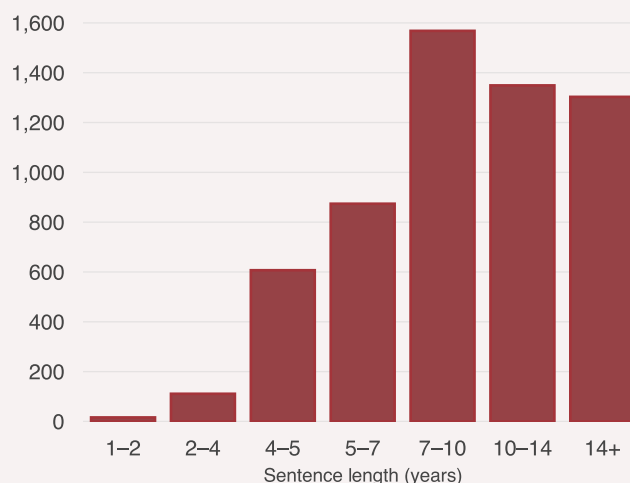
An increasing number of people in prison are serving complex and more punitive sentences.

More than one in 10 of the sentenced prison population (12%) are serving an Extended Determinate Sentence (EDS) and will not be subject to automatic release until the end of their full custodial term.⁴⁶

EDSs are on the rise
Numbers have now surpassed IPPs



Most people serving an EDS will serve a long period in custody before release



Source: Ministry of Justice (2024). Offender management statistics: April to June 2024. And previous editions.

House of Lords written question HL10575, 7 December 2020

10,961 people are currently in prison serving an indeterminate sentence (life or IPP) — 16% of the sentenced prison population,⁴⁷ up from 9% in 1994.⁴⁸

99% of unreleased people in prison serving an IPP sentence have served the minimum custodial period deemed proportionate to their crime, and are held in prison indefinitely on the basis of public protection.⁴⁹

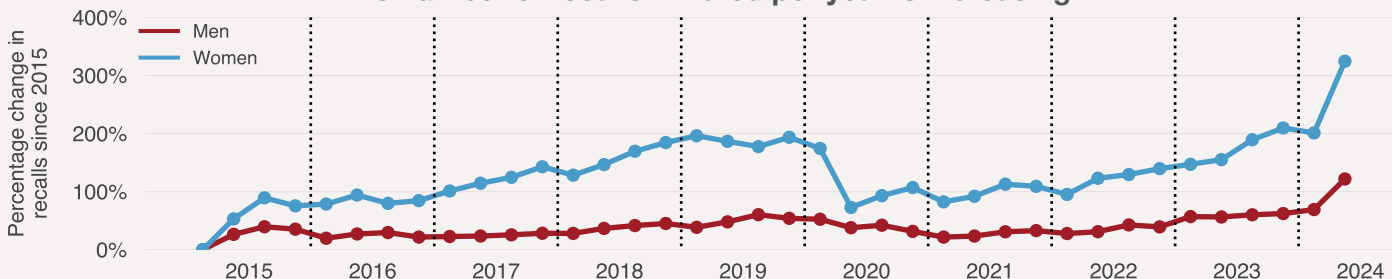
More than one in 10 people in prison (12%) are serving a life sentence.⁵⁰

Recall to prison

There were more than 15,000 admissions to prison in the year to September 2024 following the recall of people serving a sentence of less than 12 months — a 51% rise on the year before.⁵¹

Almost one in five (18%) of the sentenced prison population is now held in custody on recall — 12,920 people.⁵² The number is expected to rise by approximately 13% by 2026 — to around 13,650 people.⁵³

The number of recalls initiated per year is increasing



Source: Ministry of Justice (2024). Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024. And previous editions.

⁴⁶ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.Q.2, Prison population: 30 September 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024

⁴⁷ Ministry of Justice (2024). Tables 1.Q.1 & 1.Q.14, Prison population 30 September 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024.

⁴⁸ Home Office (2001). Table 1.8, Prison statistics England and Wales 2001. Cm 5743.

⁴⁹ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.Q.17, Prison population: 30 September 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024.

⁵⁰ Ministry of Justice (2024). Tables 1.Q.2 & 1.Q.14, Prison population 30 September 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024

⁵¹ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 2.Q.11, Prison receptions: July to September 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: July to September 2024. And previous editions.

⁵² Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.Q.2, Prison population: 31 December 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: July to September 2024.

⁵³ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.1, Prison population projections: 2024 to 2029.

Imprisonment for public protection

The Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) sentence was introduced in the Criminal Justice Act 2003, as a disposal for “dangerous” offenders.⁵⁴ It sentenced people to a fixed period in prison (called a tariff) proportionate to their crime, followed by indefinite detention until the Parole Board deemed them safe for release. They then remained indefinitely on licence with a first licence review by the Parole Board after 10 years, and the possibility of indefinite recall to prison if they breach their conditions. IPP was abolished in 2012, but not retrospectively, leaving many people still serving the sentence

In 2022, the House of Commons Justice Committee published a report of their inquiry into the IPP sentence. They concluded that the sentence is “irredeemably flawed” and called for a resentencing exercise to be completed.⁵⁵ The then Secretary of State for Justice, Alex Chalk, called the IPP sentence a stain on the justice system, and committed to reforms to the IPP licence.⁵⁶ However, a resentencing exercise was subsequently rejected by the government.⁵⁷

The Victims and Prisoners Act 2024 introduced the first significant reform to the IPP since its abolition. The waiting period for licence reviews was cut from 10 years post-release to three, and a new route was established to end the licence without Parole Board involvement. If a licence remains after the three-year review, it is automatically removed if the person avoids recall for another two years.⁵⁸

The changes came into force between November 2024 and February 2025 and were applied retrospectively. On 1 November, around 1,800 individuals had their IPP sentences removed after spending five or more years in the community without recall⁵⁹ — representing over one in five (21%) of all those ever sentenced to an IPP.⁶⁰ Over 1,000 more are now eligible for a licence review.⁶¹

There are still 1,095 people in prison serving an IPP sentence who have never been released. Nearly all (99%) are still in prison despite having already served their tariff — the minimum period they must spend in custody and considered necessary to serve as punishment for the offence.⁶²

Two thirds of unreleased IPP prisoners (66%) have spent an additional 10 years or more in prison on top of their original tariff. More than one in seven (14%) have served an additional 15 years or more.⁶³

184 people have never been released from prison, despite receiving a tariff of less than two years. Every single one has served an additional 10 years or more.⁶⁴

A further 1,599 people are serving an IPP sentence in prison having previously been released — accounting for more than half the imprisoned IPP population (59%).⁶⁵

In 2023, more people serving IPP were recalled to prison (658) than released (637).^{66,67} But this ratio began to change in 2024 — in the first six months, 322 people were recalled and 397 released.⁶⁸

In 2023–24, 335 people serving IPP sentences were released for the first time following Parole Board hearings — 44% of all IPP oral hearings. Of the remainder, 38% were refused release, and 17% were recommended for transfer to less secure open prisons.⁶⁹

In 2024, people serving IPP sentences faced higher rejection rates for transfers to open prisons, even when recommended by the Parole Board. The secretary of state rejected 62% of these recommendations, compared to 44% for prisoners serving other sentences.⁷⁰

⁵⁴ Criminal Justice Act (2003). s225-226 (as enacted).

⁵⁵ House of Commons Justice Committee (2022). IPP sentences. HC 266. House of Commons.

⁵⁶ Ministry of Justice (2023, 28 November). Reforms bring hope to rehabilitated people still serving abolished indefinite sentences.

⁵⁷ Hansard HC Deb. Vol 731, col 457WH, 27 April 2023. Imprisonment for public protection sentences.

⁵⁸ Victims and Prisoners Act 2024. s66.

⁵⁹ Ministry of Justice (2023, 28 November). Reforms bring hope to rehabilitated people still serving abolished indefinite sentences.

⁶⁰ Ministry of Justice (2016). Outcomes by offence tool. Criminal justice statistics quarterly: December 2015.

⁶¹ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 6.15, Probation April-June 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024.

⁶² Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.Q.17, Prison population: 30 September 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024.

⁶³ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.Q.18, Prison population 30 September 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024.

⁶⁴ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.Q.18, Prison population 30 September 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024.

⁶⁵ Ministry of Justice (2024). Tables 1.Q.14, Prison population 30 September 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024.

⁶⁶ Ministry of Justice (2024). Tables 5.Q.2 and 5.Q.11, Prison recalls: October to December 2023. Offender management statistics quarterly: October to December 2023.

⁶⁷ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 3.A.2, Prison releases: 2023. Offender management statistics quarterly: October to December 2023.

⁶⁸ Ministry of Justice (2024). Tables 5.Q.2 & 5.Q.11, Prison recalls: April to June 2024 and Table 3.Q.2, Releases: April to June 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024.

⁶⁹ Parole Board for England and Wales (2024). Paper oral duty member outcomes, Performance data. Annual report 2023–24.

⁷⁰ House of Commons written question 17262, 5 December 2024.

The legacy of the IPP

Nearly all are stuck in prison beyond their tariff

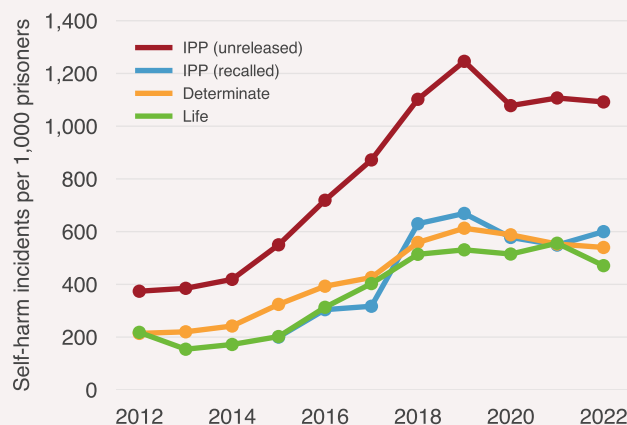
People in prison serving an IPP yet to be released



Source: Ministry of Justice (2024). Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024.

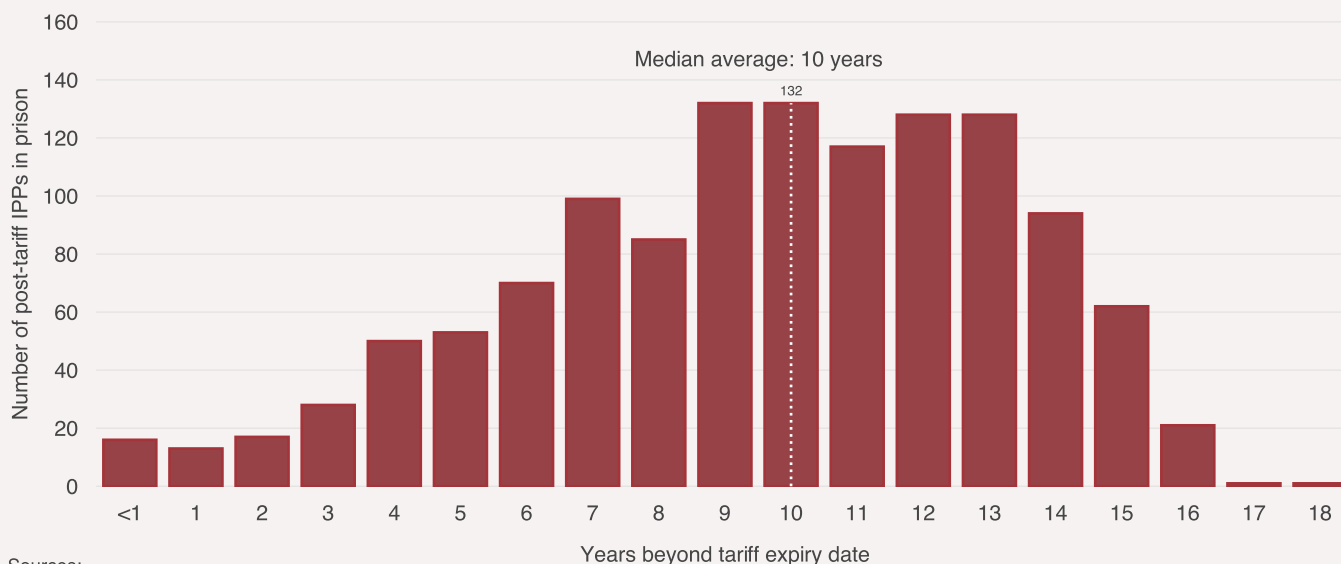
Risk of harm?

Unreleased IPP prisoners have higher rates of self-harm



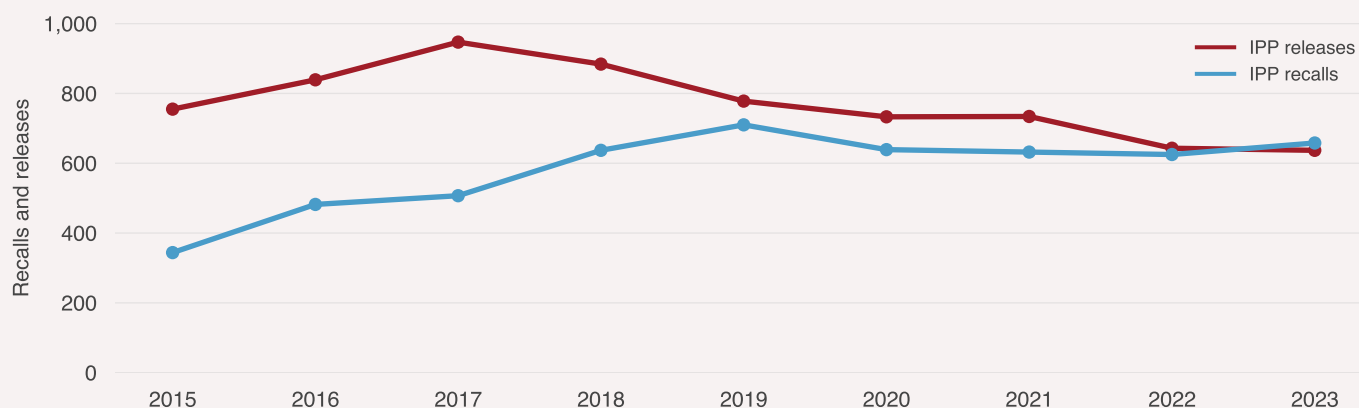
Sources: Ministry of Justice (2023). Safety in custody: Quarterly update to June 2023. Ministry of Justice (2023). Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2023.

The number of years unreleased people on IPP have served on top of their original prison term



Sources: Ministry of Justice (2023). Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2023. House of Lords written question HL423, 4 December 2023.

Revolving doors? People serving IPP are now released and recalled at similar rates



Source: Ministry of Justice (2024). Offender management statistics quarterly: October to December 2023. And previous editions.

Life sentences

People serving a life sentence must serve a minimum term in prison, set by the courts, before they can be considered for release by the Parole Board. They are subject to monitoring and restrictions on release, and serve their sentence for the rest of their lives. They can be returned to custody if they break these terms.

Life sentences, the most severe sanction since the abolition of the death penalty for murder in 1967, are mandatory for murder but can also be imposed for other serious offences at the court's discretion. Additionally, a life sentence may be automatic for a second serious offence, even if it wouldn't typically meet the threshold. However, little is known about this group. Nearly four in five unreleased life-sentenced prisoners (79%) are serving mandatory life sentences for murder, while 21% — or 1,556 individuals — are serving discretionary or automatic life sentences.⁷¹

The Criminal Justice Act 2003 significantly increased the minimum terms for life sentences for murder, with the average rising from 12.5 years in 2003 to 21.3 years by 2016. Further legislation in 2010 and 2022 continued this trend, including higher minimum terms for children.⁷² This has had a knock-on effect in sentence lengths for other offences.⁷³ In 2023, the Conservative government launched a consultation on murder sentencing, including minimum terms.⁷⁴ The 2024–25 independent sentencing review announced by the Labour government excludes murder — and therefore most life sentences — citing plans for 'wholesale reform' of homicide law and sentencing through a separate Law Commission review.⁷⁵

7,406 people in prison are serving a life sentence and have never been released. Almost one in seven (13%) have a tariff of 10 years or less, almost half (47%) have a tariff of over 10 years and up to 20 years, and almost two in five (38%) over 20 years. There are an additional 839 people who have been recalled.⁷⁶

England and Wales holds almost half of all life sentenced prisoners (43%) across the 53 jurisdictions of the Council of Europe, excluding Türkiye. An outlier, Türkiye holds 11,494 lifers, with England and Wales holding 7,084. The other 51 European jurisdictions hold 9,393 lifers between them.⁷⁷

Over a fifth (21%) of people currently in prison on a life sentence have already served their minimum term.⁷⁸ In 2021, post-tariff lifers had spent an average of nine years and two months extra in prison.⁷⁹

People serving mandatory life sentences are spending more of their sentence in prison. On average they spend 19 years in custody, up from 14 years in 2002.⁸⁰

Judges are also imposing longer tariff periods. The average length of the minimum term imposed for murder rose from 13 years in 2000 to 21 years in 2021.⁸¹

People are facing longer life tariffs at a young age. Between 2002 and 2021, the average life sentence tariff for children rose from seven to 15 years.⁸²

There are currently 68 people serving a whole life sentence — they are unlikely to ever be released.⁸³

The vast majority of life-sentenced prisoners are successfully reintegrated into the community upon release. Among those released from prison in the year to March 2022, 2% of individuals sentenced to a mandatory life sentence and 12% of those sentenced to another type of life sentence were reconvicted of any criminal offence within a year, compared to 42% of the overall prison population.⁸⁴

In 2023–24, two in five people serving a life sentence who had Parole Board hearings (41%) were released for the first time. A third (33%) were refused release, and a quarter (26%) were recommended for transfer to less secure 'open' conditions.⁸⁵

71 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.A.31, Prison population: 2015 to 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2024.

72 Prison Reform Trust (2025). Response to the Independent sentencing review 2024 to 2025.

73 Independent Commission into the Experience of Victims and Long-Term Prisoners (2022). Making sense of sentencing.

74 Ministry of Justice (2023). Murder sentencing.

75 Ministry of Justice (2024). Independent sentencing review 2024 to 2025.

76 Ministry of Justice (2024). Tables 1.Q.14 & 1.Q.16, Prison population: 30 September 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024.

77 Aebi, M. & Cocco, E. (2023). Table 10, Prison populations. SPACE I — 2023. Council of Europe.

78 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.Q.16, Prison population: 30 September 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024.

79 House of Commons written question HL3923, 24 November 2021.

80 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 3.A.10, Prison releases: 2023. Offender management statistics quarterly: October to December 2023.

81 House of Lords written question HL7261, 6 April 2022.

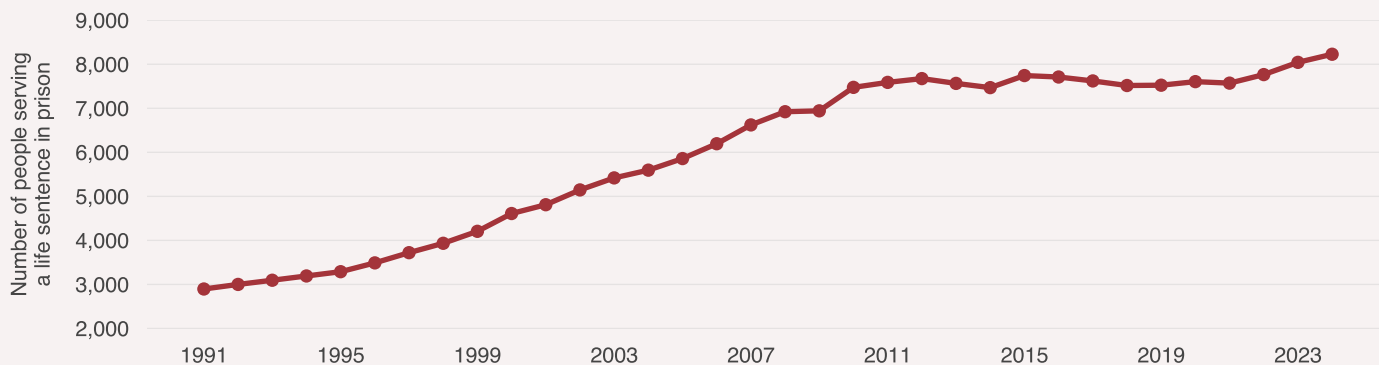
82 House of Lords written question HL1736, 27 July 2022.

83 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.Q.16, Prison population: 30 September 2024, Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024.

84 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table C2a, Proven reoffending tables (annual average), April 2021 to March 2022. Proven reoffending statistics: January to March 2022.

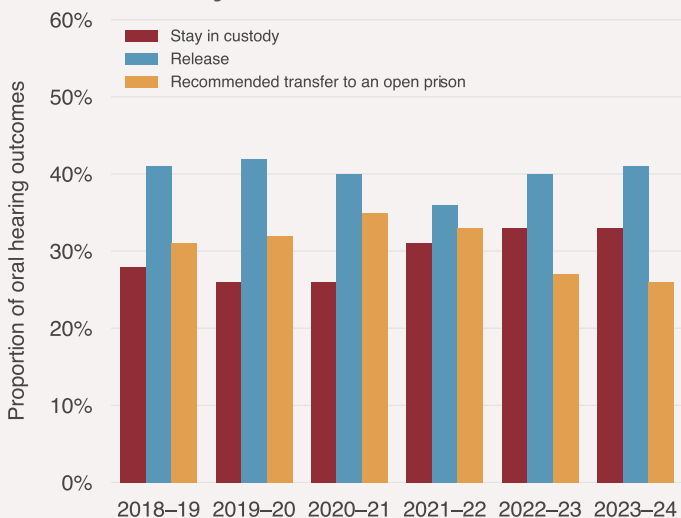
85 Parole Board for England and Wales (2024). Paper oral duty member outcomes. Performance data. Annual report 2023–24.

The number of people in prison serving a life sentence has almost trebled in the last 30 years



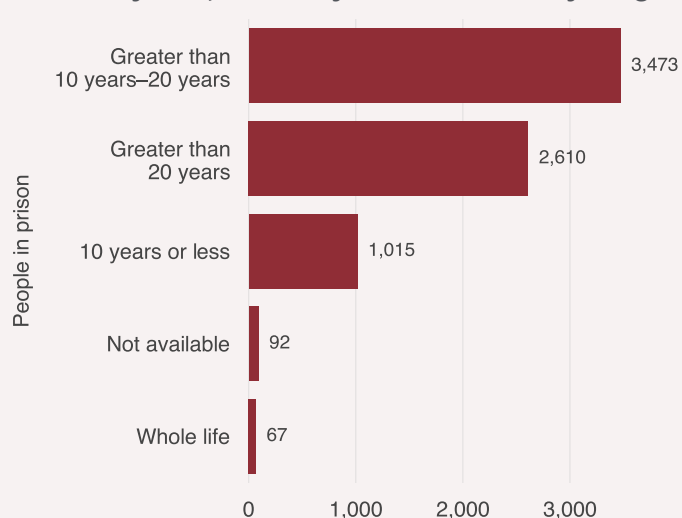
Source: Ministry of Justice (2024). Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2024. And previous editions.

Fewer than half of lifers are granted release by the Parole Board



Source: Parole Board (2024). Annual report 2023-24.

The majority of lifers have a minimum term of over 10 years, for many it's substantially longer



Source: Ministry of Justice (2024). Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2024.

People on remand

For many people, their first experience of prison is on remand. This might be ahead of their trial, or whilst they are awaiting sentencing having been found guilty. People remanded in prison receive no financial help from the prison service at the point of release. Those acquitted receive no compensation.⁸⁶ However, in 2024, the government extended its post-release temporary accommodation scheme to people held on remand and then released or acquitted.⁸⁷

In 2023 the Justice Committee raised serious concerns about the number of people being remanded in custody and the length of time people were being held on remand because of court capacity constraints. The committee urged the use of alternatives, such as conditional bail and electronic tagging, and for greater community support to avoid the use of remand for repeat non-violent offending.⁸⁸

The government stated it had subsequently engaged with 2,000 court staff to raise awareness of electronic monitoring, and that data indicates a “small” increase in its use in targeted courts.⁸⁹ It has also expanded the Community Accommodation Service, which can be used for bail.

However, the number of people on remand stubbornly remains at its highest level in at least 50 years.⁹⁰

People on remand account for almost one in five of the prison population (19%) — over 17,000 people. The majority are awaiting trial (65%), whilst the rest are awaiting sentencing.⁹¹

In September 2022, almost a third of people (32%) on remand had been held in prison beyond the six-month time limit — nearly 4,600 people. One in 20 (5%) had been there for longer than two years — 770 people.⁹² The government now claims it is too costly to produce data on how much time people spend on remand.⁹³

People remanded to custody to await trial are innocent until proven guilty. There were 37,869 receptions into prison before trial in the year to June 2024⁹⁴ — an 11% increase on the previous year.⁹⁵

Two in five people (40%) entering prison on remand awaiting trial were accused of non-violent offences — including 12% accused of drug offences and 10% accused of theft offences.⁹⁶ But the proportion remanded for non-violent offences is 9 percentage points lower than the previous year.⁹⁷

People may also be remanded to custody after they have been found guilty, but are yet to be sentenced. 24,511 people were remanded into prison awaiting sentence in the year to June 2024⁹⁸ — 21% more than the previous year.⁹⁹

In 2023, 8% of people remanded into custody by magistrates’ courts were subsequently acquitted. A further 10% received a non-custodial sentence.¹⁰⁰

In the Crown Court, 13% and 16% respectively were acquitted and given a non-custodial sentence.¹⁰¹

Almost a third (30%) of self-inflicted deaths in 2023 were by people held on remand,¹⁰² as well as nearly a fifth (19%) of self-harm incidents.¹⁰³

⁸⁶ House of Commons Justice Committee (2023). The role of adult custodial remand in the criminal justice system. HC 264. House of Commons.

⁸⁷ House of Commons written question 15423, 2 December 2024.

⁸⁸ House of Commons Justice Committee (2023). The role of adult custodial remand in the criminal justice system. HC 264. House of Commons.

⁸⁹ House of Commons Justice Committee (2023). The role of adult custodial remand in the criminal justice system: Government response to the Committee’s seventh report. HC1244. HM Stationery Office.

⁹⁰ Ministry of Justice (2024). Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024.

⁹¹ Ministry of Justice (2024). Tables 1.Q.1 & 1.Q.2, Prison population: 30 September 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024.

⁹² House of Lords written question HL3408, 25 November 2022.

⁹³ House of Commons written question 7426, 16 October 2024.

⁹⁴ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 2.Q.7, Prison receptions: April to June 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024.

⁹⁵ Ministry of Justice (2023). Table 2.4b, Prison receptions: April to June 2023. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2023.

⁹⁶ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 2.Q.7, Prison receptions: April to June 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024.

⁹⁷ Ministry of Justice (2023). Table 2.4b, Prison receptions: April to June 2023. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2023.

⁹⁸ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 2.Q.6, Prison receptions: April to June 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024.

⁹⁹ Ministry of Justice (2023). Table 2.4b, Prison receptions: April to June 2023. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2023.

¹⁰⁰ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table Q4.4, Overview tables: December 2023. Criminal justice statistics quarterly: December 2023.

¹⁰¹ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table Q4.4, Overview tables: December 2023. Criminal justice statistics quarterly: December 2023.

¹⁰² Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.7, Deaths in custody 1978 to 2023. Safety in custody: quarterly update to June 2024.

¹⁰³ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 2.6, Self-harm in custody 2004 to 2023. Safety in custody: quarterly update to June 2024.

Children on remand

A joint thematic review of children on remand by the criminal justice inspectorates in 2023 highlighted the vulnerabilities of this group, including experiences of neglect, abuse, trauma and exploitation; missed schooling; and failure to diagnose learning needs and disabilities. They also found that in many cases remand could be avoided if suitable bail accommodation was available. Inspectors described a “gulf” in quality of care given to children and recommended better cross-departmental working to address their underlying needs, as well as support for those who are acquitted.¹⁰⁴ The government fully or partially accepted all the inspectorate’s recommendations.¹⁰⁵

The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 introduced a statutory duty to consider child welfare when making remand decisions; strengthened the existing requirements that must be met to remand a child to custody; and obliged courts to record the reasons for remanding children.¹⁰⁶

In a 2022 review, the Ministry of Justice acknowledged the high proportion of children in prison on remand, and the racial disparity in the youth remand population. They committed to strengthening frontline practice, and exploring alternative non-custodial accommodation options.¹⁰⁷

On average, 196 children were held in prison on remand in the year to March 2023. They currently account for almost half of children in prison (44%) — up from 22% in 2013.¹⁰⁸

However, the actual number of children held in prison on remand has fallen in the last decade, declining by 42%.¹⁰⁹

In the year to March 2023, more than three in five children on remand (61%) were from ethnic minority groups.¹¹⁰

One in six children (17%) remanded into custody in the year to March 2023 were subsequently acquitted — the proportion was 6 percentage points lower than the previous year. Just under half (45%) were given a non-custodial sentence.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁴ Criminal justice joint inspection (2023) A joint thematic inspection of work with children subject to remand in youth detention. HM Inspectorate of Probation

¹⁰⁵ Ministry of Justice (2024). Action plan response to: A joint thematic inspection of work with children subject to remand in youth detention.

¹⁰⁶ Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022

¹⁰⁷ Ministry of Justice (2022) Review of custodial remand for children.

¹⁰⁸ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 6.3, Chapter 6: Use of remand for children. Youth justice statistics: 2022 to 2023.

¹⁰⁹ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 6.3, Chapter 6: Use of remand for children. Youth justice statistics: 2022 to 2023.

¹¹⁰ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 6.3, Chapter 6: Use of remand for children. Youth justice statistics: 2022 to 2023.

¹¹¹ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 6.6, Chapter 6: Use of remand for children. Youth justice statistics: 2022 to 2023.

THE STATE OF OUR PRISONS

Safety in prisons

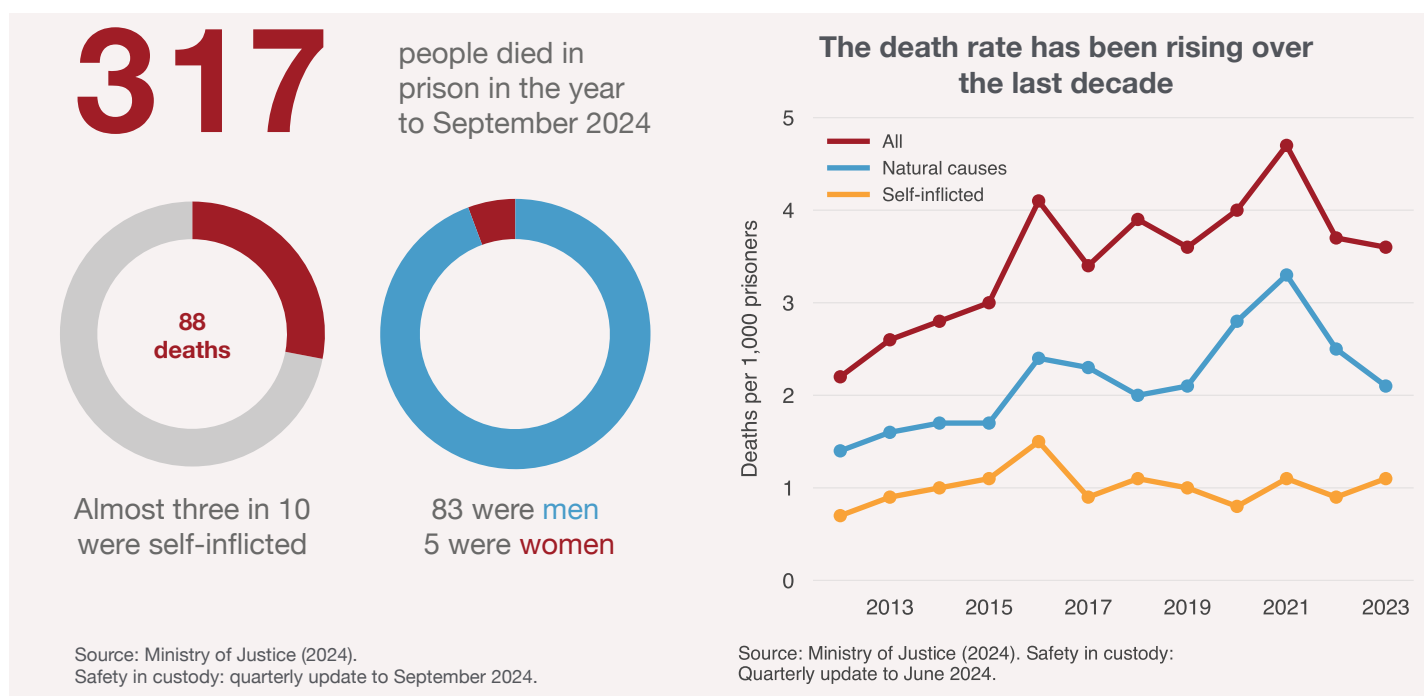
Overall, safety in prisons has deteriorated rapidly during the last decade.¹¹²

Inspectors found that safety was not good enough in almost a third of men's prisons (31%) and three out of four youth custody establishments that they visited during 2023–24.¹¹³ Around two in five people in men's prisons (42%), women's prisons (43%) and youth custody (40%) said that they had felt unsafe at some point whilst in prison.¹¹⁴

Deaths in prison

186 people died of natural causes in the year to September 2024. This is down from the peak of nearly 300 deaths in the year to September 2021, but is still 37% higher than a decade ago.¹¹⁵

Self-inflicted deaths are nearly four times more likely in men in prison than men in the general population.¹¹⁶



In the last five years one in five (20%) self-inflicted deaths occurred in the first 30 days of arrival in prison — almost half (49%) of these deaths were in the first week.¹¹⁷

Inspectors were concerned about the 27% rise in self-inflicted deaths in men's prisons between 2022 and 2023. They said the quality of learning reviews following self-inflicted deaths was poor, or even absent, and Prisons and Probation Ombudsman recommendations were not routinely reviewed.¹¹⁸

2023 saw the highest ever number of self-inflicted deaths of people serving an IPP sentence.¹¹⁹ In 2024, HMPPS acknowledged that people serving IPP are at heightened risk of harm to themselves.¹²⁰

In 2023–24, the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman called for policy changes to better support safety. These included more consistent use of interpreters; better awareness and welfare checks around court appearances; and better staff training to preserve life in an emergency.¹²¹

There were two homicides in prison in 2023. There have been nine in the last five years.¹²²

¹¹² Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1, Safety in custody summary tables to June 2024. Safety in custody: quarterly update to June 2024.

¹¹³ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2023). Annual report 2022–23. HM Stationery Office.

¹¹⁴ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2024). Table 2, Women's comparator workbook & Table 1, CYP comparator workbook. Annual report 2023–24. Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

¹¹⁵ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 2, Safety in custody summary tables to June 2024. Safety in custody: quarterly update to June 2024.

¹¹⁶ Office for National Statistics (2023). Drug-related deaths and suicide in prison custody in England and Wales: 2008 to 2019.

¹¹⁷ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.3, Deaths in prison custody 1978 to 2023. Safety in custody: quarterly update to December 2023.

¹¹⁸ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2024). Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

¹¹⁹ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.7, Deaths in prison custody 1978 to 2023. Safety in custody: quarterly update to June 2024.

¹²⁰ HM Prison and Probation Service (2024). Prison safety policy framework.

¹²¹ Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (2024). Annual report 2023–24. CP 1107. HM Stationery Office.

¹²² Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.1, Deaths in prison custody 1978 to 2023. Safety in custody: quarterly update to June 2024.

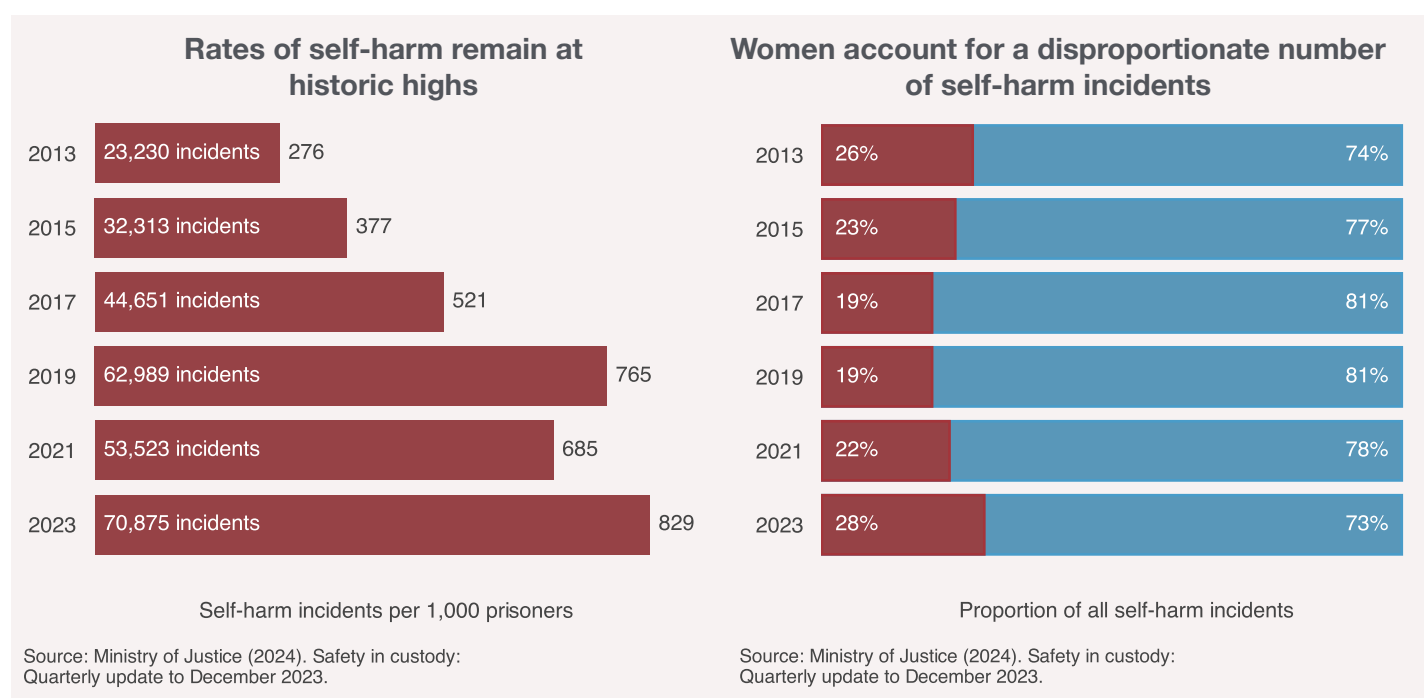
Self-harm in prison

Self-harm by women in prison hit a record high of 20,834 incidents last year. The number had already nearly doubled (96%) between 2013 and 2022. Between June 2022 and 2023 alone, it increased by another two-thirds (65%), and a further 3% in the next 12 months.¹²³

Ten years ago, there were 1,611 self-harm incidents per 1,000 women in prison. By the year to June 2024, this number had risen to 5,785.¹²⁴

Self-harm incidents among men rose by over a quarter (26%) last year to 55,531, after declining during the pandemic. The rate of self-harm per 1,000 men in prison has more than trebled in the last decade.¹²⁵

1,300 prisoners volunteered as Listeners in 2023, and provided over 14,000 hours of emotional support to other prisoners.¹²⁶ The scheme is run by the Samaritans — a charity that supports people in crisis.



Assaults in prison

Recorded assaults by men in prison decreased during the pandemic but rose by 24% last year, nearing pre-pandemic levels. Assaults by women increased by 28%, reaching the highest level ever recorded.¹²⁷

The assault rate per 1,000 men in prison is 76% higher than a decade ago, at 327 assaults per 1,000 prisoners. For women, the rate is 543 incidents per 1,000 — more than two and a half times higher than ten years ago.¹²⁸

Fairly applied rules play an important role in reducing assaults. Research has found that the consistent application of understandable rules that appear legitimate to people in prison are often associated with lower rates of assaults.¹²⁹

Inspectors found that a focus on reward rather than formal disciplinary procedures motivated prisoners to change their behaviour in a 2024 review of behaviour management across eight prisons.¹³⁰

¹²³ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 3, Safety in custody summary tables to June 2024. Safety in custody: quarterly update to June 2024.

¹²⁴ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 3, Safety in custody summary tables to June 2024. Safety in custody: quarterly update to June 2024.

¹²⁵ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 3, Safety in custody summary tables to June 2024. Safety in custody: quarterly update to June 2024.

¹²⁶ House of Commons written question 4000, 10 September 2024.

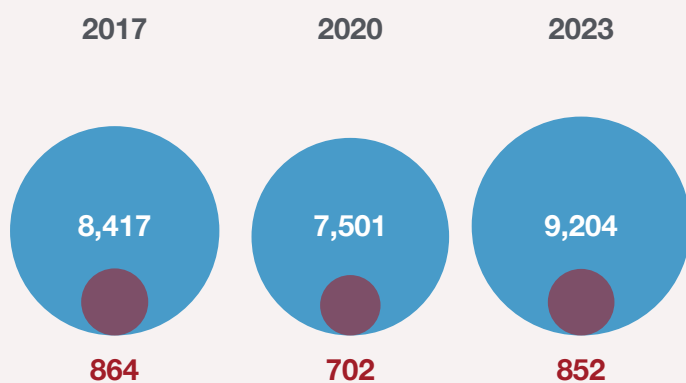
¹²⁷ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 4, Safety in custody summary tables to June 2024. Safety in custody: quarterly update to June 2024.

¹²⁸ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 4, Safety in custody summary tables to June 2024. Safety in custody: quarterly update to June 2024.

¹²⁹ McGuire, J. (2018). Understanding prison violence: A rapid evidence assessment. HM Prison and Probation Service.

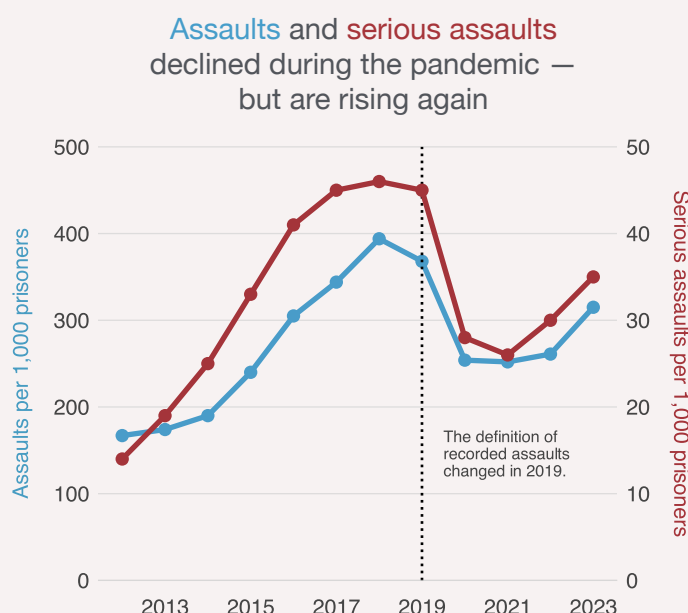
¹³⁰ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Improving behaviour in prisons.

Assaults on staff are at a record high.



Serious assaults on staff are also increasing again.

Source: Ministry of Justice (2024). Safety in custody: Quarterly update to December 2023.



Use of force

Inspectors found that the use of force had increased in about half of men's prisons they inspected last year. They raised concerns about poor governance and the failure of staff to use body-worn video cameras.¹³¹ However, a recent Ministry of Justice evaluation revealed no statistically significant difference in assault rates in prisons with cameras and those without.¹³²

PAVA — an incapacitant similar to pepper spray which causes severe pain to the eyes — was first rolled out to adult male prisons in 2019. Before the rollout, HMPPS acknowledged the likelihood of disproportionate use against black, Asian and minority ethnic prisoners.¹³³ Before the election, the Conservative government had been examining the case for rolling out PAVA spray in Young Offender Institutions.¹³⁴ The Labour government has stated that it is continuing to review the matter.¹³⁵

PAVA was drawn¹³⁶ 1,312 times in 2023 and deployed¹³⁷ in two in three (67%) of those instances.¹³⁸

Between 2019 and 2023, two in five PAVA deployments (41%) were against black/black British prisoners,¹³⁹ who made up just 13% of the adult male prison population at that time.¹⁴⁰

Between 2019 and 2023, nearly a third of PAVA deployments (32%) were against Muslim prisoners,¹⁴¹ who made up around 17% of the adult male prison population.¹⁴²

The government originally committed to publishing data on the use of force in 2020, yet no data has been published to date.¹⁴³

¹³¹ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2024). Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

¹³² Pope, L., et al. (2020). Body worn video camera (BWVC) pilot evaluation. Ministry of Justice.

¹³³ Prison Reform Trust (2023). Equality incapacitated: The disproportionate impact of PAVA spray on Black, Muslim and disabled prisoners.

¹³⁴ House of Lords written question HL10134, 26 September 2023.

¹³⁵ House of Commons written question 4226, 13 September 2024.

¹³⁶ PAVA is unclipped from the belt and physically presented at a prisoner.

¹³⁷ PAVA has been physically presented and discharged/squirted at a prisoner.

¹³⁸ House of Commons written question 17267, 15 March 2024.

¹³⁹ House of Lords written question HL10655, 26 October 2023.

¹⁴⁰ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.A.20, Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2024.

¹⁴¹ House of Lords written question HL10655, 26 October 2023.

¹⁴² Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.A.22, Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2024.

¹⁴³ Letter from Minister of State for Justice Lucy Frazer QC MP to Prison Reform Trust, June 2020, available at: <https://prisonreformtrust.org.uk/2020-06-30-lucy-frazer-to-pd/>

Treatment and conditions

Nearly half of prisons (42%) were judged to have concerning or seriously concerning performance in 2023–24 by HM Prisons and Probation Service (HMPPS). Those mostly likely to be of concern were reception prisons, with almost three-quarters (73%) rated concerning/seriously concerning, compared to 47% last year.¹⁴⁴

In their 2022–23 annual report, the UK National Preventative Mechanism raised serious concerns about the number of deaths in prison, restricted regimes, staff shortages, and a lack of rehabilitative activity.¹⁴⁵

Before the pandemic HMPPS prison ratings had been improving, in part due to a rise in security scores.¹⁴⁶ However, deaths and self-harm remain at historically high levels, with both rising in 2023.^{147,148}

In 2023–24, inspectors judged that almost four in five inspected prisons (79%) were poor or not sufficiently good at providing purposeful activity, compared to 93% in the previous year. The majority that scored well were open prisons, which are intended to prepare people for release.^{149,150}

Over a quarter of inspected prisons were judged poor or not sufficiently good on safety (28%), compared with almost half the year before (49%).¹⁵¹

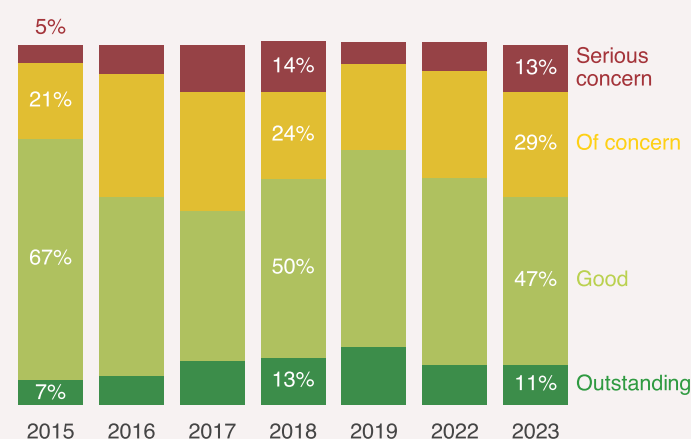
Just over a quarter of prisons (28%) visited by inspectors in 2023–24 were assessed as having not sufficiently good or poor outcomes for respect.¹⁵² Inspectors were concerned that overcrowding and inexperience were making staff-prisoner relationships “transactional”, which led to frustration, increased conflict, and inappropriate use of force.¹⁵³

13 prisons have received an Urgent Notification — three of which went on to receive a second notification.¹⁵⁴ In 2017, England and Wales introduced the Urgent Notification process, which allows the chief inspector to alert the justice secretary to serious concerns about conditions within an individual prison.¹⁵⁵

In 2024, HMP Rochester was the first Category C prison to be subject to an Urgent Notification from inspectors.¹⁵⁶ At the time of writing, eight prisons were subject to an Urgent Notification; five of which are Category B reception prisons. Three prisons — HMPs Bedford, Bristol and Exeter — are subject to their second UN.¹⁵⁷

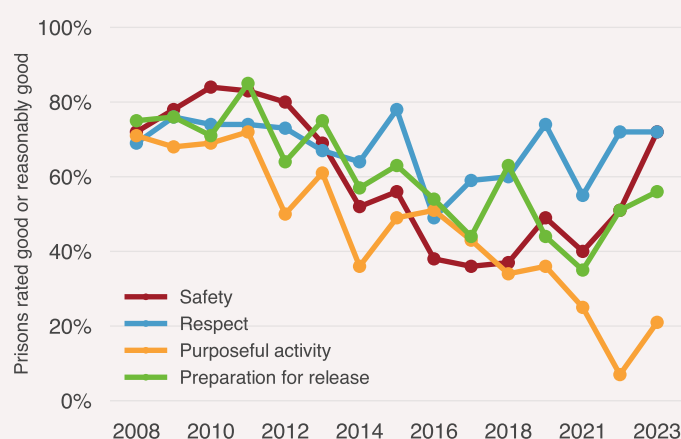
Prison standards — in long-term decline?

Over a third of prisons are “of concern” or “serious concern”



Source: Ministry of Justice. Annual prison performance ratings 2023–24 & previous editions.
Note that ratings were suspended in 2020–21 and reduced in 2021–22.

Standards are slowly starting to recover — but purposeful activity is still poor



Source: HM Chief Inspector of Prisons. Annual report 2023–24 and previous editions.
Note: 2020 not included due to low number of prisons inspected during Covid-19.

¹⁴⁴ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1, Annual prison performance ratings supplementary tables. Prison performance ratings: 2023 to 2024.

¹⁴⁵ UK National Preventative Mechanism (2024). 14th annual report of the United Kingdom's National Preventative Mechanism 2022/23. HM Stationery Office.

¹⁴⁶ Ministry of Justice (2020). Prison performance ratings: 2019 to 2020. And previous editions.

¹⁴⁷ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.1, Deaths in prison custody 1978 to 2023, Safety in custody: quarterly update to June 2024.

¹⁴⁸ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 2.1, Self-harm in prison custody 2004 to 2023, Safety in custody: quarterly update to June 2024.

¹⁴⁹ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Table 1, Judgements, scores, and notable positive practice, Annual report 2023–24. HC 218. HM Stationery Office.

¹⁵⁰ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2023). Annual report 2022–23. HC 1451. HM Stationery Office.

¹⁵¹ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Table 6, Judgements, scores, and notable positive practice, Annual report 2023–24. HC 218. HM Stationery Office.

¹⁵² HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Table 1, Judgements, scores, and notable positive practice, Annual report 2023–24. HC 218. HM Stationery Office.

¹⁵³ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

¹⁵⁴ HM Chief Inspectorate of Prisons (2024, n.d.). Our reports. Accessed 21 January 2025.

¹⁵⁵ Ministry of Justice (2017). The Urgent Notification process overview.

¹⁵⁶ Ministry of Justice (2024, 30 September). Government deploys urgent support to struggling Rochester prison.

¹⁵⁷ HM Chief Inspectorate of Prisons (2024, n.d.). Our reports. Accessed 21 January 2025.

The physical conditions of prisons

Inspectors highlighted “dilapidated”, “filthy”, and “deteriorating” conditions in men’s prisons, citing dirty wings, limited access to cleaning equipment, pest infestations, mouldy and poorly ventilated showers, and broken heating systems. Many prisoners shared cells designed for one person, with toilets placed next to beds and little to no screening. While prison leaders were commended for trying to manage these ageing facilities, their efforts were hindered by systemic issues such as underinvestment in infrastructure, inability to commission building work, and persistent overcrowding.¹⁵⁸

Around a quarter of people in prison are housed in prisons with Victorian-era accommodation.¹⁵⁹ Compact spaces originally built on the outskirts of cities, they have now become enclosed by urban expansion, making improvements difficult and exacerbating the problems of overcrowding.¹⁶⁰

2023–24 is the first year where time out of cell has broadly returned to pre-pandemic levels.¹⁶¹ One in ten women (10%) and just over one in five men (21%) surveyed by inspectors spent less than two hours a day out of their cells.¹⁶² Last year it was 36% of women and 42% of men.¹⁶³

But there was a sharp divide between prison types. Half (50%) of men in local prisons reported being unlocked for less than two hours a day.¹⁶⁴ Inspectors found that this impacted mental health, staff-prisoner relationships, and preparation for release.¹⁶⁵

The Independent Monitoring Board has raised serious concerns about how prisoners’ property is dealt with. More than nine in 10 surveyed boards (92%) said they had raised concerns about property lost or damaged during transfers, and nearly three in five (57%) during cell moves. Examples of lost items included a box of legal paperwork, prescribed medication, mementos of loved ones who had died, family contact details, photo ID, and a prosthetic leg that was missing for over a year.¹⁶⁶

Segregation

Inspectors reported that conditions in many segregation units remained severely restricted — with most men unlocked for only 30 minutes a day. They expressed particular concern about HMYOI Cookham Wood, where two boys were held in conditions described as solitary confinement for over 100 days.¹⁶⁷

Research on segregation has established that it is harmful to health and wellbeing. Over half of segregated prisoners interviewed said they had problems with three or more of the following: anger, anxiety, insomnia, depression, difficulty in concentration, and self-harm.¹⁶⁸ However, inspectors have praised the work of Close Supervision Centres — specialist units in high security prisons separately holding men removed from association with others — noting the impact of highly trained and experienced staff and good resourcing. But they acknowledged CSCs are the “deepest” form of custody in the prison system.¹⁶⁹

A 2015 study found that nearly two-fifths, 19 out of a total of 50 people, had deliberately engineered a move to the segregation unit. Reasons included trying to transfer to a different prison, evading a debt, or getting away from drugs or violence on the wings.¹⁷⁰

¹⁵⁸ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

¹⁵⁹ Ministry of Justice (2024). Population bulletin: monthly September 2024. Prison population: monthly figures 2024.

¹⁶⁰ Moran, D. et al. (2024). Making proper use of ‘proper prisons’? The Victorian estate and the future of the prison system. Howard League for Penal Reform, University of Bath and University of Birmingham.

¹⁶¹ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2020). Annual report 2019–20. HM Stationery Office.

¹⁶² HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Table 2, Women’s comparator workbook, Annual report 2023–24. HC 218. HM Stationery Office.

¹⁶³ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Table 1, Men’s and women’s comparator workbooks, Annual report 2023–24. HC 218. HM Stationery Office.

¹⁶⁴ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Table 2, Men’s comparator workbook, Annual report 2023–24. HC 218. HM Stationery Office.

¹⁶⁵ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons. Purposeful prisons: Time out of cell.

¹⁶⁶ Independent Monitoring Board (2024). How property loss impacts prisoners: A thematic monitoring report.

¹⁶⁷ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

¹⁶⁸ Shalev, S. and Edgar, K. (2015). Deep custody: Segregation units and close supervision centres in England and Wales. Prison Reform Trust.

¹⁶⁹ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Report on an inspection of close supervision centres 18 March –17 April 2024.

¹⁷⁰ Shalev, S. and Edgar, K. (2015). Deep custody: Segregation units and close supervision centres in England and Wales. Prison Reform Trust.

The prison capacity crisis

The prison estate had a critically urgent shortage of capacity in 2024, triggering a host of emergency measures. In the first eight months of 2024, the prison estate almost always had fewer than 1,500 places left in operational capacity.¹⁷¹ Operational capacity is different to certified normal accommodation (the decent, uncrowded standard of accommodation) — it is the absolute maximum number of people prisons can hold without seriously compromising order and security.

The shortage in the adult male estate was particularly acute. From February to June 2024 there were almost always less than 1,000 places left per week. In May 2024 there were just 290¹⁷² — exceeding the critical limit of 300 which poses a serious risk to safety and functioning of the justice system.¹⁷³ The adult male estate has routinely been at 99% capacity since the beginning of 2023.¹⁷⁴

In October 2023 the Conservative government introduced the End of Custody Supervised Licence Scheme (ECSL) allowing certain prisoners to be released 18 days before their usual release date. It operated until September 2024,¹⁷⁵ with rises to 35 days in March 2024, and finally to 70 days in May.¹⁷⁶

In July 2024, the Justice Secretary announced an emergency early release scheme to replace ECSL: SDS40. This allowed certain people serving Standard Determinate Sentences (the least serious/restrictive custodial sentence) to be released after serving 40% of their term, rather than the usual 50%. It excluded all sex offences, terrorism offences, and offences related to domestic violence, coercive control, stalking or harassment, as well as more serious violent offences.¹⁷⁷ Following the initial release of eligible prisoners, SDS40 remains in operation and will be reviewed in Spring 2026.

A further emergency measure was reintroduced in 2024 to tackle court backlogs: magistrates can now impose prison sentences of up to 12 months rather than six months, increasing the number of people who can be sentenced swiftly.¹⁷⁸ The scheme was briefly in use under the Conservative government, but removed owing to rising pressure on prison capacity.¹⁷⁹ The government argues that the measure will tackle the rising remand population, a key driver of population increases.¹⁸⁰ Concerns have previously been expressed that extending the powers of magistrates may lead to an increase in short custodial sentences.¹⁸¹

The government reactivated Operation Early Dawn in August 2024, holding individuals in police cells and delaying trials until prison spaces were available. More people entered prison following the violent disorder of summer 2024.¹⁸²

In the medium-to-long term, the government has committed to measures aimed at the other two key drivers of the rising prison population: longer custodial sentences and recalls. The Independent Sentencing Review is due to report in Spring 2025, and includes considering alternatives to imprisonment.¹⁸³

Other announced measures include an extension to the time that may be spent on Home Detention Curfew to 365 days from June 2025,¹⁸⁴ and a change in recall review policy. The government has acknowledged that the growth in the recall population in prison is unsustainable.¹⁸⁵

HDC has long been recognised as a prudent measure for reducing the number of people held in prisons and enhancing resettlement opportunities, with a success rate of 85% in 2022.¹⁸⁶

The National Audit Office has assessed that the government's prison building plans — another key long-term commitment — will leave a shortfall of 12,400 prison places by 2027.^{187,188}

¹⁷¹ Ministry of Justice (2024). Prison population figures: 2024. Population bulletin: monthly December 2024. And previous editions.

¹⁷² Ministry of Justice (2024). Ad-hoc adult male prison population and capacity release.

¹⁷³ Ministry of Justice (2024, 16 July). New Lord Chancellor sets out measures to avert prison capacity crisis.

¹⁷⁴ Ministry of Justice (2024). Ad-hoc adult male prison population and capacity release.

¹⁷⁵ House of Commons written question 23878, 17 January 2025.

¹⁷⁶ Ministry of Justice (2024). End of Custody Supervised Licence (ECSL) data, England and Wales.

¹⁷⁷ Ministry of Justice (2024, 12 July). Lord Chancellor sets out immediate action to defuse ticking prison 'time-bomb'.

¹⁷⁸ Ministry of Justice (2024, 17 October). Increased sentencing powers for magistrates to address prisons crisis.

¹⁷⁹ National Audit Office (2024). Reducing the backlog in the Crown Court. HC728.

¹⁸⁰ House of Lords statement HLWS154, 22 October 2024.

¹⁸¹ Coomber, A. (2022, 20 Jan). Why extending the sentencing powers of magistrates is a bad idea. Howard League for Penal Reform.

¹⁸² Ministry of Justice (2024, 19 August). Process activated to manage prisoner movements.

¹⁸³ Ministry of Justice (2024, 21 October). Independent Sentencing Review 2024 to 2025.

¹⁸⁴ The Home Detention Curfew and Requisite and Minimum Custodial Periods (Amendment) Order 2024. s3.

¹⁸⁵ House of Lords statement HLWS154, 22 October 2024.

¹⁸⁶ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 3.A.18, Releases: 2023. Offender management statistics quarterly: October to December 2023.

¹⁸⁷ National Audit Office (2024). Increasing the capacity of the prison estate to meet demand. HC 376.

¹⁸⁸ The NAO acknowledges that their figures do not account for forthcoming population projections taking account of 2024 policy changes and the government's 10-year capacity strategy, neither of which had been published at the time of their report.

Emergency measures

10,083 people were released under the End of Custody Supervised Licence Scheme (ECSL). Despite generally serving shorter sentences for less serious offences, women in prison were only eligible for ECSL for the last seven months of its operation.^{189,190}

3,112 people serving determinate sentences were released on two single days in September/October 2024 under SDS40, having served 40% of their sentence, rather than the usual 50%.¹⁹¹

61% of people released under the initial SDS40 activation were serving sentences of less than five years.¹⁹² Assuming an average sentence length of three years, they would have been released just under four months sooner than intended.

37 people were released in error in the first release group of SDS40. This group were incorrectly sentenced under legislation that had been updated, preventing HMPPS from identifying them. All were returned to custody within 18 days of release.^{193,194} Further offences were subsequently added to the list of SDS40 exclusions.¹⁹⁵ This group should have been sentenced under the Sentencing Act 2020, which was intended to simplify years of constantly changing legislation by successive governments.¹⁹⁶

Overcrowding

The prison system has been overcrowded in every year since 1994.^{197,198} Over three in every five prisons (63%) in England and Wales are overcrowded (78 of 123 prisons).¹⁹⁹

Over 20,500 people are held in overcrowded accommodation²⁰⁰ — a 10% increase on last year, and comprising almost a quarter of the prison population (24%).²⁰¹

The current level of overcrowding has remained broadly unchanged for the last 20 years. Court closures during the pandemic, which resulted in a falling prison population, meant that the level of overcrowding reduced slightly in 2021 and 2022. However, it has now returned to pre-pandemic levels.²⁰²

But the prison estate is not uniformly overcrowded. 93% of men's reception prisons are overcrowded, 78% of Category C prisons, and just two of 13 open prisons.²⁰³

86% of women's local prisons are overcrowded, with no overcrowding in the women's open estate.²⁰⁴

In 2023, the chief inspector issued a stark warning about the consequences of increased overcrowding in prisons, including negative impact on purposeful activity, "deprivation, squalor and risk of further violence."²⁰⁵

The previous government "created" 800 places by changing single cells to double occupancy.²⁰⁶ Prison inspectors have repeatedly warned against the impact of cramped cells on hygiene, dignity and safety.

189 Ministry of Justice (2024). End of Custody Supervised Licence (ECSL) data, England and Wales.

190 Note that the number of releases is a slight undercount, as data for the last ten weeks of ECSL operation is not yet available.

191 Ministry of Justice (2024). Standard determinate sentences 40% (SDS40) 'Tranche 1' and 'Tranche 2' release data, England and Wales.

192 Ministry of Justice (2024). Standard determinate sentences 40% (SDS40) 'Tranche 1' and 'Tranche 2' release data, England and Wales.

193 House of Commons written question 10449, 28 October 2024.

194 House of Commons written question 6628, 14 October 2024.

195 The Home Detention Curfew and Requisite and Minimum Custodial Periods (Amendment) Order 2024. s1 and s2.

196 Ministry of Justice (2020, 22 October). Sentencing Code granted Royal Assent.

197 Home Office (1999). Digest 4: Information on the criminal justice system in England and Wales.

198 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 2.2, Chapter 2: Prison crowding. HMPPS annual digest: April 2023 to March 2024.

199 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 2.2, Chapter 2: Prison crowding. HMPPS annual digest: April 2023 to March 2024.

200 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 2.3, Chapter 2: Prison crowding. HMPPS annual digest: April 2023 to March 2024.

201 Ministry of Justice (2024). Tables 2.1 and 2.3, Chapter 2 tables: Prison crowding. HMPPS annual digest: April 2023 to March 2024.

202 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 2.2, Chapter 2 tables: Prison crowding. HMPPS annual digest: April 2023 to March 2024.

203 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 2.2, Chapter 2 tables: Prison crowding. HMPPS annual digest: April 2023 to March 2024.

204 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 2.2, Chapter 2 tables: Prison crowding. HMPPS annual digest: April 2023 to March 2024.

205 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2023, 2 August). HM Inspectorate of Prisons.

206 Ministry of Justice (2023, 24 June). Further rollout of Rapid Deployment Cells to boost prison places.

New build prisons

HMP Fosse Way opened in May 2023, and construction of HMP Millsike is underway. Fosse Way joined HMP Five Wells, which opened in 2022. All three prisons are, or will be, Category C resettlement prisons holding nearly 5,000 adult men between them.^{207,208}

Fosse Way and Five Wells are among the largest prisons in England and Wales, along with HMP Berwyn which opened in 2017. They can each hold around 1,700 prisoners in certified normal accommodation (Berwyn can hold 2,000).²⁰⁹

A 2016 study found that prisons holding under 400 prisoners were seven times more likely to receive a ‘good’ rating on safety from prison inspectors compared to larger prisons. They were also five times more likely to receive ‘good’ ratings in respect and purposeful activity.²¹⁰

An existing prison, HMP Highpoint, is on track to become the biggest prison in England and Wales, adding 700 places²¹¹ and taking its capacity to over 2,000 prisoners.²¹²

The Labour government’s prison building plans

The Conservative government committed to 20,000 new prison places by the mid-2020s to meet rising demand, at a cost of £3.8bn.²¹³ Labour estimates that delays and problems inflated the cost of the programme to around £10bn.²¹⁴ Both the outgoing and incoming governments say around 6,000 places were delivered, mainly from HMP Five Wells and Fosse Way (3,400 places), as well as new houseblocks at existing prisons (225 places), temporary accommodation (400 places), refurbishing cells (1,000 places),²¹⁵ and installing around 730 Rapid Deployment Cells (modular units with a 15-year lifespan).²¹⁶

The Labour government has committed to continuing the prison building programme, and has promised to deliver another 14,000 places by 2031, comprised of:²¹⁷

- **Four new prisons delivering 6,500 places. This is a continuation of the Conservative government’s building plans.** HMP Millsike (1,500 places) is already under construction, and two of the other planned prisons had received planning permission following appeal.^{218, 219} Labour approved permission for the fourth prison upon taking office, and says it will streamline the planning permission process for prisons.²²⁰
- **6,400 places through building more houseblocks at existing prisons.** The government has not said where these will be, but projects were already approved or underway in at least 13 prisons, 11 of them under the previous government.^{221, 222, 223}
- **1,050 more Rapid Deployment Cells for use in the Category C and open estate.**
- **1,150 refurbished cells, particularly at Victorian prisons.**

The government projects that the prison population will rise by over 10,000, to reach 97,300 people in the next three years²²⁴ — but current plans only deliver 8,000 additional places in that time period.²²⁵ It intends to acquire more land for building prisons.²²⁶

Labour has made a long-term forecast that the prison population will rise to between 97,300 and 112,300 by 2032.²²⁷ If it meets its target of 14,000 extra places, it will bring operational capacity to within the lower end of this range, at around 103,800 places.

207 Ministry of Justice (2024). Prison population figures: 2024. Population bulletin: monthly December 2024.

208 Ministry of Justice (2024). 10-year prison capacity strategy. HM Stationery Office.

209 Ministry of Justice (2024). Prison population figures: 2024. Population bulletin: monthly December 2024.

210 Madoc-Jones, I., et al. (2016). Prison building ‘Does size matter?’: A re-assessment. Prison Service Journal, 227, 4-10.

211 Gedge, K. (2024, 30 January). HMP Highpoint – The circular economy of IT disposal. Justice Digital. Ministry of Justice.

212 Ministry of Justice (2024). Prison population figures: 2024. Population bulletin: monthly December 2024.

213 Frazer, L. (2021). Autumn budget and spending review 2021. HC 822. House of Commons.

214 Ministry of Justice (2024). 10-year prison capacity strategy. HM Stationery Office.

215 Argar, E. (2024). Letter to Chair of the Justice Select Committee Sir Robert Neill MP, 19 March 2024.

216 House of Commons written question 25498, 14 May 2024.

217 Ministry of Justice (2024). 10-year prison capacity strategy. HM Stationery Office.

218 Edward Argar MP (2023, 21 November). Letter to Sir Bob Neill MP, Chair of House of Commons Justice Committee.

219 Pope, B. A. (2024, January 31). Plan for third Grendon prison approved by Planning Inspectorate. BBC News.

220 Ministry of Justice (2024). 10-year prison capacity strategy. HM Stationery Office.

221 House of Commons written question 187209, 7 June 2023.

222 House of Commons written question 3329, 9 September 2024.

223 House of Commons written question 12313, 1 November 2024.

224 Ministry of Justice (2023). Table 1.1, Prison population projections: 2022 to 2027.

225 Ministry of Justice (2024). 10-year prison capacity strategy. HM Stationery Office.

226 Ministry of Justice (2024). 10-year prison capacity strategy. HM Stationery Office.

227 Ministry of Justice (2024). 10-year prison capacity strategy. HM Stationery Office.

Prison refurbishment and maintenance

Just 1,005 prison places were added to the prison estate in real terms between 2010 and 2024, as thousands of cells were lost through dilapidation and prison closures.²²⁸

The Conservative government completed refurbishments at seven prisons²²⁹ but also delayed cell maintenance as a way of “creating” prison places.²³⁰

The Labour government has committed to investing £220m in maintenance in 2024–25 and £300m in the following year, but this includes the probation service.²³¹ In 2020, HMPPS estimated that it needed to spend £194m a year on public sector prison maintenance for the next 25 years.²³²

The cost of making prison cells legally fire safety compliant is an estimated £1.4bn.²³³ The collapse of a major supplier in 2024 impacted planned fire safety improvements to 4,000 prison places.²³⁴ The estimated cost was made before the collapse.

In a survey of prison estate conditions, just 2% of prison buildings received a ‘good’ rating for fabric, mechanics and engineering. 13% were rated ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’ on fabric, and 18% on mechanics and engineering. The estimated cost to bring buildings up to ‘fair’ condition was £1.4bn.²³⁵

Reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) had been found at five prisons by March 2024.²³⁶ RAAC is a building material often used in public buildings between the 1950s and 1990s. The Institute of Structural Engineers has warned that RAAC can deteriorate over time and may be at increased risk of collapse with little or no warning, particular after exposure to water.²³⁷ It is not clear what is being done to address this in prisons.

HMP Dartmoor — whose closure was delayed to address the prison capacity crisis — was temporarily evacuated in 2024 owing to elevated radon gas readings. Prisoners and staff were transferred to other prisons, and work to understand the impact of exposure is underway.²³⁸ Radon occurs naturally in the ground, and HMP Dartmoor lies in a particularly affected area of the UK. It is the second biggest cause of lung cancer, but exposure can be managed in modern buildings.²³⁹ HMP Dartmoor opened in 1809.

228 National Audit Office (2024). Increasing the capacity of the prison estate to meet demand. HC 376.

229 Ministry of Justice (2023, 20 June 2022). £500 million boost to create thousands of new prison places.

230 House of Commons written question 1368, 20 November 2023.

231 Ministry of Justice (2024). 10-year prison capacity strategy. HM Stationery Office.

232 National Audit Office (2020). Improving the prison estate. HC 41. House of Commons.

233 Ministry of Justice (2024). Summary data from the Prison Estate Conditions Survey Programme (2021–2023).

234 Ministry of Justice (2024). 10-year prison capacity strategy. HM Stationery Office.

235 Ministry of Justice (2024). Summary data from the Prison Estate Conditions Survey Programme (2021–2023).

236 Argar, E. (2024). Letter to Chair of the Justice Select Committee Sir Robert Neill MP, 19 March 2024.

237 Institute of Structural Engineers (2023, 25 October). IStructE statement & FAQs: Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC).

238 House of Lords written question HL3077, 9 December 2024.

239 Health and Safety Executive (n.d.). Radon in the workplace. Accessed 19 January 2025.

Prison service resources and staffing

Resources

HM Prisons and Probation Service (HMPPS) has experienced significant cuts to its overall budget in recent years.

Between 2010–11 and 2014–15 HMPPS's resource budget was reduced by 20%.^{240,241,242} Despite increases in recent years, including an 8% rise in 2023–24, its resource budget still remains 6% lower in real terms than in 2010–11.^{243,244}

The cost of a prison place in 2022–23 was the same in real terms as 2010–11. The average annual overall cost of a prison place in England and Wales is now £51,724.^{245,246,247}

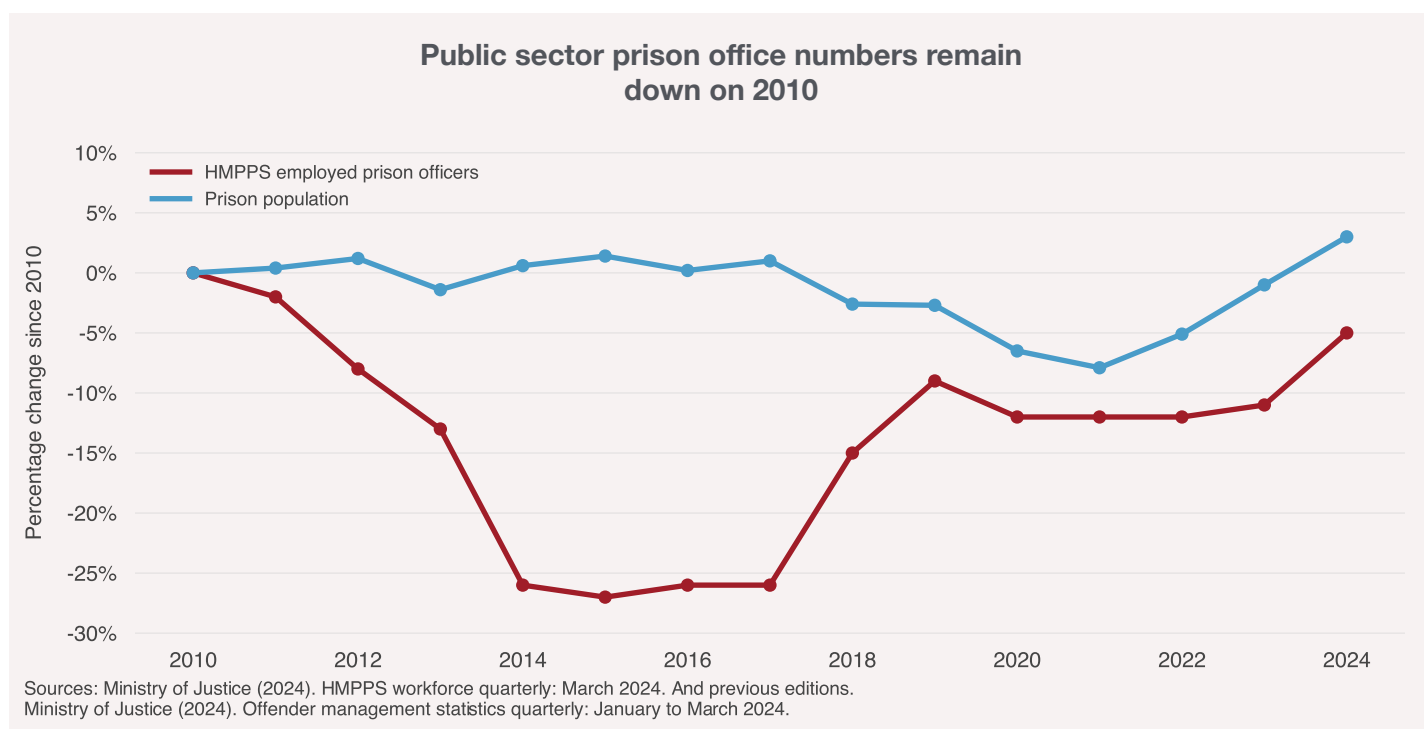
HMPPS underspent its capital budget for prison building by £220m in 2023–24. The Ministry of Justice has indicated that planning permission delays and supplier pressures are having an impact.²⁴⁸

Staffing levels

The number of frontline operational prison staff (bands 3–5) was cut by 26% between 2010–2017.²⁴⁹

The Conservative government announced £100m to partially reverse the decline,²⁵⁰ committing to recruit a further 2,500 officers by the end of 2018.²⁵¹ This target was achieved. It then committed to recruiting 5,000 officers by the mid 2020s.²⁵²

There are nearly 1,700 more officers than there were in 2021– 34% of the staffing target,²⁵³ but there are still 5% fewer than in 2010.²⁵⁴



²⁴⁰ Ministry of Justice (2011). Ministry of Justice annual report and accounts 2010–11.

²⁴¹ Ministry of Justice (2015). Ministry of Justice annual report and accounts 2014–15.

²⁴² HM Treasury (2024). GDP deflators at market prices, and money GDP October 2024 (Autumn Statement).

²⁴³ Ministry of Justice (2024). Ministry of Justice annual report and accounts 2023–24.

²⁴⁴ HM Treasury (2024). GDP deflators at market prices, and money GDP October 2024 (Autumn Statement).

²⁴⁵ Ministry of Justice (2011). Costs per place and costs per prisoner by individual prison. HM Prison & Probation Service Annual Report and Accounts 2010–11 MI Addendum.

²⁴⁶ Ministry of Justice (2024). Costs per place and costs per prisoner by individual prison. Prison performance data 2022 to 2023.

²⁴⁷ HM Treasury (2023). GDP deflators at market prices, and money GDP November 2023 (Autumn Statement).

²⁴⁸ Ministry of Justice (2024). Ministry of Justice annual report and accounts 2023–24.

²⁴⁹ Ministry of Justice (2018). Table 3, HMPPS workforce statistics bulletin: September 2018 tables. HMPPS workforce quarterly: September 2018.

²⁵⁰ Ministry of Justice (2017). Justice Secretary launches new prison and probation service to reform offenders. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/justice-secretary-launches-new-prison-and-probation-service-to-reform-offenders>

²⁵¹ Ministry of Justice (2016). Prison safety and reform. Cm 9350. HM Stationery Office.

²⁵² Ministry of Justice (2021). Prisons strategy white paper. Cm 581. HM Stationery Office.

²⁵³ Ministry of Justice (2023). Table 3, HMPPS workforce statistics bulletin: September 2024 tables. HMPPS workforce quarterly: September 2024.

²⁵⁴ Ministry of Justice (2018). Table 3, HMPPS workforce statistics bulletin: September 2018 tables HMPPS workforce quarterly: September 2018.

Staff experiences

Inspectors report that prisons in northern England are overstaffed, while those in the south face severe shortages. To address this imbalance, the detached duty scheme temporarily transfers officers to prisons far from their home and usual workplace.²⁵⁵

Retention remains a problem. In the year to September 2024, almost one in seven (13%) employed officers left the prison service.²⁵⁶

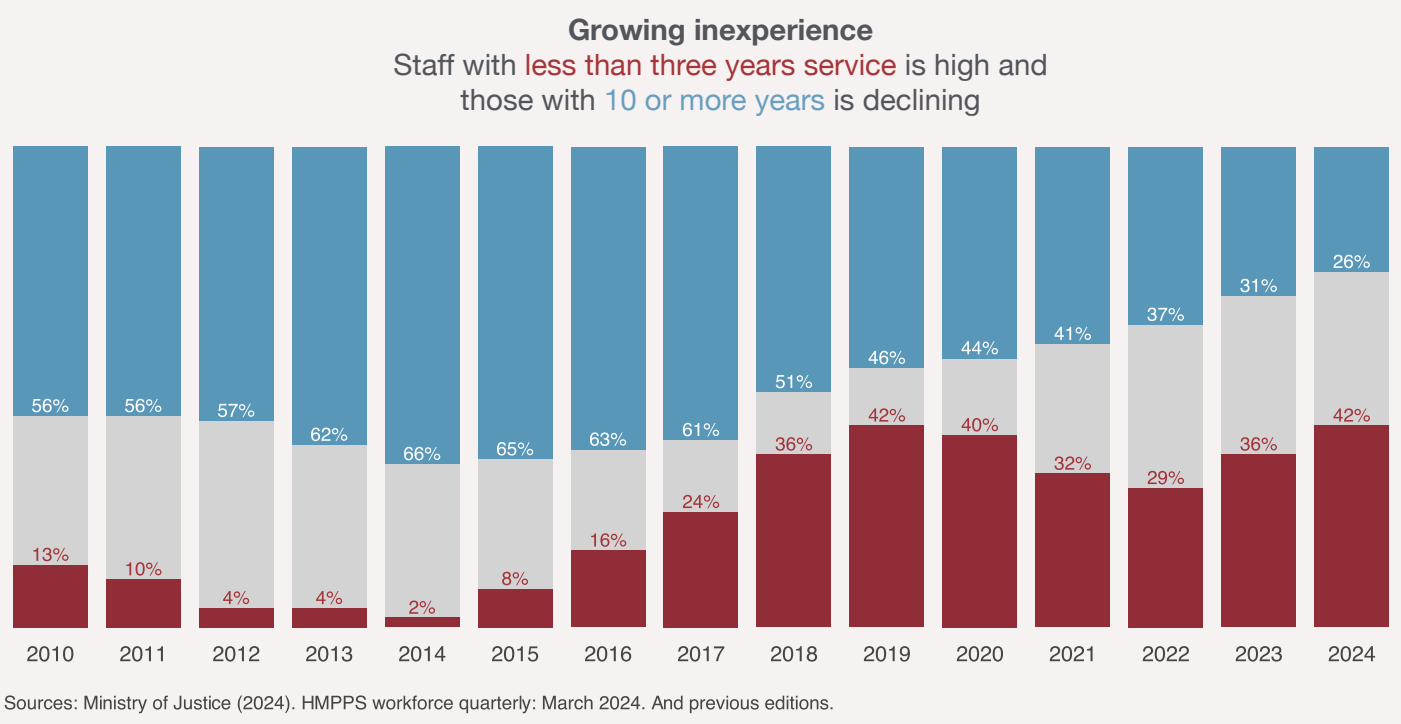
Over half of officers (58%) who left the service in the last year had stayed in the role for less than three years. Over a third (34%) left after less than a year.²⁵⁷

Since 2019, the starting salary for a prison officer has risen from £23,529 to £32,851.²⁵⁸

But a 2024 inquiry found that many new staff do not receive adequate support, and suggested that morale was at an all-time low, exacerbated by the prison capacity crisis.²⁵⁹

In a 2024 review of recruitment and retention, inspectors found severe impacts of staff shortages in other grades, not just prison officers. Shortages in education and probation staff affected the quality of provision and support available to prisoners.²⁶⁰

Inspectors also criticised the lack of governor involvement in recruiting staff to their own prisons. Many governors expressed frustration at not having control over who works for them. Prison officer recruitment is handled centrally.²⁶¹



255 Criminal Justice Joint Inspection (2024). Efficiency spotlight report: The impact of recruitment and retention on the justice system.
256 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 11, HMPPS workforce statistics bulletin: September 2024 tables HMPPS workforce quarterly: September 2024.
257 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 13, HMPPS workforce statistics bulletin: September 2024 tables HMPPS workforce quarterly: September 2024.
258 House of Commons written question 11803, 6 February 2024.
259 Neill, R. (2024). Letter to Minister for Prisons, Parole and Probation Edward Argar MP, 23 May 2024.
260 Criminal Justice Joint Inspection (2024). Efficiency spotlight report: The impact of recruitment and retention on the justice system.
261 Criminal Justice Joint Inspection (2024). Efficiency spotlight report: The impact of recruitment and retention on the justice system.

Private prisons

In England and Wales there were 17,314 people held in private prisons as of September 2024 (20% of the imprisoned population).²⁶²

There are 14 private prisons in England and Wales. Private prisons cost a total of £685.4m in 2022–23.²⁶³ The newest privately run prison, HMP Fosse Way, opened in 2023. However in 2024, HMP Lowdham Grange was taken back into public ownership in 2024,²⁶⁴ following a serious deterioration in safety and conditions at the prison after the transfer of contract from one private provider to another.²⁶⁵

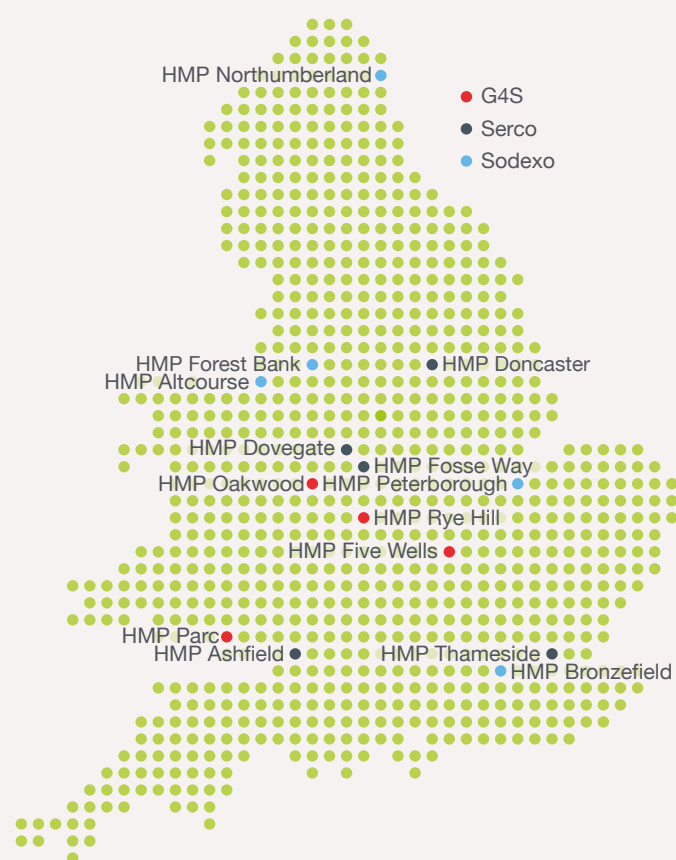
Five long-term contracts are due to expire by the end of 2027. These include prisons that have developed specialist provision, such as HMP Rye Hill for men convicted of sex offences, and HMP Dovegate which houses a therapeutic community.²⁶⁶

The contract to run HMP Millsike (currently under construction) was awarded to Mitey Care & Custody,²⁶⁷ the first new provider to be awarded a prison contract since the 1990s.

Oasis Restore secure school, the first institution of its kind in the UK for children on remand or serving custodial sentences, opened in 2024. Focused on education and healthcare,²⁶⁸ it is currently the only secure institution operated by a charity.

The previous government planned to build six new prisons, contracting five to the private sector.²⁶⁹ Two are now operational, and one is under construction — all privately run. The current government has pledged to continue the prison building program but has not clarified its stance on private contracting.²⁷⁰

Private prisons in England and Wales



Source: Beard, J. (2023). The prison estate in England and Wales. House of Commons.

Private prison performance

A mixed picture as two fall to the lowest level

	2022–23	2023–24
Altcourse	Performance is acceptable	Performance is of concern
Ashfield	Performance is acceptable	Performance is acceptable
Bronzefield	Performance is of concern	Performance is acceptable
Doncaster	Performance is acceptable	Performance is of concern
Dovegate	Performance is acceptable	Performance is acceptable
Five Wells	Performance is of concern	Performance is of serious concern
Forest Bank	Performance is of concern	Performance is of concern
Northumberland	Performance is acceptable	Performance is of concern
Oakwood	Performance is acceptable	Performance is acceptable
Parc	Performance is acceptable	Performance is acceptable
Peterborough (Female)	Performance is acceptable	Performance is acceptable
Peterborough (Male)	Performance is acceptable	Performance is of serious concern
Rye Hill	Performance is acceptable	Performance is acceptable
Thameside	Performance is of concern	Performance is of concern

■ Exceptional performance
■ Performance is acceptable
■ Performance is of concern
■ Performance is of serious concern

Source: Ministry of Justice. (2024) Prison annual performance ratings 2023–24.

²⁶² Ministry of Justice (2024). Prison population: Monthly figures 2024. Population bulletin: Monthly September 2024.

²⁶³ Table 2a, HM Prison & Probation Service (2024). Annual report and accounts 2022–23. HC 183. House of Commons.

²⁶⁴ Ministry of Justice (2024, 22 May). HMP Lowdham Grange contract to transition to public sector control.

²⁶⁵ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Report on an independent review of progress at HMP Lowdham Grange. 8–10 January 2024. Note: The unit costs of private and public prisons are not directly comparable because of different methods of financing and scope.

²⁶⁶ House of Commons written question 200700, 13 December 2018.

²⁶⁷ Ministry of Justice (2024, 23 April). Contract awarded to UK's first all-electric 'green' prison.

²⁶⁸ Youth Justice Board (2024, 4 October). Inside Oasis Secure School.

²⁶⁹ House of Lords written statement HLWS644, 4 March 2022.

²⁷⁰ Ministry of Justice (2024). 10-year prison capacity strategy.

PEOPLE IN PRISON

Social characteristics of adult prisoners

Characteristic	Prison population	General population
Taken into care as a child	31% of women 24% of men	2%
Experienced abuse as a child	29% (53% for women, 27% for men)	20%
Observed violence in the home as a child	41% (50% for women, 40% for men)	14%
Regularly truant from school	59%	5.2% (England) and 4.8% (Wales)
Expelled or permanently excluded from school	42% (32% for women, 43% for men)	In 2005 <1% of school pupils were permanently excluded (England)
No qualifications	47%	15% of working age population
Unemployed in the four weeks before custody	68% (81% for women, 67% for men)	7.7% of the economically active population are unemployed
Never had a job	13%	3.9%
Homeless before entering custody	15%	4% have been homeless or in temporary accommodation
Have children under the age of 18	47% of women 45% of men	Approximately 27% of the over 18 population*
Are young fathers (aged 18–20)	19%	4%
Have symptoms indicative of psychosis	16% (25% for women, 15% for men)	4%
Identified as suffering from both anxiety and depression	25% (49% for women, 23% for men)	15%
Have attempted suicide at some point	46% for women, 21% for men	6%
Have ever used Class A drugs	64%	13%
Drank alcohol every day in the four weeks before custody	22%	16% of men and 10% of women reported drinking on a daily basis

Sources:

Harker, L. et al. (2013). How safe are our children? NSPCC.
 HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2024). Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationary Office.
 Light, M., et al. (2013). Gender differences in substance misuse and mental health amongst prisoners. Ministry of Justice.
 Ministry of Justice (2012). Accommodation, homelessness and reoffending of prisoners.
 Ministry of Justice (2010). Compendium of reoffending statistics.
 Ministry of Justice (2012). Estimating the prevalence of disability amongst prisoners.
 Ministry of Justice (2012). Prisoners' childhood and family backgrounds.
 Ministry of Justice (2012). The pre-custody employment, training and education status of newly sentenced prisoners.
 Table KS611EW, Office for National Statistics (2012). 2011 Census.
 Table 1, Office for National Statistics (2013). Families and households, 2012.
 Office for National Statistics (2013). Labour market statistics, September 2013.
 Office for National Statistics (2013). Population estimates for UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland — Mid 2012.
 Welsh Government (2013). Absenteeism by pupil characteristics 2011/12.
 Wiles, N. et al. (2006). Self-reported psychotic symptoms in the general population. The British Journal of Psychiatry, 188: 519–526.

What people in prison say

The Prison Reform Trust has a strategic objective of giving prisoners a stronger influence in prison policy. In 2018 we launched the Prisoner Policy Network (PPN) — a network of serving prisoners, ex-prisoners and their families who want to share their experiences and ideas with policy makers. Our Building Futures programme, launched in 2020, works with men in prison serving a continuous period of at least ten years in custody, and women serving at least eight years. It aims to provide innovative prisoner-led policy solutions and shape a prison environment that is safe, humane, encourages accountability and fosters hope.

In 2024, the government announced an independent review of sentencing.²⁷¹ We asked our PPN membership what they would do to make prison sentences fairer and more effective for prisoners, victims, and the public.

“Prison can shape and reshape fundamental attributes of character, but right now survival of the system is the only thing that matters. Limitation and suppression take precedence over healthy ambition.”

“From a position as mine where the individual feels deprived of opportunity and hungry for significance, which is fundamental point for many youths doing long sentences, the solution that occurs to me is to widen that individual’s perspective through learning discipline, and also the acknowledgement of meaningful work.”

“Prison sentences are a contradiction to the purpose of removing one’s liberty. No help or support is in place to rehabilitate. Just compounding complex issues and releasing them back into society even more damaged than when they came in.”

“Please look at age related sentencing, and the trauma and domestic violence [that we have] endured.”

“For prison sentences to be made fairer and more effective, start with disclosure [of all evidence]. This is the basic premise of any fair, open and just system.”

“Lengthy sentences should be eligible for parole at one third of the sentence, and courses must be completed by then.”

“Doing what you have always done will give you the same result you have always got. Sending people to prison as the preferred option often creates more victims. Recognise change, acknowledge success, to stop the revolving door and turn prisoners back into people, not numbers.”

“I would like to see lifers or long termers who have gone above and beyond in their sentence and who have completed all their sentence plan be considered for transfer to open conditions a lot earlier than three years [before release eligibility date]. This would allow us to progress, to get used to a different setting, and reintegrated into society with a more steady and relaxed approach.”

“Taking up education, faith, therapy or creative pursuits and finding a meaning and purpose in my situation all provide me with a hook to progress and change. They help to deal with feelings of guilt and shame.”

“Being able to seek out opportunities to help others or give something back, or work through the restorative justice process will help my victims and the public.”

²⁷¹ Ministry of Justice (2024, 14 November). Independent sentencing review 2024 to 2025.

Prison Reform Trust also published other reports in 2024, where prisoners had their say.

Invisible women: Progression²⁷²

The Building Futures programme published a briefing on the sentence progression experiences of women serving long sentences.

“For long termers, you have the bit at the beginning, the bit at the end, and the great depression in between.”

“There is no information on progression. You try to do workbooks and your case worker don’t turn up. Until it’s parole time you’re literally invisible.”

“The sentence plan is meant to be a tool that is discussed with me. There is no consultation or collaboration. It isn’t a dialogue at all.”

“Not everyone can be proactive, some of the girls can’t read and write — how are they supposed to know how to help themselves?”

Race to the top: Race and ethnicity in prisons²⁷³

The Prisoner Policy Network asked 661 members “How does my race/ethnicity impact on my experience of prison?”

“When I first came to prison, I never thought my race or ethnic group would play a role in how I’m perceived as that was not my experience as a healthcare professional. I can now say with conviction that, as a BAME prisoner, the bar is set higher for me/us compared to the white Caucasian inmate in every respect.”

“I don’t bother with their processes. They mark their own homework don’t they, so they always get straight As.”

“I’m Welsh and feel like I am more aware of that in an English jail. There is racism here, and you hear English people getting it in Welsh prisons as well.”

“I have found that as we have all been marked for life by the banner of sex offender, the normal societal issues of racism seem not to be so prevalent.”

Growing old and dying inside: Improving the experiences of older people serving long prison sentences²⁷⁴

Building Futures asked 121 members serving long sentences how their age affected their prison experiences.

“When you are in your 50s you have built up a lifetime’s worth of experiences. When you come to prison, all of that is at risk. All of a sudden, the life you had known for 50 plus years has gone. You are alone and probably for the first time in a very long time, you feel vulnerable and lost.”

“I have been a working mum with a house to run, bills to pay, mouths to feed. I did everything I needed to do and provided for my family. Here I am unable to do anything independently. It has been a huge source of frustration, and I struggled to adjust.”

“Generally everything is based on younger people, all courses, education, rehabilitation, work-based roles. The system loves a broken person that they can fix, not an old person who needs care and treatment.”

²⁷² Vince, C. & Evison, E. (2024). Invisible women: understanding women’s experiences of long-term imprisonment. Briefing 3: Progression. Prison Reform Trust.

²⁷³ Harriott, P. et al. (2024). Race to the top: A PPN report on race and ethnicity in prisons. Prison Reform Trust.

²⁷⁴ Pryce, J. (2024). Growing old and dying inside: improving the experiences of older people serving long prison sentences. Prison Reform Trust.

Who cares? A consultation on ageing and lost milestones in prison²⁷⁵

The Building Futures Network Group at HMP Rye Hill asked 32 long-serving prisoners (around 5% of Rye Hill's population) "Can the current prison system look after prisoners with humanity and help them lead law-abiding and useful lives in custody and release if the growing older population become the majority?"

"Conditions such as Alzheimer's [are] not being recognised or cared for. You just can't treat someone like this the same as everyone else."

"I've never even held an iPhone, but now my bank is in there as an "app"? I've never even seen an app. What is it?"

"It's better than a care home as you're surrounded by all ages, not just those waiting to die."

"You shouldn't have to die in prison."

Potential unlocked: building a sustainable prison workforce.²⁷⁶

PRT held focus groups in seven prisons about the prison officer role, and what makes a good officer.

"Good prison officers treat people like they would want to be treated. It's as simple as that."

"He treats you like you're human, seems happy and genuinely pleased to see people."

"If you've come here to help people rather than take out frustrations on prisoners, you may find yourself banging your head against a wall."

"Most of us, if not all of us, have been in here longer than the officers. What faith does that give us...knowing that we know more about the prison than their own officers?"

A long stretch: The challenge of maintaining relationships for people serving long prison sentences²⁷⁷

Building Futures asked 133 of their members serving long sentences about the impact of relationships on their lives inside.

"Everyone I ever knew and cared about turned their backs on me. This I fully understand is my fault and a direct consequence of my offence, but it does not make it hurt any less or make me any less lonely."

"We all lived carefree lives with no real responsibilities and no real important priorities. As life goes by everyone's priorities changed, [they] got married, had kids, secure jobs... So, I found out slowly but surely [that] I came lower on everyone's priority list."

"I've been in prison for [over 25 years], so personal relationships are forever being built and renewed. Every time one moves, the process of building trust has to start again."

"My parents have both passed away during my time in prison. I wasn't able to attend their funerals nor was I able to visit them when they were sick."

"We are all in this jail together and so strong friendships do happen. For example, my friend has [a chronic condition]. Every single day I cook his dinner. There should be recognition that sometimes we provide more care and support each other than the staff do."

²⁷⁵ HMP Rye Hill Building Futures Network Group (2024). Who cares? A consultation on ageing and lost milestones in prison. Prison Reform Trust.

²⁷⁶ Dawson, P. (2024). Potential unlocked: building a sustainable prison workforce. Prison Reform Trust.

²⁷⁷ Hutton, H. & O'Brien, R. (2024). A long stretch: The challenge of maintaining relationships for people serving long prison sentences. Prison Reform Trust

What prison governors say

In 2024, the Prison Reform Trust launched its ambitious Next Gen Leaders programme, which aims to connect, cultivate and inspire future prison governors. Governors make a crucial difference to the quality of prison life, often under challenging circumstances. The prisons inspectorate has made leadership a core area of scrutiny, and describes it as one of the most important factors driving outcomes for prisoners.²⁷⁸ A parliamentary inquiry into prison governance and leadership is underway.²⁷⁹

We asked our first Next Gen Leaders cohort what have been the best and worst things about being a prison leader, and what they want people to know about what it is like.

“Staff development is fundamental and I simply love being a part of that.”

“The worst thing is that you never know what is going to happen! But equally, that can also be the best thing.”

“I would like people to know that being a prison leader can be rewarding. There is a real opportunity to make a difference and reduce the stigma attached to prisons; that they can be fulfilling places to live, work and visit.”

“Being a prison leader could be like leading in a disenchanted environment closed off from society, delivering necessities and accepting that we’re all working against a sophisticated clock. But for me, it’s about accepting the here and now, appreciating that change doesn’t happen instantly, and trusting that through compassion and leadership, I can inspire others.”

“To feel humbled when listening to and understanding the personal journeys of the people we care for.”

“Ultimately it’s my commitment to build an inclusive, thriving community.”

“It is challenging and relentless but exceptionally rewarding, even when delivering one step at a time.”

“The amazing people you meet and the work you undertake. This role is like no other. Prisons are a hybrid of fear, emotions, care, decency and respect, and those who work within them spend their time living and breathing the work that we undertake. Most people can’t do what we do.”

“The worst – it’s a lonely place. Your friends and family have no understanding of what you do and the dangers/risks that you face daily.”

“It is the best feeling in the world when you know that you’ve made a difference to someone’s life — you know that when that individual walks out that gate, that you’ll never see them again.”

“Our job is to reduce risk and protect the public and we do that by keeping men/women safe and assisting and supporting them to change their lives for the better — there is no better feeling.”

“Seeing a change in even one individual prisoner and the impact on the staff who’ve invested in that prisoner. Ultimately that’s why most people join the service.”

“The worst is when things go horribly wrong: serious incidents and the impact they have on staff well-being and morale, and the personal impact and weight of that as a prison leader.”

“It can be a really fun job but it can also be a really lonely job if you don’t prioritise support.”

“The best thing is the ability to help people to help themselves. The worst thing is not seeing the fruits of your labour. Success happens for prisoners outside prison and we rarely see it.”

“What people can go through and recover from is inspirational. To be part of that is a privilege.”

“Every day I can empower my staff and the prisoners in my care to grow into the best versions of themselves. My job is to provide them with the framework to do so effectively and to cheerlead them on, no matter how many attempts it takes.”

“The worst thing is undoubtedly when someone chooses to take their life while in custody: telling a family member their loved one has died in prison is the worst possible human experience.”

“Being a prison leader is not a job, it is a vocation and a lifestyle choice. I do not work shifts, I never really switch off.”

“It is the most exhilarating and frustrating experience, the most challenging and rewarding, the most diverse and the most colourful. I have met the most incredible people, both staff and prisoners, and nothing in life scares or shocks me anymore!”

278 HM Inspectorate of Prisons (n.d.). How we inspect. Accessed 15 January 2025.

279 Justice and Home Affairs Committee (n.d.). Prison culture: governance, leadership and staffing. Accessed 15 January 2025.

People from an ethnic minority background in prison

Over a quarter (27%) of the prison population, 23,649 people, are from an ethnic minority group. 12% identify as black/black British; 8% as Asian/Asian British; and 5% as from a mixed ethnic background.²⁸⁰

If our prison population reflected the ethnic make-up of England and Wales, we would have over 9,000 fewer men and boys in prison²⁸¹ — the equivalent of 12 average-sized male prisons.²⁸²

A 2016 study found that people from ethnic minority background face disproportionately higher odds of receiving custodial sentences for indictable offences at the Crown Court, with black people 53%, Asian people 55%, and other ethnic minority groups 81% more likely to be imprisoned compared to White people, even after accounting for higher not guilty plea rates.²⁸³

Defendants from an ethnic minority group are more likely to be remanded in custody than white defendants. In 2022, black defendants were 26% more likely, defendants of mixed ethnicities 22% more likely, and Asian defendants 17% more likely to receive this outcome.²⁸⁴

In 2022, black people spent the highest proportion of their sentence in prison (68%), followed by those from a mixed ethnic background (64%), other ethnic background (61%), white (59%) and Asian (58%) prisoners.²⁸⁵

3% of surveyed men, 4% of women and 8% of children in custody said that they identify as Gypsy, Roma or Traveller (GRT),²⁸⁶ compared to an estimated 0.1% of the general population in England and Wales.²⁸⁷

In 2020, inspectors found that most prisons they visited were still not aware of GRT people's existence or needs, which undermined attempts to provide culturally appropriate support and plans for resettlement.²⁸⁸

A 2023 study found that 69% of Gypsy and Irish Traveller prisoners were enrolled in purposeful activity, compared to 64% of the overall prison population, but that activities were often not suited to their needs. They were often excluded from work due to not meeting mandatory literacy/numeracy standards.²⁸⁹

Treatment and conditions

Black, Asian and minority ethnic people in prison often report more negatively about their prison experiences and relationships with staff. Fewer say they have a member of staff they could turn to for help, or are treated with respect by staff. More say they have been bullied or victimised by staff.²⁹⁰

Inspectors found many black prisoners feel that uneasy relationships with staff partly stemmed from underlying prejudice and racism, while few staff acknowledge the possibility of racism in their establishments.²⁹¹

Inspectors found that prison staff underestimate the cultural requirements of people from ethnic minority backgrounds in prison. A third of ethnic minority prisoners said their ethnicity directly influenced their rehabilitation and resettlement planning, whereas almost no staff considered ethnicity to have any impact.²⁹²

Men in prison from an ethnic minority background are more likely to report having been recently restrained or placed in segregation.²⁹³

Prison officers remain less ethnically diverse than the prison population. 6% of HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) prison officers (bands 3–5) identify as black, 3% as Asian, and 75% as white,²⁹⁴ whereas 12% of prisoners identify as black, 8% as Asian, and 72% as white.^{295 296}

280 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.Q.7, Prison population: 30 September 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024.

281 Kneen, H. (2017). An exploratory estimate of the economic cost of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic net overrepresentation in the Criminal Justice System in 2015. Ministry of Justice.

282 Ministry of Justice (2023). Table 1.Q.13, Prison population: 30 September 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024.

283 Hopkins, K., Uhrig, N. & Colahan, M. (2016). Associations between ethnic background and being sentenced to prison in the Crown Court in England and Wales in 2015. Ministry of Justice.

284 Ministry of Justice (2024). Statistics on ethnicity and the criminal justice system 2022.

285 Ministry of Justice (2024). Statistics on ethnicity and the criminal justice system 2022.

286 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Table 2, Women's comparator workbook & Tables 1 & 4, CYP comparator workbook., Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

287 Office for National Statistics (2023). Gypsy or Irish Traveller populations, England and Wales: Census 2021.

288 HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2020) Minority ethnic prisoners' experiences of rehabilitation and release planning.

289 The Traveller Movement (2023). Available but not accessible: Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers: Barriers in accessing purposeful activities in prison.

290 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Table 10, Women & men's comparator workbooks, Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

291 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2022) The experiences of adult black male prisoners and black prison staff. HM Stationery Office.

292 HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2020) Minority ethnic prisoners' experiences of rehabilitation and release planning.

293 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Table 10, Men's comparator workbooks, Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

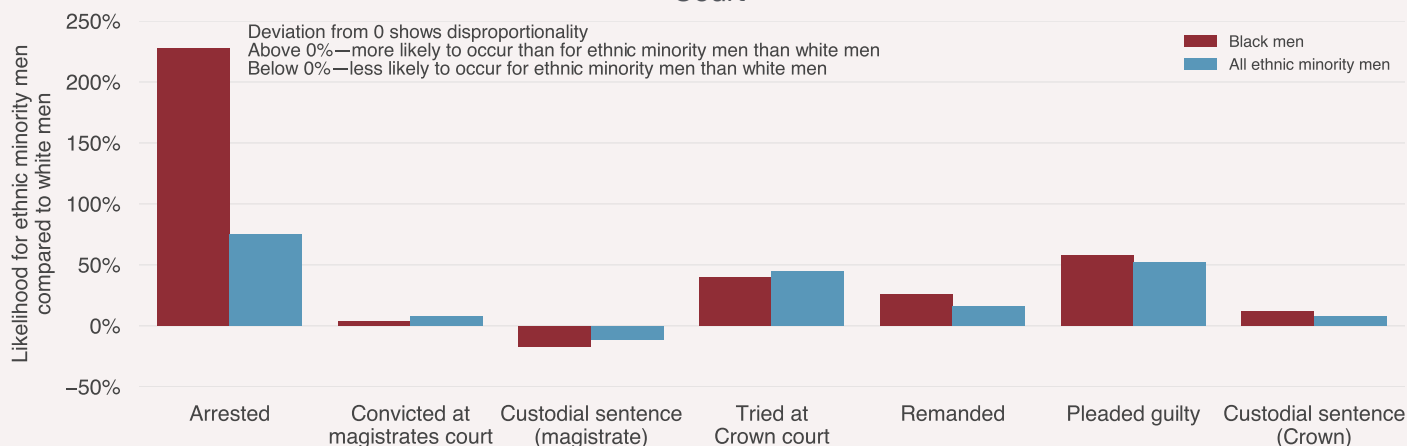
294 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1b, HMPPS annual staff equalities 2023 to 2024 tables. HMPPS staff equalities report: 2023 to 2024.

295 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.Q.7, Prison population: 30 September 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024.

296 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.Q.7, Prison population 30 September 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2024. But 14% of prison officers did not have their ethnicity recorded or did not disclose it, compared to only 1% of prisoners.

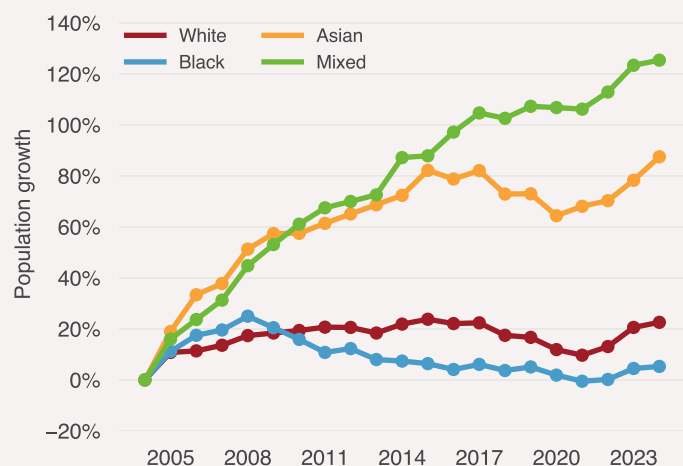
Equal justice?

Ethnic minority men are more likely to be arrested, plead not guilty and be sent to prison by the Crown Court



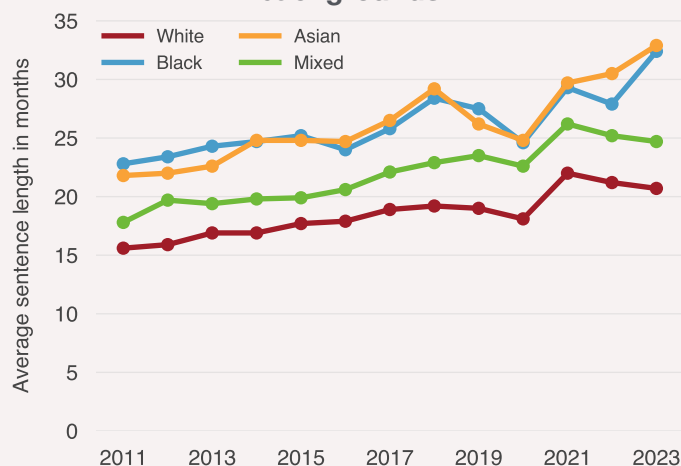
Source: Ministry of Justice (2016) Black, Asian and minority ethnic disproportionality in the criminal justice system in England and Wales.

The number of Asian and mixed ethnicity prisoners has risen sharply since 2004



Source: Ministry of Justice (2024). Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024.

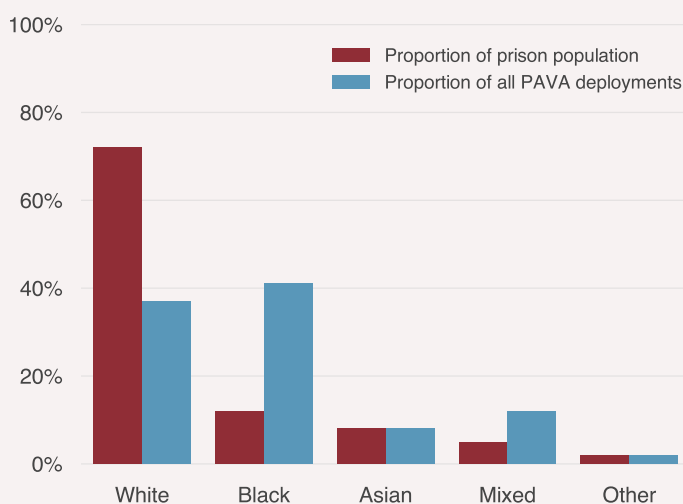
Average custodial sentence lengths are higher for people from black, Asian and mixed ethnic backgrounds



Source: Criminal justice statistics quarterly: December 2023.

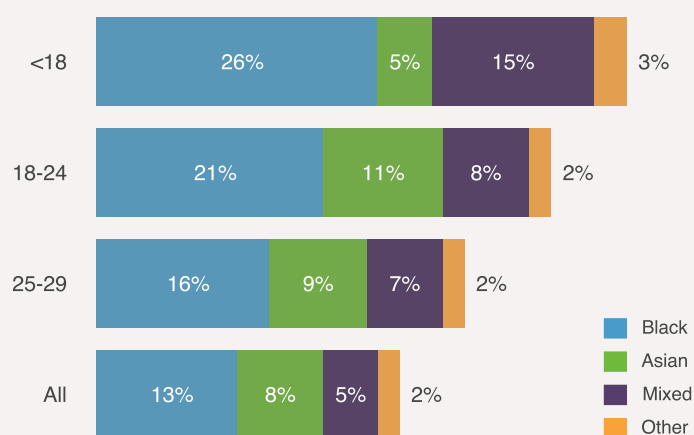
PAVA spray

More than two in five of all deployments have been against black men



Sources:
Ministry of Justice (2023). Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2023.
House of Lords written question HL10655, 26 October 2023.

Ethnic minority representation is even greater amongst younger prisoners



Sources:
House of Lords written question HL3924, 24 November 2021.
Ministry of Justice (2021) Youth Custody report September 2021.

Faith and belief in prison

44% of adult prisoners identify their religion as Christian, 18% as Muslim, 2% as Buddhist, 0.6% as Jewish, 0.7% as Sikh, 0.4% as Hindu and 3% as another faith. Almost a third (31%) state they have no religion.²⁹⁷

In youth custody, 29% of children identify their religion as Christian, 20% as Muslim, and 6% as another faith. 16% state they have no religion.²⁹⁸

The number of Muslims in adult prisons has nearly tripled since 2002, rising from 5,502 to 15,971 by 2024. They now make up 18% of the prison population,²⁹⁹ compared to 6% of the general population.³⁰⁰ Muslims in prison are far from being a homogeneous group. Some were born into Muslim families, and others have converted. 35% are Asian, 27% are black, 20% are white and 10% have a mixed ethnic background.³⁰¹

Muslim prisoners are less likely to say they feel safe, treated respectfully by staff, or could turn to them for help.³⁰²

The ideology of people in prison for terrorist offences is recorded. 157 people were in prison for offences related to Islamist extremism in 2024 — two fewer than in the previous year. The number peaked at 187 in 2017 and appears to have stabilised in recent years. By contrast the number of people in prison in 2024 for right-wing extremism has risen to 69, up from 60 people the year before, and just nine people in 2016. A further 18 people are in prison for terror offences not related to a specific ideology.³⁰³

LGBT people in prison

One in 15 surveyed men (6%) and almost one in five (18%) women in prison identify as gay/lesbian or bisexual.³⁰⁴ This is a broadly similar proportion to the proportion of men in the general population who identify as gay or bisexual, and considerably higher than the number of women who do so (3%).³⁰⁵

There were 305 transgender people in prison as of March 2024. Ten have a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC). Of those without a GRC, 227 identified as trans women and 49 as trans men; 11 identified as non-binary and 8 self-identified in a different way or their identified gender was unrecorded/stated. 245 reported their legal gender as male and 50 reported their legal gender as female.³⁰⁶

Of the 227 trans women in prison, five or fewer are housed in women's prisons. Five or fewer trans men are housed in a men's prison (of 49 trans men).³⁰⁷ Most transgender women do not request to be held in the women's estate.³⁰⁸

The United Nations recognises LGBT people as a particularly vulnerable group in prisons, with documented suffering of discrimination and abuse but relatively little information about their needs.³⁰⁹

A systematic review found that many LGBT people feel discriminated against, stigmatised and threatened in prison. The heteronormative environment of prison is associated with high rates of homophobia (from prisoners and staff), which can result in degradation and victimisation. They also experience inadequate access to healthcare.³¹⁰

In 2024, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture recommended that transgender people should be housed in prisons corresponding to their self-identified gender, subject to individualised assessments considering both their own and others' safety.³¹¹ HMPPs manages the care and allocation of transgender prisoners through individual case boards.³¹²

297 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.A.22, Prison population 2015 to 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2024.

298 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.5. Youth custody report: November 2024.

299 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.A.22, Prison population 2015 to 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2024 and previous editions.

300 Office for National Statistics (2022) Religion, England and Wales: Census 2021.

301 House of Commons written question 8447, 16 January 2024.

302 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Table 13, Women & men's comparator workbooks, Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

303 Table P.01b, Home Office (2023) Operation of police powers under the Terrorism Act 2000: quarterly update to June 2023.

304 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Table 2, Women's comparator workbook, Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

305 Office for National Statistics (2023). Sexual orientation, UK: 2021 and 2022.

306 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 2.1, Chapter 2 tables: transgender prisoners. HM Prison and Probation Service Offender Equalities Annual Report 2023 to 2024.

307 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 2.1, Chapter 2 tables: transgender prisoners. HM Prison and Probation Service Offender Equalities Annual Report 2023 to 2024.

308 House of Commons written question 19488, 18 December 2024.

309 United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (2009). Handbook on prisoners with special needs. United Nations.

310 Donohue, G., McCann, E. & Brown, M. (2021). Views and experiences of LGBTQ+ people in prison regarding their psychosocial needs: A systematic review of the qualitative research evidence. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 18, 9335.

311 European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (2024). 33rd general report. Activities 2023. Council of Europe.

312 Ministry of Justice (2024). The care and management of individuals who are transgender.

Older people in prison

Older prisoners can be split into four main profiles, each with different needs:

Repeat prisoners. People in and out of prison for less serious offences and who have returned to prison at an older age.

Grown old in prison. People sentenced for a long sentence prior to the age of 50 and who have grown old in prison.

Short-term, first-time prisoners. People sentenced to prison for the first time for a short sentence.

Long-term, first-time prisoners. People sentenced to prison for the first time for a long sentence, possibly for historic sexual or violent offences.

Many older people in prison experience chronic health problems prior to or during imprisonment as a result of poverty, poor diet, inadequate access to healthcare, alcoholism, smoking or other substance abuse. The strains of prison life can further accelerate the ageing process.³¹³

In 2024, following consultation with 121 prisoners serving long sentences, the Prison Reform Trust called on the government to publish a national strategy for older prisoners as a matter of urgency.³¹⁴ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons,³¹⁵ the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman,³¹⁶ Age UK³¹⁷ and other organisations³¹⁸ have made the same call over the last decade. The Justice Committee has also stated: “It is inconsistent for the Ministry of Justice to recognise both the growth in the older prisoner population and the severity of their needs and not to articulate a strategy to properly account for this.”³¹⁹ The government later accepted the committee’s recommendation to publish a strategy³²⁰ and publication was initially scheduled for summer 2021, then early 2023.³²¹ At the time of publication no strategy had been published.

With prison sentences getting longer, people are growing old behind bars. The number of people in prison aged 60 and over has grown rapidly over the last two decades. There are almost four times the number there were in 2002.³²²

Almost one in five (18%) of the prison population are aged 50 or over — 15,703 people. Of these 4,349 are in their 60s and a further 2,004 people are 70 or older.³²³

The government projects a 15% rise in the prison population by 2028, including a significant increase in older prisoners. Those aged 50 and over are expected to grow by 2,400 (15%), and those aged 70 and over by 700 (35%).³²⁴

More than two in five men in prison aged over 50 (43%) are there for sexual offences. The next highest offence category is violence against the person (28%) followed by drug offences (8%). For women aged over 50 in prison, more than two in five (42%) have committed an offence of violence against the person, followed by drug offences (12%), then theft offences (8%).³²⁵

426 people in prison were aged 80 or over as of 30 September 2023. The majority (92%) were sentenced to custody whilst in their 70s.³²⁶

A third (33%) of unreleased people serving an indeterminate sentence are aged 50 or over. 2,358 people are serving life sentences and a further 446 are serving an indeterminate sentence of Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP).³²⁷

313 Davies, M. et al. (2023). Living (and dying) as an older person in prison. Nuffield Trust.

314 Pryce, J. (2024). Growing old and dying inside: improving the experiences of older people serving long prison sentences. Prison Reform Trust.

315 HM Inspectorate of Prisons & Care Quality Commission (2018). Social care in prisons in England and Wales.

316 Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (2017). Learning lessons from PPO investigations: Older prisoners.

317 Age UK (2019). Older prisoners (England and Wales).

318 Clinks (2021). Understanding the needs and experiences of older people in prison.

319 House of Commons Justice Committee (2012). Older prisoners. HM Stationery Office.

320 House of Commons Justice Committee (2020). Ageing prison population: Government Response to the Committee’s Fifth Report. HM Stationery Office.

321 Rob Butler MP (2022). Letter to Sir Bob Neill, Chair of Justice Select Committee. <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/30482/documents/175886/default/>

322 Ministry of Justice (2024). Tables 1.A.18 and 1.Leg.18, Prison population: 2002-2015 and 2015-2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2024.

323 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.Q.6, Prison population: 30 September 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024.

324 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 4.1, Prison population projections: 2024 to 2029: Statistical tables. Prison population projections: 2024 to 2029.

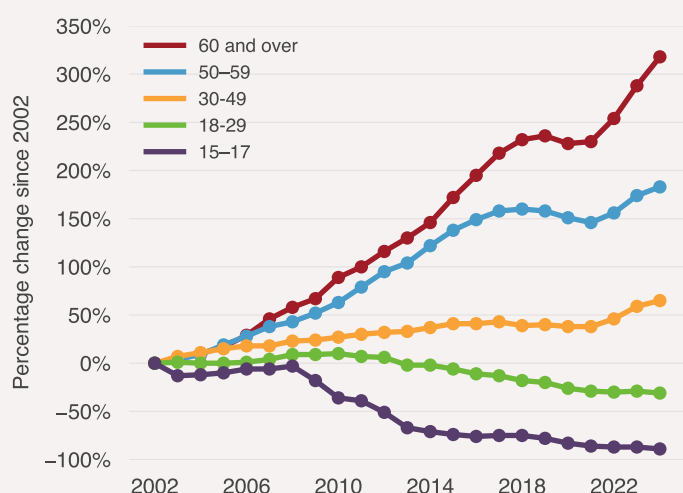
325 House of Lords written question HL1415, 25 January 2024.

326 House of Lords written question HL1416, 25 January 2024.

327 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.A.32, Prison population: 2015 to 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2024.

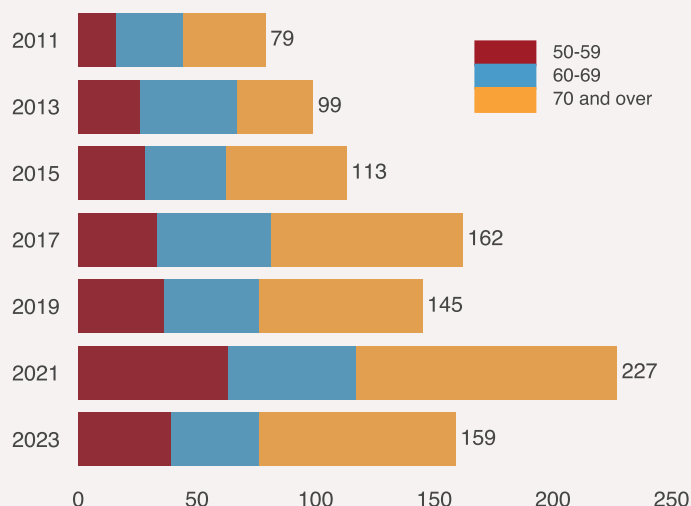
Growing old behind bars

Over 50s account for almost one in six people in prison



Source: Ministry of Justice (2024). Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2024.

Deaths by natural causes



Sources: Ministry of Justice (2024). Safety in custody: Quarterly update to December 2023.

Treatment, conditions and release planning

159 people aged 50 or over died of natural causes whilst in prison in 2023 — almost three times the number that died twenty years ago.³²⁸

Older people in prison are much more likely to suffer from chronic disease, disability, decreased mobility, and sensory impairment than other prisoners. As many as 85% of prisoners over 60 may have some form of major illness.³²⁹ The Care Act 2014 means that local authorities have a duty to assess and give care and support to people who meet the threshold for care and are in prisons and probation hostels in their area.³³⁰

Older people interviewed on entering prison for the first time often suffered from “entry shock”. This was made worse by a lack of information and an unfamiliarity with prison regimes and expectations.³³¹

Men in prison aged over 50 generally report more positively on many aspects of prison life compared to younger men. However, they are more likely to report physical health issues, difficulties accessing healthcare upon arrival, reduced contact with loved ones, and limited access to work on temporary release.³³²

A 2024 Prison Reform Trust consultation found that maintaining relationships is challenging for people serving long sentences as they age. Many had fears for the future as their relationships were stretched to breaking point, as they became more detached when visits dwindled, families changed, loved ones died and children grew up. Some anticipated leaving prison with no friends or family to return to.³³³

Older prisoners consistently emphasise the importance of meaningful self-development to maintain their mental health as they age. However, the prison service’s focus on rehabilitation and resettlement often fails to address the circumstances of those serving long sentences who are likely to spend the rest of their lives in prison.^{334,335}

A 2024 consultation with serving prisoners at HMP Rye Hill highlighted ways to better support aging prisoners. Recommendations included greater flexibility in addressing rulebreaking by individuals with dementia, more opportunities to acknowledge significant milestones such as births, deaths, and anniversaries, and the ability for prisoners to continue paying National Insurance contributions.³³⁶

³²⁸ Ministry of Justice (2024). Deaths data tool. Safety in custody: quarterly update to June 2024.

³²⁹ House of Commons Justice Committee (2020). Ageing prison population. HM Stationery Office.

³³⁰ Care Act 2014. s76. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/23/section/76>

³³¹ Senior, J., et al. (2013). Health and social care services for older male adults in prison: The identification of current service provision and piloting of an assessment and care planning model. Health Services and Delivery Research 2013,1. NIHR Journals Library.

³³² HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Table 9, Women’s and men’s comparator workbooks. Annual report 2023–24.

³³³ Hutton, M. & O’Brien, R. (2024). A long stretch: The challenge of maintaining relationships for people serving long prison sentences. Prison Reform Trust.

³³⁴ HMP Rye Hill Building Futures Network Group (2023). Progression within a prison: What does it mean and what should it look like? Prison Reform Trust.

³³⁵ Jarman, B. & Vince, C. (2022). Making progress? What progression means for people serving the longest sentences. Prison Reform Trust.

³³⁶ HMP Rye Hill Building Futures Network Group (2023). Who cares? A consultation on ageing and lost milestones in prison. Prison Reform Trust.

People with neurodivergent conditions in prison

There is no universally accepted definition of neurodiversity. It was originally introduced as an alternative to deficit-based language to describe conditions that influence how people process information. People with neurodiverse conditions may have a different pattern of cognitive strengths, difficulties and perspectives to ‘neurotypical’ individuals. The Ministry of Justice considers neurodivergent conditions to include (but not exclusively) learning disabilities, learning difficulties, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism and acquired brain injury.³³⁷

People with neurodivergent conditions face systemic barriers in the criminal justice system, including limited understanding of their needs, inadequate support, and the inconsistent implementation of reasonable adjustments. In prison, they are often excluded from key aspects of the regime, including rehabilitative opportunities.³³⁸

A 2021 independent review of neurodiversity in the criminal justice system recommended six key actions, including a common screening tool, routine data collection, staff training, reasonable adjustments, cross-departmental collaboration, and a cross-government strategy co-created with people with experience of neurodivergence.³³⁹ The then government agreed or partly agreed with all recommendations.³⁴⁰ It also committed to improving training and accessibility in prisons in the National Disability Rights Strategy³⁴¹ and the National Strategy for Autistic People.³⁴²

Prevalence of neurodivergent conditions in prisoners

The lack of routine screening makes it difficult to estimate how many people in prison have a neurodivergent condition. Following a review of evidence, inspectors suggested that “perhaps half of those entering prison could reasonably be expected to have some form of neurodivergent condition”, compared to professionals’ estimate of 15–20% of the general population.³⁴³

Of prisoners screened through educational assessments in England in 2023–24, over half (55%) were identified as having a learning difficulty or disability.^{344,345}

In 2022–23, basic screening upon entry to custody suggested that nearly a third of arriving prisoners (31%) had a neurodivergent need.³⁴⁶ But this data is not routinely published.

Academic reviews have attempted to estimate the prevalence of other neurodivergent conditions amongst people in prison and/or the wider criminal justice system. Estimates vary from 4%³⁴⁷ to 26% for ADHD³⁴⁸, over half (52%) for having suffered a traumatic brain injury,^{349,350} and 3–13% for autism, with continued uncertainty over autism³⁵¹ and ADHD.³⁵²

Concerns have been raised by inspectors about missed opportunities to identify where reasonable adjustments could be made, and poor data sharing between departments.³⁵³

³³⁷ Ministry of Justice (2023). Updated action plan. A response to the Criminal Justice Joint Inspection: Neurodiversity in the criminal justice system.

³³⁸ Criminal Justice Joint Inspection (2021). Neurodiversity in the criminal justice system: A review of evidence.

³³⁹ Criminal Justice Joint Inspection (2021). Neurodiversity in the criminal justice system: A review of evidence.

³⁴⁰ Ministry of Justice (2023). A response to the Criminal Justice Joint Inspection: Neurodiversity in the criminal justice system, a review of evidence. January 2023 update.

³⁴¹ HM Government (2021). National Disability Strategy. CP 512. HM Stationery Office.

³⁴² HM Government (2021). The national strategy for autistic children, young people and adults: 2021 to 2026.

³⁴³ Criminal Justice Joint Inspection (2021). Neurodiversity in the criminal justice system: A review of evidence.

³⁴⁴ Ministry of Justice (2023). Table 1.4, Prison education and accredited programme statistics: April 2022 to March 2023.

³⁴⁵ The prevalence figure for 2022–23 was 28%. However, the increase this year is most likely due to changes in the methodology for collecting data on learning difficulty and/or disability (LDD), which previously categorised people as having no LDD, when in fact the information was unknown. The data also no longer includes Welsh or private prisons.

³⁴⁶ House of Lords written question HL5704, 6 March 2023.

³⁴⁷ Fazel, S. & Favril, L. (2024). Prevalence of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder in adult prisoners: A meta-analysis. *Criminal behavior and mental health*, 34(3), 339–346.

³⁴⁸ Baggio, S. et al. (2018). Prevalence of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder in detention settings: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 9, 1–10.

³⁴⁹ Having suffered a traumatic brain injury at some point in life does not always mean that someone develops cognitive processing issues, but it can increase the risk of doing so.

³⁵⁰ Hunter, S. et al. (2023). The prevalence of traumatic brain injury (TBI) among people impacted by the criminal legal system: An updated meta-analysis and sub-group analyses. *Law and Human Behavior*, 47(5), 539–565.

³⁵¹ Collins, J. et al. (2023). A systematic review of autistic people and the criminal justice system: An update on King and Murphy (2014). *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 53, 3151–3179.

³⁵² Fazel, S. & Favril, L. (2024). Prevalence of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder in adult prisoners: A meta-analysis. *Criminal behavior and mental health*, 34(3), 339–346.

³⁵³ Criminal Justice Joint Inspection (2021). Neurodiversity in the criminal justice system: A review of evidence.

Barriers faced by people with neurodivergent conditions

Prisoners with learning disabilities or difficulties are more likely than other prisoners to have broken a prison rule, they are five times as likely to have been subject to control and restraint, and around three times as likely to report having spent time in segregation.³⁵⁴

Inspectors found that people with neurodivergent conditions may struggle to evidence low risk and progress through sentences due to limited availability of suitable offending behaviour programmes. They also highlighted additional challenges in understanding and complying with licence conditions, increasing the risk of breaches and recall to custody.³⁵⁵

Inspectors surveying prison and probation staff found consistent low levels of awareness, understanding and confidence relating to neurodiversity. Less than a quarter (24%) of prison staff who responded said that they had received any training about neurodiversity.³⁵⁶ Three out of four criminal justice professionals in England and Wales believe that impairments are sometimes missed.³⁵⁷

Improving support for neurodiversity-related needs

Over the past decade the government has invested in liaison and diversion services in police custody suites and the criminal courts. These aim to identify people who have vulnerabilities, including neurodivergent conditions, and divert them towards a setting more appropriate for treatment. The roll-out achieved 100% coverage across England in March 2020,³⁵⁸ and the services appear to increase diversion from custodial sentences.³⁵⁹

HMPPS has developed a neurodiversity training toolkit by and with neurodivergent staff,³⁶⁰ and reformulated core staff competencies to require neurodiversity-related awareness and skills.³⁶¹

All public and private prisons have recruited a Neurodiversity Support Manager or an equivalent role. 116 staff remained in post across 124 prisons as of 29 July 2024.³⁶² Inspectors commented that this year they had seen a mix of good, fragmented and non-existent services, which had yet to be evaluated.³⁶³

Four prisons currently have Autism Accreditation from the National Autistic Society and eight are working towards it,³⁶⁴ but progress appears inconsistent. In June 2023, three prisons had accreditation and 15 were working towards it.³⁶⁵

In 2023–24, 320 people completed an accredited offending behaviour programme that was adapted for people with learning disabilities and difficulties — more than three times as many as 10 years ago.³⁶⁶ In recent years HMPPS has expanded its suite of adapted programmes.

Four specialised units have opened since 2021, to support neurodiverse prisoners.³⁶⁷ A 2023 review of the unit at HMP Pentonville noted few incidents of violence and a reduction in assaults, stating that the unit “provided good evidence of what could be achieved at Pentonville when overcrowding and staff engagement are appropriately addressed”.³⁶⁸

354 Talbot, J. (2008) Prisoners' Voices: Experiences of the criminal justice system by prisoners with learning disabilities and difficulties. Prison Reform Trust.

355 Criminal Justice Joint Inspection (2021). Neurodiversity in the criminal justice system: A review of evidence.

356 Criminal Justice Joint Inspection (2021). Neurodiversity in the criminal justice system: A review of evidence.

357 Equality and Human Rights Commission (2020). Inclusive justice: a system designed for all.

358 NHS England website, accessed on 10 November 2022, available at <https://www.england.nhs.uk/commissioning/health-just/liaison-and-diversion/about/>

359 Disley, E. et al. (2021). Findings from the national evaluation of Liaison and Diversion services in England. RAND. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RBA1271-1.html

360 House of Commons written question 189790, 22 June 2023.

361 Ministry of Justice (2023). A response to the Criminal Justice Joint Inspection: Neurodiversity in the criminal justice system, a review of evidence. January 2023 update.

362 House of Commons written question 1838, 2 August 2024.

363 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

364 Personal communication from the National Autistic Society, 9 December 2024.

365 House of Commons written question 203860, 26 October 2023.

366 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 3.2, Prison accredited programmes 2023–24. Prison education and accredited programme statistics 2023 to 2024.

367 Ministry of Justice (2024, 16 May). Greater support for neurodivergent offenders in bid to cut crime.

368 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2023). Report on an independent review of progress at HMP Pentonville.

Foreign nationals in prison

The term “foreign national prisoner” encompasses many different people who have committed a criminal offence. People may have come to the UK as children; they may be second generation immigrants — often from former colonies; asylum seekers; people who have been given indefinite leave to remain as refugees; European and European Economic Area nationals; people who have been trafficked into the country; visitors or workers.

People who have completed their sentence but are not UK nationals may continue to be held in prison (as immigration detainees); be released; or transferred to an immigration removal centre. Those with the right to stay in UK will be released like any other British citizen, while others of continuing interest to the Home Office may be released on immigration bail. All foreign national prisoners sentenced to 12 months or more are subject to automatic deportation unless they fall within defined exceptions. People contesting their deportation because they have family in the UK are no longer entitled to legal aid.

Legislation over the last two decades has expanded deportation of foreign national prisoners. The Early Removal Scheme (ERS) allows for the removal of determinate sentenced foreign nationals from prison before the end of their sentence. The Tariff Expired Removal Scheme (TERS) for indeterminately sentenced foreign nationals, allows removal on or after their tariff expiry without reference to the Parole Board. The Nationality and Borders Act 2022 allowed determinately sentenced prisoners to leave custody up to 12 months earlier than previously. The United Kingdom has prisoner transfer arrangements (PTAs) with 110 countries and territories.³⁶⁹

In 2022, prison inspectors reviewed the experiences of immigration detainees held in prisons. Their principal finding was that this group are “substantially disadvantaged” compared to those held in immigration removal centres, and that detention adversely affects their welfare. The inspectorate concluded that immigration detainees in prison have distinct needs which are often not met. These included access to legal representation and advice, Home Office caseworkers, and interpreting/translation services. They are often held for unacceptably long periods and given very little notice that they will be subject to indefinite immigration detention.³⁷⁰

Foreign nationals (non-UK passport holders) currently make up one in eight people in prison in England and Wales (12%). On 30 September 2024 there were 10,418 foreign nationals in prison.³⁷¹

Foreign national prisoners come from 168 countries — but over half are from 11 countries (Albania, Poland, Romania, Ireland, Jamaica, Pakistan, Lithuania, India, Portugal, Somalia and Iraq).³⁷²

Between 2002 and 2008, the number of foreign nationals in prison increased by nearly 50%, compared to a 13% rise among British nationals. However, numbers steadily declined over the following decade and have stabilised over the past four years. Today, there are 9% fewer foreign nationals in prison than at their 2008 peak, while the number of British nationals has increased by 9%.³⁷³

One in 10 women in prison (11%) are foreign nationals.³⁷⁴ A research study found that in a sample of migrant women in prison, over half (56%) had been coerced or trafficked into offending.³⁷⁵

A lower proportion of foreign nationals are in prison for violent (29%) and sexual offences (15%), compared with the overall prison population — 34% and 18% respectively. However, they are more likely to be in prison for a drug offence (24%) or miscellaneous crimes against society (10%), compared with 16% and 4% for the overall prison population.^{376,377}

3,575 people were either removed or voluntarily returned to their home country in the year to September 2024 following conviction of a criminal offence.³⁷⁸

³⁶⁹ House of Commons written question 11410, 1 February 2024.

³⁷⁰ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2022). The experience of immigration detainees in prisons.

³⁷¹ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.Q.9, Prison population 30 September 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024.

³⁷² Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.Q.12, Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024.

³⁷³ Ministry of Justice (2024). Tables 1.Leg.10 & 1.A.20, Prison populations 2002-2015 and 2015-2024. Offender management quarterly: January to March 2024.

³⁷⁴ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.Q.11, Prison population 30 September 2024, Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024.

³⁷⁵ Hales, L. and Gelsthorpe, L. (2013). The criminalisation of migrant women: Research findings and policy and practice implications. Prison Service Journal, 206, 25-30.

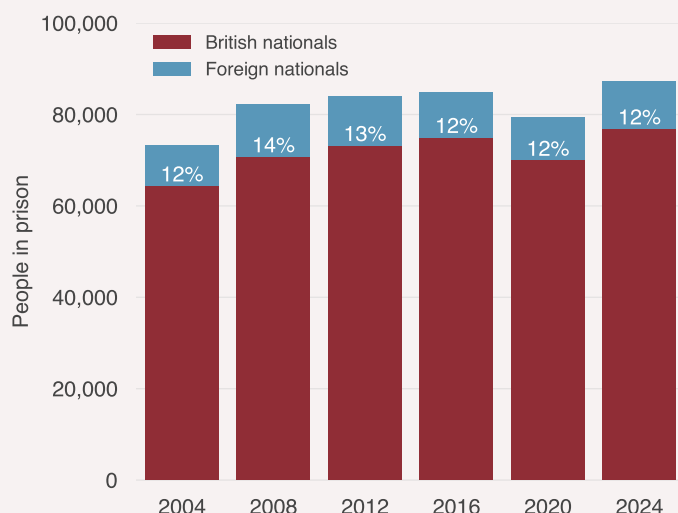
³⁷⁶ House of Commons written question 9762, 25 October 2024.

³⁷⁷ Ministry of Justice (2024). Tables 1.Q.3, 1.Q.4 and 1.Q.5, Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024.

³⁷⁸ Home Office (2024). Table Det_D03, Immigration detention detailed datasets, year ending September 2024. Immigration system statistics, year ending September 2024.

Foreign nationals

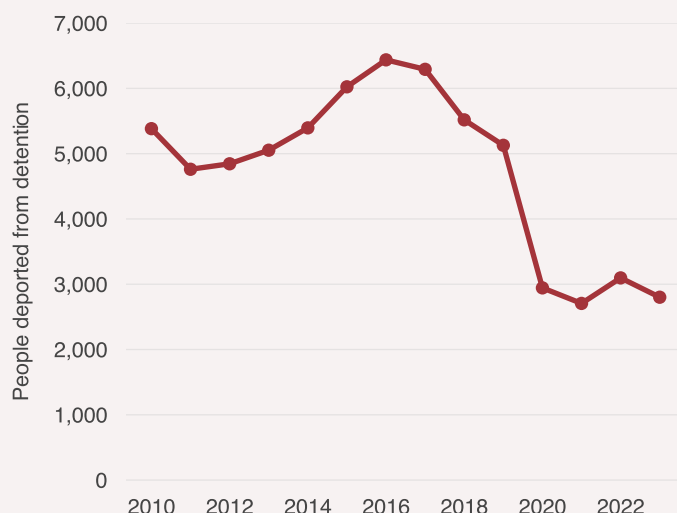
The foreign national population in prison has remained broadly stable over the last two decades



Source: Ministry of Justice (2024). Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2024.

Deportations

Over 65,000 people with convictions have been deported since 2010



Source: Table D03, Home Office (2023). Immigration system statistics: Year ending September 2023.

Treatment and conditions

Inspectors continue to find significant gaps in provision for foreign nationals. There is not enough use of professional interpreting services, and not enough contact with Home Office staff, leaving many uncertain about their status, and consequently denied progression opportunities.³⁷⁹

According to inspectors, surveyed foreign nationals were less likely to say they felt treated with respect by staff. They also said it was less easy to make applications or complaints, and were less likely to say they were receiving support for their release. Foreign national women were more likely to experience poor healthcare and felt less able to live healthily in prison.³⁸⁰

Human rights organisations have drawn attention to the practice of holding age-disputed children in adult prisons. Between 2022 and 2024, they identified 14 young people who were wrongly assessed by the Home Office as being aged over 18 upon arrival in the UK and spent time in adult prisons.³⁸¹

Immigration detainees

Immigration detainees include, but are not limited to, foreign national prisoners who have served their sentence and continue to be held under immigration powers while the Home Office attempts to deport them.

Immigration detention is an administrative process, not a criminal procedure. That means people can be detained — potentially in prison — by immigration officials rather than courts. Unlike most other European countries, there is no time limit on immigration detention in the UK.

114 people were still held in prison at the end of September 2024 under immigration powers, despite having completed their custodial sentence.³⁸² Following a visit to the UK in 2023, the European Council for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) has stated that the UK has taken insufficient action to end the practice of holding immigration detainees in prison beyond the end of their custodial sentences.³⁸³

The CPT has stated that “a prison is by definition not a suitable place in which to detain someone who is neither suspected nor convicted of a criminal offence.”³⁸⁴

³⁷⁹ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2023). Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

³⁸⁰ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2024). Table 12, Women's and men's comparator workbook, Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

³⁸¹ Taylor, V. (2024). “No such thing as justice here.” The criminalisation of people arriving to the UK on ‘small boats’. University of Oxford, Captain Support, Humans for Rights Network, and Refugee Legal Support.

³⁸² Home Office (2024). Table Det_02, Detention summary tables year ending September 2024. Immigration system statistics, year ending September 2024.

³⁸³ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (2024). Report to the United Kingdom government on the visit to the United Kingdom carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 27 March to 6 April 2023. Council of Europe.

³⁸⁴ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (2017). Immigration detention. Council of Europe.

Women in prison

A series of inquiries and reports in recent decades have all concluded that prison is rarely a necessary, appropriate or proportionate response to women who offend, including the influential Corston Report on women with particular vulnerabilities in the criminal justice system — published over fifteen years ago.³⁸⁵

In June 2018, the Ministry of Justice published its long-awaited Female Offender Strategy. It promised a focus on early intervention, community-based solutions and better custody for those women who do have to be in prison. It recognised the evidence base for a distinct approach to women and a local whole system approach.³⁸⁶ In September 2018 a cross-government Victims Strategy was published, promising to use trauma-informed approaches to support female offenders who are also victims.³⁸⁷ In 2019, the Farmer review reported on family and relational ties for women in prison, recommending “investment, from both national and local budgets, in women’s centres, domestic abuse and other community services and inside prisons...a relatively modest investment will go a long way.”³⁸⁸

In 2022, the National Audit Office criticised the Ministry of Justice for failing to prioritise, and invest in, the Female Offender Strategy, as well as weak governance and monitoring of its aims.³⁸⁹ In 2023 the Ministry of Justice launched a new delivery plan, backed by a promised £24m investment in community solutions across 2023–25.³⁹⁰ £15m had been awarded by October 2023.³⁹¹

Despite a strategic emphasis on imprisoning fewer women, in January 2021 the Ministry of Justice announced plans to build 500 new prison places for women in five existing prisons at an estimated cost of £150m.³⁹² Planning permission was secured for three sites, but in April 2024 HMPPS announced that the building work had been paused owing to spiralling costs. They also acknowledged that their existing strategy was geared towards fewer women being in prison.³⁹³

In September 2024, the Labour government announced the creation of a Women’s Justice Board, aimed at developing earlier interventions for women and enhancing alternatives to prison, such as community sentences and residential women’s centres. A strategy is expected to be published in Spring 2025.³⁹⁴ The government has also indicated that funding is being allocated to women’s centres, alongside piloting Intensive Supervision Courts³⁹⁵ that deliver community sentences with tailored support to address the root causes of offending.³⁹⁶

While England and Wales form a single jurisdiction for prisons, Wales launched its own strategy, the Female Offending Blueprint, in 2019. It emphasises a whole-systems approach to women, with an emphasis on early intervention and prevention, multi-agency working, and recognition that women who offend are also frequently victims of offending themselves.³⁹⁷

Ministers in Scotland have also committed to reducing women’s imprisonment. For data on women in Scotland and Northern Ireland please see page 82 and page 87.

³⁸⁵ Baroness Corston (2007). The Corston report. Home Office.

³⁸⁶ Ministry of Justice (2018). Female offender strategy.

³⁸⁷ HM Government (2018). Victims strategy. Cm 9700. HM Stationery Office.

³⁸⁸ Lord Farmer (2019). The importance of strengthening female offenders’ family and other relationships to prevent reoffending and reduce intergenerational crime. Ministry of Justice.

³⁸⁹ National Audit Office (2022). Improving outcomes for women in the criminal justice system. HC 1012.

³⁹⁰ Ministry of Justice (2023). Female offender strategy delivery plan 2022–25. CP 772.

³⁹¹ House of Commons written question 203057, 25 October 2023.

³⁹² House of Commons written question 164487, 16 March 2021.

³⁹³ Parker, F. (2024). Letter to Chair of the Justice Select Committee Sir Bob Neill, 29 April 2024. Ministry of Justice.

³⁹⁴ Ministry of Justice (2024, 24 September). Extra support for women through the criminal justice system announced.

³⁹⁵ House of Commons written question 13443, 14 November 2024.

³⁹⁶ Ministry of Justice (2023, 28 June). Pioneering initiative to force offenders to get clean or face jail time.

³⁹⁷ Ministry of Justice (2019). Female offending blueprint for Wales.

Women make up only

4%

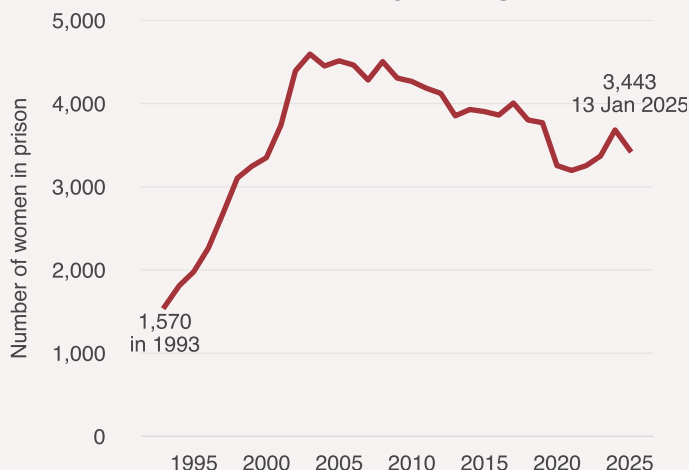
of the total prison population

6,121

women entered prison in the year to June 2024—either on remand or to serve a sentence

Source: Ministry of Justice (2024). Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024.

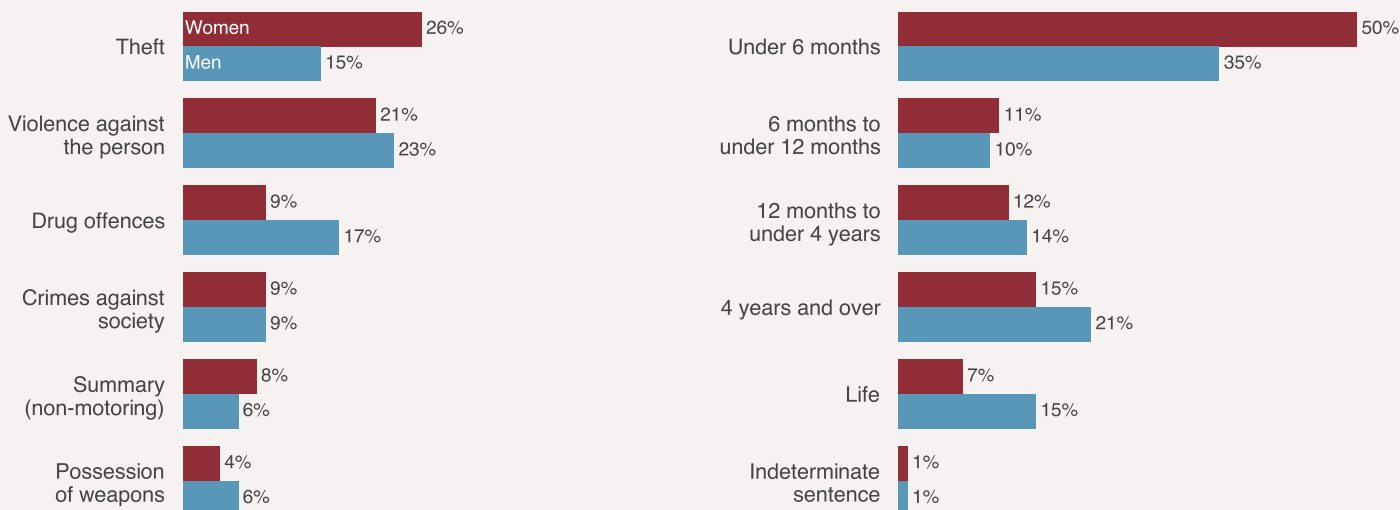
There are over twice as many women in prison as there were 30 years ago



Sources: Ministry of Justice (2025). Population bulletin weekly 13 January 2025. Ministry of Justice (2024). Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2024. Home Office (2003). Prison statistics England and Wales 2001.

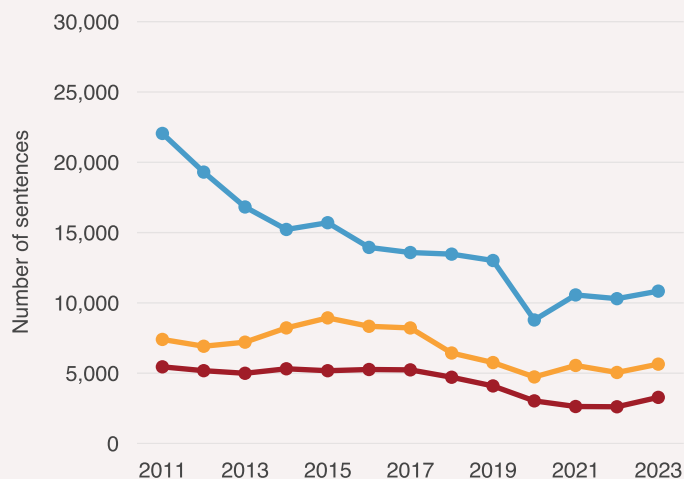
Women tend to commit less serious offences — many serve prison sentences of less than 12 months

In 2023, women entered prison for committing these offences, to serve these sentences



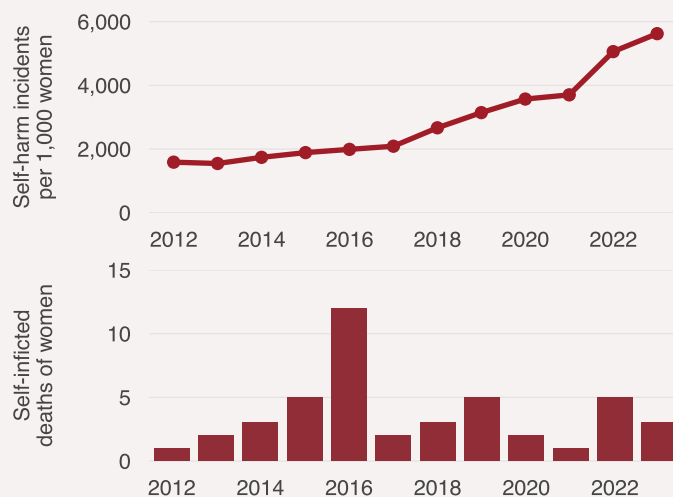
Source: Ministry of Justice (2024). Offender management statistics quarterly: October to December 2023.

Community sentences for women have halved since 2011. Suspended sentences are also down — they account for only 3% of all sentences. Use of very short prison sentences has slightly declined.



Source: Ministry of Justice (2024). Criminal justice statistics quarterly: December 2023.

Many women in prison have mental health needs and histories of abuse. Self-harm is at a record high.



Source: Ministry of Justice (2024). Safety in custody: Quarterly update to June 2024.

Use of custody

On 30 September 2024 there were 3,524 women in prison in England and Wales — around the same number as 12 months ago.³⁹⁸ Women entered prison on 6,121 occasions in the year to June 2024 — either on remand or to serve a sentence — up 16% on the previous 12 months.³⁹⁹

Many women remanded into custody don't go on to receive a custodial sentence — in 2023, more than three in five (68%) of women remanded and tried by the magistrates' court didn't receive a custodial sentence. In the Crown Court this figure was almost half (46%).⁴⁰⁰ In September 2022, more than one in five women held on remand (21%) had been there longer than six months.⁴⁰¹

Most women entering prison to serve a sentence (60%) have committed a non-violent offence.⁴⁰²

In 2023, more women were sent to prison to serve a sentence for theft than for criminal damage and arson, drug offences, possession of weapons, robbery, and sexual offences combined.⁴⁰³

The proportion of women being sent to prison to serve very short prison sentences has risen. In 1993 only a third of custodial sentences given to women were for six months or less — in 2023 it was half (50%).⁴⁰⁴

On average, around one in five women who entered prison in 2022–23 (19%) said they had been in local authority care.^{405,406}

63% of surveyed women in prison serving less than 12 months said they needed help with previous or ongoing trauma, including domestic violence.⁴⁰⁷

Girls in custody

In 2024, inspectors highlighted concerns about housing girls in HMYOI Wetherby, a young offender institution for boys, following the closure of a secure training centre in 2021. They reported that care for girls was inadequate, with girls receiving less time out of their cells than boys. Additionally, inspectors raised serious concerns about a girl who had clothing removed by male officers after she used them to make ligatures. The government has announced an independent review of the placement of girls in custody, with findings expected in February 2025.⁴⁰⁸

On average, 12 girls are held in custody at any given time — a significant decrease from 72 in 2013.⁴⁰⁹

Previously, girls were housed in small units within adult women's prisons, but the last of these units closed in 2013. Since then, girls have primarily been placed in secure children's homes or training centres, but the closure of Rainsbrooke STC saw some girls transferred to YOIs.⁴¹⁰ As of a November 2023 inspection, HMYOI Wetherby housed three of the seven girls in custody.⁴¹¹ By the time of an independent progress review in October 2024, there were no girls held at the facility.⁴¹²

Rehabilitation and resettlement

44% of women leaving prison are reconvicted within one year. Of those who reoffended, 72% were serving a sentence of six months or less.⁴¹³

The reoffending rate is 83% for women who have served more than 11 previous custodial sentences.⁴¹⁴

Women released from prison are more likely to reoffend, and reoffend sooner, than those serving community sentences.⁴¹⁵

398 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.Q.1, Prison population 30 September 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024.

399 Ministry of Justice (2023). Table 2.Q.1, Prison receptions: April to June 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024. And previous editions.

400 Ministry of Justice (2024). Remands data tool. Criminal justice system statistics quarterly: December 2023.

401 House of Commons written question 121085, 19 January 2023.

402 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 2.A.12, Receptions 2023. Offender management statistics quarterly: October to December 2023.

403 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 2.A.12, Receptions 2023. Offender management statistics quarterly: October to December 2023.

404 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 2.A.10, Receptions 2023. Offender management statistics quarterly: October to December 2023. And previous editions.

405 House of Lords written question HL8980, 17 July 2023.

406 Ministry of Justice (2023). Table 1.1, Offender management statistics quarterly: October to December 2022.

407 Criminal justice joint inspection (2024). Survey analysis workbook. The quality of work undertaken with women.

408 Cooney, F. (2024, 20 December). Where do girls live when in custody? House of Commons library.

409 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 7.8, Chapter 7 – Children in youth custody. Youth justice statistics: 2022 to 2023.

410 Cooney, F. (2024, 20 December). Where do girls live when in custody? House of Commons library.

411 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Report on an unannounced inspection of HMYOI Wetherby 20 November–7 December 2023.

412 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Report on an independent review of progress at HMYOI Wetherby 22 October–6 November 2024.

413 House of Lords written question HL1566, 30 January 2024.

414 Table 7.08, Ministry of Justice (2018). Women and the criminal justice system 2017.

415 Hedderman, C. and Jolliffe, D. (2015). The impact of prison for women on the edge: Paying the price for wrong decisions, victims and offenders. International Journal of Evidence-based Research, Policy, and Practice. 10, 152–178.

People in prison

A 2024 inspection found that resettlement provision for women is disjointed and complicated, owing to many women being held far away from their home area. It was particularly difficult for short-sentenced and recalled women to access meaningful support.⁴¹⁶

Women are generally more positive than men about the benefits of purposeful activity in prison in helping them on release.⁴¹⁷ However, just 10% of women were in paid employment six weeks after release from custody — compared to 20% of men.⁴¹⁸ After six months, this rose to 17% and 32%, respectively.⁴¹⁹

Almost half of women (47%) left prison without settled accommodation in 2023–24.⁴²⁰

The number of women recalled to prison has risen in the last year. In the 12 months to June 2024, 2,477 women were recalled to prison — an increase of over a third (36%) on the previous 12 months.⁴²¹

Family

Family is a vital support to resettlement on release.⁴²² **But keeping in touch is often made more difficult by being held in prison far from home.** The average distance for women is 63 miles, but many are held significantly further away.⁴²³

More than 17,500 children were estimated to be separated from their mother by imprisonment in 2020.⁴²⁴ Information on the caring responsibilities of women in prison and children living in the community is now recorded on entry to custody. However, this is not yet routinely published.⁴²⁵

A 2024 ad-hoc data exercise by the Ministry of Justice estimated that over half (55%) of women in prison have children aged under 18.⁴²⁶

215 pregnant women were held in prison at some point during 2023–24 — 21 more than the previous year — with an average of 47 imprisoned at any one time.⁴²⁷

53 babies were born in prison in 2023–24, compared to 44 in the previous year.⁴²⁸ **HMPPS does not record how many women experience miscarriage in prison.**⁴²⁹

Health

More than three in five women in prison (62%) report that they have mental health problems, compared with just over half of men (54%).⁴³⁰ In 2022, women accounted for 13% of transfers from prison to secure mental health facilities,^{431,432} despite making up only 4% of the prison population.⁴³³

Women serving long sentences report significant concerns, including untreated long-term health issues and inadequate healthcare — particularly in reproductive health and fertility. Many also struggle with the retraumatising impact of prison. For a substantial number, their offences occurred within the context of coercive or abusive relationships.^{434,435}

Nearly three in five women in prison who drank in the four weeks before custody (59%) thought they had a problem with alcohol. Around half (52%) thought their drinking was out of control, and two in five (41%) wished they could stop.⁴³⁶

416 Criminal Justice Joint Inspection (2024). The quality of work undertaken with women.

417 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Table 2, Women's comparator workbook, Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

418 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 4, Employment at 6 weeks post-release from custody data tables. Offender employment outcomes, update to March 2024.

419 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 4, Employment at 6 months post-release from custody data tables. Offender employment outcomes, update to March 2024.

420 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 4, Housed on release from custody data tables. Offender accommodation outcomes, update to March 2024.

421 Ministry of Justice (2023). Table 5.02, Licence recalls: April to June 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024. And previous editions.

422 Criminal Justice Joint Inspection (2014). Resettlement provision for adult offenders: Accommodation and education, training and employment.

423 Ministry of Justice. (2018). Table 5.1a and 5.1b, Supporting Data Tables for the Female Offender Strategy.

424 Kincaid, S. et al. (2019). Children of prisoners: Fixing a broken system. Crest Advisory.

425 House of Lords written question HL8979, 17 July 2023.

426 Ministry of Justice (2024). Official statistics in development: Estimates of children with a parent in prison.

427 HM Prison & Probation Service (2024). Tables 10.2 and 10.3, Chapter 10 tables — Mother and Baby Units, pregnant prisoners and births. HMPPS Annual Digest, April 2023 to March 2024. Ministry of Justice.

428 HM Prison & Probation Service (2024). Table 10.2, Chapter 10 tables — Mother and Baby Units, pregnant prisoners and births. HMPPS Annual Digest, April 2023 to March 2024. Ministry of Justice.

429 House of Commons written question 176814, 17 April 2023.

430 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Table 2, Women's comparator workbook, Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

431 House of Commons written question 21512, 22 April 2024.

432 Ministry of Justice (2022). Table 7, Restricted patients 2022. Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2022.

433 Ministry of Justice (2022). Table 1.1, Prison population: 30 June 2022. Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2022.

434 Vince, C. & Evison, E. (2023). Invisible women: Understanding women's experiences of long-term imprisonment: Briefing 2: Hope, health and staff-prisoner relationships. Prison Reform Trust.

435 Vince, C. & Evison, E. (2024). Invisible women: Understanding women's experiences of long-term imprisonment: Briefing 3: Progression. Prison Reform Trust.

436 Light, M., et al. (2013). Tables A24, A27 and A28. Gender differences in substance misuse and mental health amongst prisoners. Ministry of Justice.

Two thirds of women in prison (67%) had used drugs within a month prior to custody and almost half (49%) thought they needed help with a drug problem. Of those who had used drugs, three in 10 (30%) had overdosed previously.⁴³⁷

Women serving long sentences in prison

There are 346 women serving an indeterminate sentence in prison — almost all on life sentences (97%). They account for one in ten women in custody (10%).⁴³⁸ The number of women on an indeterminate sentence has more than doubled since 2002.⁴³⁹

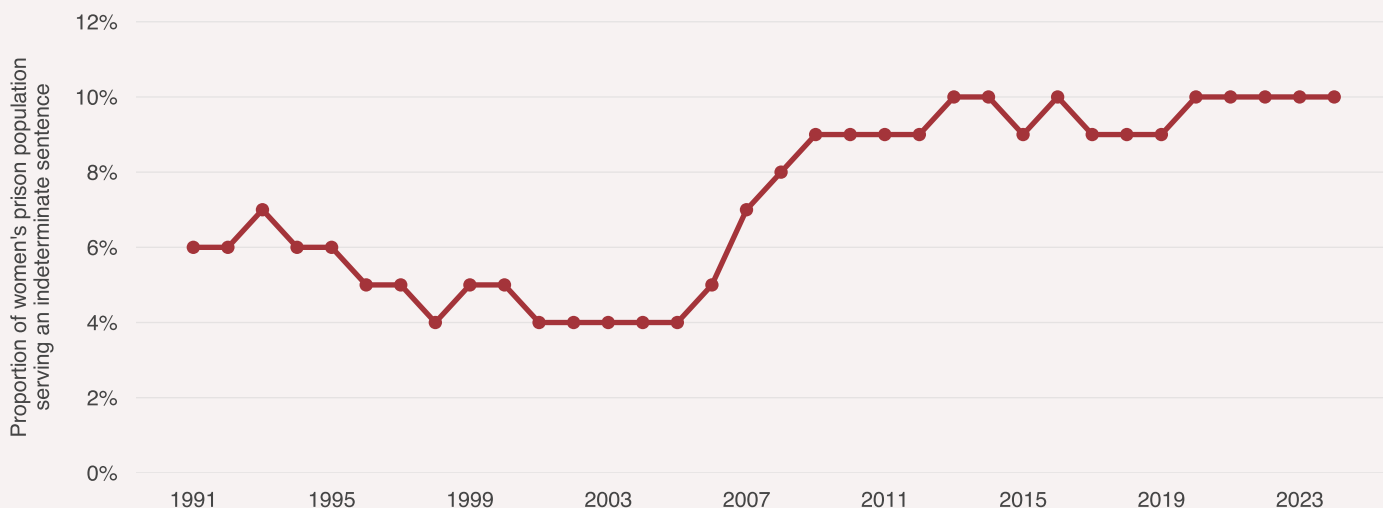
Nearly nine in 10 women currently serving an indeterminate sentence (88%) have never been released from custody. The remaining one in 10 (12%) have been recalled to prison after release. None have a fixed release date and will remain in prison until the Parole Board determines they are safe to be released.⁴⁴⁰

Of those women currently serving an indeterminate sentence who have never been released, 11% remain in prison despite having already served their tariff — the minimum period deemed necessary as punishment for their offence.⁴⁴¹

A total of 113 women, accounting for 3% of the female prison population, are serving extended determinate sentences (EDS), which involve longer custodial periods followed by extended licence supervision.⁴⁴² In 2022, at least 24 women were serving EDS sentences exceeding ten years.⁴⁴³

Women convicted of more serious crimes are spending longer in custody. Between 2015 and 2024, the number of women serving long sentences of four to 10 years has declined by 18%. But the number serving sentences of ten years or more has increased by a quarter (25%).⁴⁴⁴

The proportion of women serving indeterminate sentences has almost doubled in the last 30 years



Source: Ministry of Justice (2024). Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2024. Home Office, Prison statistics

⁴³⁷ Light, M., et al. (2013). Tables A40, A42 and A64. Gender differences in substance misuse and mental health amongst prisoners. Ministry of Justice.

⁴³⁸ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.Q.2, Prison population 30 September 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024.

⁴³⁹ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.A.2, Prison population 2015-2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2024. And previous editions.

⁴⁴⁰ Ministry of Justice (2024). Tables 1.Q.14, Prison population 30 September 2024, Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024.

⁴⁴¹ Ministry of Justice (2024). Tables 1.Q.14 and 1.Q.15, Prison population 30 September 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024.

⁴⁴² Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.Q.2, Prison population 30 September 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024.

⁴⁴³ House of Lords written question HL3588, 5 December 2022.

⁴⁴⁴ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.A.2, Prison population 2015-2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2024.

Children in prison

Children aged 10–17 can be lawfully detained in custody through three routes: remand; a Detention and Training Order (DTO), which is a custodial sentence lasting 4 months to 2 years for 15–17 year-olds and children aged 12–14 who offend persistently; or more severe sentences, such as life sentences, that exceed the maximum period of a DTO and can be applied to children as young as 10. While the number of children in custody has declined from nearly 3,000 in 2008 to just over 400 in 2024, the reasons for detention have shifted significantly.⁴⁴⁵ The proportion held on remand has risen from around 22% to 44% over the last decade, and stricter remand criteria has been introduced under the Police, Crime, Courts and Sentencing Act. Meanwhile, the proportion serving DTOs has decreased from 58% to 24%, and those serving longer sentences have increased from 21% to 32%⁴⁴⁶, including at least 31 children serving life sentences.^{447,448}

There are currently four main types of accommodation used to detain children. The 14 secure children's homes (SCHs) in England and Wales generally accommodate younger children and are intended to provide tailored support to children's needs. The sole remaining Secure Training Centre (STC) is a purpose-built place of detention for more vulnerable children aged 12–17, intended to provide education and rehabilitation. In 2017, the government committed to opening two secure schools and brought forward legislation to allow these to be run by charitable organisations. The first, operated by Oasis Restore, opened in June 2024 and will eventually accommodate up to 49 children.⁴⁴⁹ Lastly, five Young Offender Institutions (YOIs) are prisons that can accommodate children — although due to the current prison capacity crisis for adults, there are currently 118 young adults also accommodated there.⁴⁵⁰ The Ministry of Justice has forecast that the population of children aged 15–17 in custody will remain at around 300 through to September 2028⁴⁵¹ — a more optimistic estimate than last year, which predicted that it could rise to as high as 500.⁴⁵²

Use of custody

Children are committing fewer recorded crimes — proven offences in 2023 decreased by 65% compared to 2013.⁴⁵³

The number of children sentenced to in custody fell from 4,657 in 2010 to 544 children in the 12 months to 2023 — but the average sentence length increased from 11.3 months to 19.6 months.⁴⁵⁴

At the end of November 2024 there were 422 children in custody in England and Wales; 16 children were aged 14 or younger.⁴⁵⁵ The number of children in custody has fallen by 83% compared to 15 years ago.⁴⁵⁶

Two-thirds of children in custody in 2023 were there for offences of violence against the person.⁴⁵⁷

More than two in five children in custody (44%) are on remand.⁴⁵⁸

More than three in five of children (62%) remanded in custody in the year to March 2023 were either subsequently acquitted (17%) or given a non-custodial sentence (45%).⁴⁵⁹

Half of children in custody are from a black, Asian or minority ethnic background. The proportion of black children is four percentage points higher than ten years ago (from 22% to 26%).⁴⁶⁰ 8% of children in custody said they were from a traveller community.⁴⁶¹ Just 0.2% of children in England and Wales are from a Gypsy or Irish Traveller background.⁴⁶²

Fewer than 1% of all children in England are in care,⁴⁶³ but three in five (62%) of children in custody have been in care at some time in their lives.⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁴⁵ Youth Justice Board (2024). Table 1.1, Youth custody population November 2024. Youth custody data.

⁴⁴⁶ Youth Justice Board (2024). Table 7.5, Chapter 7 – Children in custody. Youth justice statistics 2022–23.

⁴⁴⁷ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.Q.2, Prison population 30 September 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024.

⁴⁴⁸ These are 15–17 year old children only. The number aged 10–14 serving life sentences is not published.

⁴⁴⁹ Youth Justice Board (2024, 4 October). Inside the Oasis Restore secure school.

⁴⁵⁰ Youth Justice Board (2024). Table 1.4, Youth custody population November 2024. Youth custody data.

⁴⁵¹ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 5.1, Prison population projections 2024 to 2029.

⁴⁵² Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 5.1, Prison population projections 2023 to 2028.

⁴⁵³ Youth Justice Board (2024). Table 4.1, Chapter 4 – Proven offences by children. Youth justice statistics: 2022 to 2023.

⁴⁵⁴ Youth Justice Board (2024). Tables 5.3, Chapter 5 – Sentencing of children. Youth justice statistics: 2022 to 2023. And previous editions.

⁴⁵⁵ Youth Custody Service (2024). Table 1.4. Youth custody report: November 2024.

⁴⁵⁶ Youth Custody Service (2024). Table 1.1. Youth custody report: November 2024.

⁴⁵⁷ Youth Justice Board (2024). Table 7.6, Chapter 7 – Children in custody. Youth justice statistics: 2022 to 2023.

⁴⁵⁸ Youth Justice Board (2024). Table 7.5, Chapter 7 – Children in custody. Youth justice statistics: 2022 to 2023.

⁴⁵⁹ Youth Justice Board (2024). Table 6.6, Chapter 6 – Use of remand for children. Youth justice statistics: 2022 to 2023.

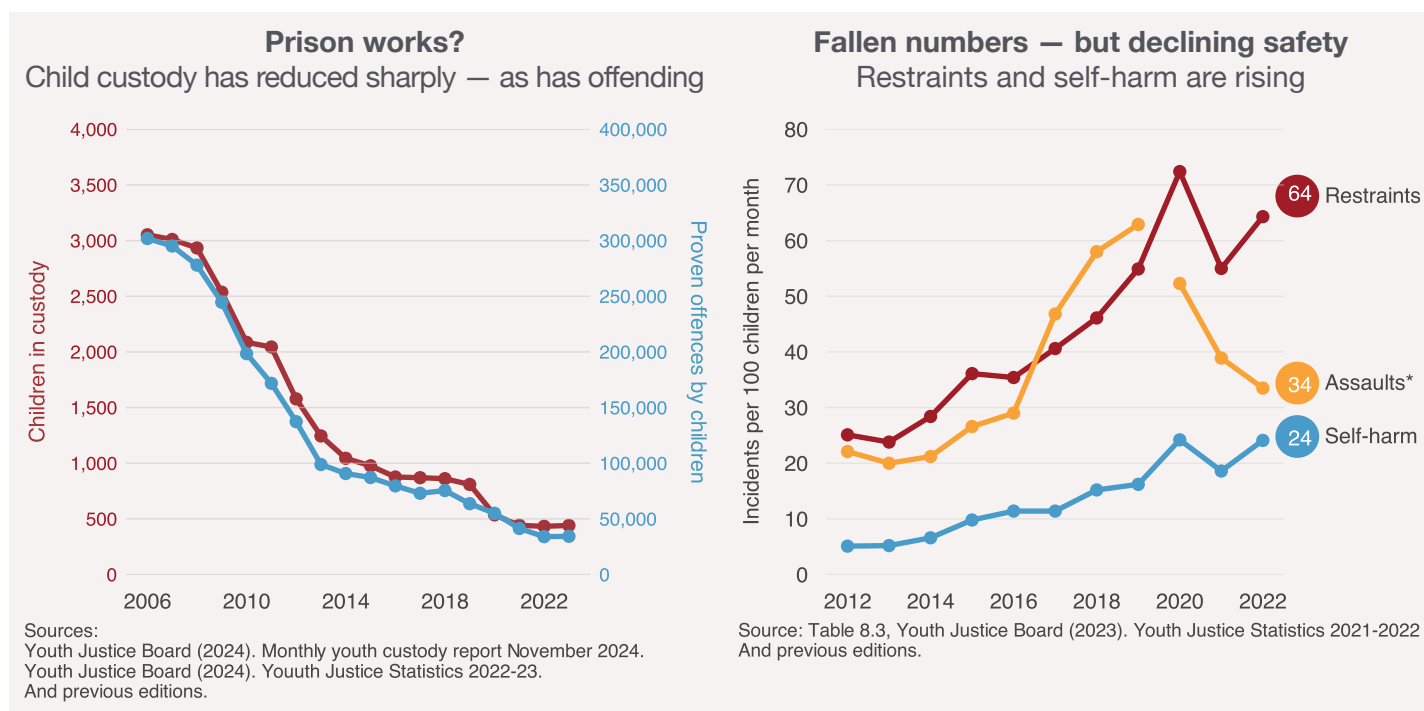
⁴⁶⁰ Youth Justice Board (2024). Table 7.9, Chapter 7 – Children in custody. Youth justice statistics: 2022 to 2023.

⁴⁶¹ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2024). Table 1, Children and young people workbook, Children in custody 2023–24.

⁴⁶² Office for National Statistics (2023). Gypsy or Irish Traveller populations data: Population counts and Table MYE2, ONS (2022). Mid-year populations estimates, UK, June 2021.

⁴⁶³ Department for Education (2023). Table: National CLA on 31 March by characteristics, Children looked after in England including adoptions and Table MYE2 – Persons, Office for National Statistics (2022). Mid-year populations estimates, UK, June 2021.

⁴⁶⁴ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2024). Table 1, Children and young people workbook, Children in custody 2023–24.



Safety, care and wellbeing in custody

In 2023–24, inspectors described how many YOIs had fallen into a “vicious cycle” of disorder, which reduced time out of cell, fuelling frustration and further disruption. This impacted on staff morale and children’s feelings of safety.⁴⁶⁵

Almost three-quarters of children (72%) said they spend more than two hours out of their cell on weekdays, and just two in five (42%) at weekends,⁴⁶⁶ though some establishments provided a far better weekend regime than others.⁴⁶⁷

In 2023–24, three-quarters of children (76%) said they were taking part in education, 7% in vocational training, and 18% in offending behaviour programmes.⁴⁶⁸ This is a 12 percentage point decrease for education compared with the year before.⁴⁶⁹ Inspectors noted that violence, disorder and feeling unsafe continues to impact attendance,⁴⁷⁰ and raised serious concerns about the declining quality of education in Young Offender Institutions.⁴⁷¹

Children’s perceptions of their safety continue to be poor. Two in five children (40%) told inspectors that they had felt unsafe where they are held.⁴⁷²

A report by prison inspectors concluded that the ‘restricted status’ system used to manage children at increased risk of escape was inappropriate, and was based on the model used to manage adult men.⁴⁷³ HMPPS committed to a review of the policy, including access to purposeful activity and rehabilitative provision for restricted status children.⁴⁷⁴

Separation of children from their peers continues to be widespread. There were 1,038 instances of separation involving 480 children in 2023–24. Nearly two-thirds of surveyed children (64%) had been kept locked up and prevented from mixing as a punishment. One in six separations (17%) lasted over 21 days, and one in forty lasted (2%) over 100 days. Inspectors found separation is a common method of managing conflict and risk, and that many children choose to self-separate for safety.⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁶⁵ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2024). Children in custody 2023-24.

⁴⁶⁶ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2024). Table 1, Children and young people workbook, Children in custody 2023-24

⁴⁶⁷ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2024). Children in custody 2023-24.

⁴⁶⁸ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2024). Table 1, Children and young people workbook. Annual report 2023-24. HM Stationery Office.

⁴⁶⁹ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2023). Table 1, Children and young people workbook. Annual report 2022-23. HM Stationery Office.

⁴⁷⁰ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2024). Children in custody 2023-24.

⁴⁷¹ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). A decade of declining quality of education in young offender institutions: the systematic shortcomings that fail children.

⁴⁷² HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2024). Table 1, Children and young people workbook. Annual report 2023-24. HM Stationery Office.

⁴⁷³ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2023). Restricted status children and prisoners held in women’s establishments.

⁴⁷⁴ HM Prison and Probation Service (2023). Action plan: Response to the thematic report Restricted Status children and prisoners held in women’s establishments.

⁴⁷⁵ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Separation of children in young offender institutions — review of progress.

In the year ending March 2023 there were 4,553 use of force incidents in custody, down 9% from the previous year. When the fall in the custodial population is taken into account, the average use of force incidents per 100 children has also decreased.⁴⁷⁶

The rate of self-harm amongst children in custody has risen sharply in recent years — increasing by a third (32%) in the last year alone. There were 383 self-harm incidents per 100 children in custody on average in the year to March 2023, up from 289 incidents in the previous year, and 63 incidents in 2010.⁴⁷⁷

Less than two in five children in custody (38%) said that it was quite or very easy for family or friends to visit.⁴⁷⁸

Less than half of children (48%) said they felt cared for by staff.⁴⁷⁹

Three out of four YOIs were rated ‘poor’ or ‘not sufficiently good’ by inspectors for safety, and all received these low ratings for purposeful activity. Only one, HMYOI Parc was rated ‘good’ across safety, care, and resettlement.⁴⁸⁰ The remaining STC, Oakhill, was judged as inadequate.⁴⁸¹ SCHs are inspected by Ofsted, with reports only available on request.

Following an Urgent Notification issued in 2023, the government announced that HMYOI Cookham Wood would be rolerolled to an adult prison. Inspectors reported a “complete breakdown in behaviour management.”⁴⁸²

In 2024, inspectors highlighted concerns about housing girls in HMYOI Wetherby, a young offender institution for boys,⁴⁸³ following the closure of a secure training centre in 2021. They reported that care for girls was inadequate, with girls receiving less time out of their cells than boys. Additionally, inspectors raised serious concerns about a girl who had clothing removed by male officers after she used them to make ligatures. The government has announced an independent review of the placement of girls in custody, with findings expected in February 2025.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁷⁶ Youth Justice Board (2024). Table 8.2 and 8.3, Behaviour management in the youth secure estate. Youth justice statistics: 2022 to 2023.

⁴⁷⁷ Youth Justice Board (2024). Table 8.3, Behaviour management in the youth secure estate. Youth justice statistics: 2022 to 2023.

⁴⁷⁸ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2024). Table 1, Children and young people workbook. Annual report 2023-24. HM Stationery Office.

⁴⁷⁹ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2024). Table 1, Children and young people workbook. Annual report 2023-24. HM Stationery Office.

⁴⁸⁰ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2024). Table 2, Judgements, scores and notable positive practice workbook. Annual report 2023-24. HM Stationery Office.

⁴⁸¹ HM Inspectorate of Prisons & Ofsted (2024). Full inspections of Oakhill STC.

⁴⁸² HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2024). Children in custody 2023-24.

⁴⁸³ Girls and boys live separately, but mix under supervision for daily activities such as education.

⁴⁸⁴ Cooney, F. (2024, 20 December). Where do girls live when in custody? House of Commons library.

Young adults in prison

The definition of “young adults” is not straightforward in criminal justice. The DYOI sentence (a custodial sentence specifically for young adults) legally classifies them as aged 18–20, however HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) policy and practice increasingly recognises that brain development and maturation takes place up to the age of 25. Yet currently, most data sources report on young adults aged 18–24. Data on this page refers to 18–24 year olds, unless otherwise stated.

There is currently no separate sentencing framework for young adults, as there is for children. In 2024, the Sentencing Council proposed changes to sentencing guidelines for 18–25 year olds which take their neurological development into account, the effects of custody upon them, and treats their emotional and developmental age with at least equal importance to their chronological age. Changes are due to be published in 2024–25.⁴⁸⁵

In 2021, a prison inspectorate report concluded that outcomes remain poor for young adults compared to those aged 25 or older. The report found that there has been a reduction of services for young adults, with little difference in treatment compared to adult prisoners. Inspectors recommended that HMPPS develop and resource a national strategy for young adult prisoners.⁴⁸⁶

HMPPS subsequently developed a custodial strategy and operational guidance for working with young adults but these have not been published. The Female Offender Strategy Delivery Plan for 2022–25 promised a justice system-wide strategy for young women aged 18–25, but in its May 2024 progress report it was still listed as in progress.⁴⁸⁷

HMPPS has also committed to several young adult specific projects, including a maturity screening tool;⁴⁸⁸ an evaluation of the transitions unit at HMP/YOI Deebolt for children entering the young adult estate; piloting a regional approach to improving provisions for young adults;⁴⁸⁹ and pilots to support young adult women at HMPs Styal and Bronzefield.⁴⁹⁰

10,848 young adults are currently in prison in England and Wales — they account for 12% of the total prison population.⁴⁹¹

There are now almost half as many young adults in prison as there were 20 years ago.⁴⁹²

But the number of young adults on remand has only reduced by 20% in the last 20 years, compared to a 53% reduction in those serving a sentence. The number on remand has also begun to rise again since the pandemic — up 25% compared to 2020.⁴⁹³

A 2015 economic analysis found that 18–24 year olds have the highest level of black, Asian and ethnic minority over-representation in the adult prison estate of all age groups. If our prison population reflected the make-up of England and Wales, we would have 2,850 fewer black, Asian and ethnic minority young adults in prison.⁴⁹⁴

Almost two in five (39%) 18–20 year olds in prison are serving a sentence for violence against the person, more than one in seven (16%) for drug offences, and around one in ten for robbery (11%) and theft (10%).⁴⁹⁵

53 18–20 year olds entered prison to serve a life sentence in 2023 — almost double the number than a decade ago.⁴⁹⁶

In 2023, there were 1,852 people in prison serving a life sentence with a tariff of 15 years or more, who were sentenced at age 25 or younger⁴⁹⁷ — more than twice as many as in 2013.⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁸⁵ Sentencing Council (2024, 11 July). Sentencing Council Business Plan 2024/25.

⁴⁸⁶ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2021). Outcomes for young adults in custody. HM Stationery Office.

⁴⁸⁷ Ministry of Justice (2024). Female offender delivery strategy: Tracker table. Female offender strategy delivery plan: Progress report.

⁴⁸⁸ House of Lords written question HL1417, 25 January 2024.

⁴⁸⁹ HM Prison & Probation Service (2021). A response to the HMI Prisons inspection: A thematic inspection on outcomes for young adults in custody.

⁴⁹⁰ Ministry of Justice (2024). Female offender delivery strategy: Tracker table. Female offender strategy delivery plan: Progress report.

⁴⁹¹ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.Q.6, Prison population: 30 September 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024.

⁴⁹² Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.A.18, Annual prison population 2015 to 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2024 and previous editions.

⁴⁹³ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.A.18, Annual prison population 2015 to 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2024 and previous editions.

⁴⁹⁴ Table 11, Kneen, H. (2017). An exploratory estimate of the economic cost of Black, Asian and minority ethnic net overrepresentation in the criminal justice system in 2015. Ministry of Justice.

⁴⁹⁵ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.Q.5, Prison population: 30 September 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024.

⁴⁹⁶ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 2.A.10, Prison receptions: 2023. Offender management statistics quarterly: October to December 2023 and previous editions.

⁴⁹⁷ House of Lords written question HL1418, 25 January 2024.

⁴⁹⁸ Ministry of Justice (2020). Freedom of Information request 201117009, 15 December 2020, available at: <https://bit.ly/U25-lifers-15-plus>

Treatment and conditions

Young adults accounted for over one in five (22%) self-harm incidents in prison in 2023. Young women accounted for over a third of female self-harm incidents (35%) despite comprising only 8% of the female prison population. Young men accounted for 17% of male self-harm while making up 13% of the male prison population.⁴⁹⁹

Safety is declining for young adults in prison. In 2023, the number of assaults rose by 15% compared to the previous year, and by three-quarters (75%) in the last decade, despite a significantly smaller population. There were more than 6,700 assaults initiated by young adults in 2023 — accounting for a third (33%) of all such incidents.⁵⁰⁰

Young adults are more likely to be on the lowest level of the Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP) scheme. On average, more than one in ten (13%) were on the ‘basic’ level (up from 9% last year) compared with 4% of the adult population.⁵⁰¹

In 2018, inspectors found that the IEP scheme was least effective in young adult prisons. A focus on punitive measures and an inadequate regime for people on basic meant that many spent long periods on the lowest levels without any improvement in their behaviour.⁵⁰² In 2024, HMPPS began advising prisons to focus on reward rather than punishment for young adults, and to take lack of maturity into account.⁵⁰³

499 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 2.3, Self-harm in prison custody 2004 to 2023. Safety in custody quarterly update to December 2023.

500 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 3.3, Assaults in prison custody 2000 to 2023. Safety in custody quarterly update to December 2023.

501 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 4.1, Chapter 4 tables: Incentives. HMPPS offender equalities annual report 2023 to 2024.

502 HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2018) Incentivising and promoting good behaviour. HM Stationery Office

503 HM Prison and Probation Service (2024). Incentives policy framework.

HEALTH IN PRISON

Drugs and alcohol

The government commissioned independent review of drugs by Dame Carol Black, published in 2020–21, estimated that people with a serious drug addiction occupy one third of prison places. They are generally serving very short sentences, have an extensive offending history and reoffend in the future. The review concluded that drug prevention, treatment and recovery across all public services (including prisons) was “not fit for purpose and urgently needs repair.” It recommended an additional £552m of investment over the next five years, including funding to improve quality of in-prison treatment, increased diversion from custody to community services, and seamless post-release support for addiction recovery, including coordinated service provision, and welfare support from day one of release.⁵⁰⁴

In December 2021, the government published its 10-year strategy to tackle drugs, and address the recommendations in Dame Black’s review. It promised to invest £780m in a “world class treatment and recovery system” that included “a treatment place for every offender with an addiction”, an expanded specialist workforce, better access to post-release support (including accommodation) and more transparency on commissioning services.⁵⁰⁵

Substance use and supply in prison

Over one in five women (21%) and almost one third of men (32%) report that it is easy to get drugs in their prison.⁵⁰⁶ This is down from 40% (women) and 45% (men) before the pandemic.⁵⁰⁷

More than one in five men (22%) said that it was easy to get alcohol in their prison — nearly double the level amongst women in prison (12%).⁵⁰⁸

Drugs were seized on 21,145 occasions last year, an increase of 44% compared with the previous year. Where drugs were found, the percentage of finds where the exact substance was unknown accounted for the largest category (33%), followed by cannabis (27%), then psychoactive substances (23%).⁵⁰⁹

Drugs accounted for over a fifth (22%) of illicit items seized in prisons in 2023–24 — more than any other type of illicit item.⁵¹⁰

51,452 random mandatory drugs tests (rMDTs) were conducted in the 12 months to March 2024, an increase of 25% from the previous year, but HMPPS says the number of tests is still not sufficient for reliable estimates of drug use.⁵¹¹

1,155 staff were investigated for supplying drugs to prisons in 2023. In the same year, 47 staff were arrested for drug conveyance, and 56 were charged.⁵¹²

In 2019, the government announced £100m of investment in measures to reduce crime in prison. The Security Investment Programme had three lines of defence: reducing conveyance of illicit items, disrupting and retrieving mobile phones, and strengthening staff resilience to corruption. The results have been mixed and inconclusive, and dependent on staff retention and skills.⁵¹³

6% of women and 9% of men surveyed by inspectors reported that they had developed a problem with illicit drugs since they had arrived at prison.⁵¹⁴

There were 145 drug-related deaths in prison between 2008 and 2019. The risk of men dying from drug related death in prison was higher than the general male population for 2016–2019. Deaths were most commonly from opiates (40%) followed by psychoactive substances (30%). In the general population, psychoactive substances account for only 2% of drug related deaths.⁵¹⁵

⁵⁰⁴ Black, C. (2021). Review of drugs: Phase two report. Home Office.

⁵⁰⁵ HM Government (2021). From harm to hope: A 10-year drugs plan to cut crime and save lives. HM Government.

⁵⁰⁶ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Table 2, Women’s comparator workbook. Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

⁵⁰⁷ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2020). Annual report 2019–20. HM Stationery Office.

⁵⁰⁸ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Table 2, Women’s comparator workbook. Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

⁵⁰⁹ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 8.2a, Chapter 8 tables – Finds in prison. HM Prison and Probation Service annual digest 2023–24. NB Multiple drugs can be found in a single seizure incident.

⁵¹⁰ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 8.2a, Chapter 8 tables – Finds in prison—Incidents data tool. HM Prison and Probation Service annual digest 2023–24.

⁵¹¹ Ministry of Justice (2024). HM Prison and Probation Service annual digest 2023–24.

⁵¹² House of Commons written question 15450, 29 February 2024.

⁵¹³ Ramziri, A. et al. (2024). Security Investment Programme (SIP): Overview and outcome study. Ministry of Justice.

⁵¹⁴ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Table 2, Women’s comparator workbook. Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

⁵¹⁵ Office for National Statistics (2023). Drug-related deaths and suicide in prison custody in England and Wales: 2008 to 2019. Office for National Statistics. Note that due to the ONS definition of a drug-related death, 18 of the reported deaths were also suicides.

Substance-related needs upon entry to prison

One in six men (17%), and one in seven women (15%) serving a sentence in prison are there for drug offences.⁵¹⁶

Almost one third of women entering prison report having a drug issue (30%) compared with just under a quarter of men (23%).⁵¹⁷

In 2023, three in five prisoners serving less than 12 months (60%) had an identified substance misuse need, and two in five (39%) had an identified alcohol misuse need.⁵¹⁸

Two-thirds of women (66%) and nearly two in five men in prison (38%) report committing offences to get money to buy drugs. More than two-thirds of women (68%) and over half of men (55%) said they were under the influence of drugs when they offended.⁵¹⁹

Nearly half of women in prison (48%) report having committed offences to support someone else's drug use.⁵²⁰

Seven in 10 people in prison with a self-identified alcohol problem (70%) said they had been drinking when they committed the offence for which they were in prison.⁵²¹

One in seven women and men (14%) said they had a problem with alcohol on arrival at prison.⁵²²

Substance misuse support

Naloxone, a medicine that reverses opioid overdoses, is an important safeguard for released prisoners with opioid addictions. They face heightened risk of overdose in the 14 days after release — likely due to reduced tolerance.⁵²³

Despite rising opioid deaths and evidence linking naloxone to reduced fatalities,⁵²⁴ provision remains inconsistent. In 2018–19, only 17% of English prisoners with an opioid problem were released with naloxone. England, unlike the other UK nations, lacks a national naloxone programme, relying on local commissioning.⁵²⁵ Recent legislation has expanded availability, but regional variation persists.⁵²⁶

Between 2022 and 2024, the number of Incentivised Substance-Free Living units (ISFLs) grew from 25 to 80,⁵²⁷ with the government aiming to open 100 by March 2025.⁵²⁸ These units offer additional support for prisoners struggling with addiction, combining regular drug testing with incentives to help them remain drug-free.

In 2023–24, inspectors praised the introduction of demand-reduction initiatives such as ISFLs, but noted seeing less “intensive, transformative group work that is crucial for released prisoners with opioid addictions” than before the pandemic.⁵²⁹

45,499 people received drug and alcohol treatment in prison during 2022–23, an increase of 4% from the previous year. Almost half (47%) were receiving treatment for opiate use.⁵³⁰

The government says it has now recruited 50 Health and Justice Coordinators to improve links between prisons and community treatment services.⁵³¹

In prisons that received investment for specialist roles, uptake of substance misuse treatment increased by 19 percentage points and uptake of post-release preparation increased by 14 percentage points. Two-thirds of surveyed prisoners (65%) said they had accessed substance misuse support, and three in five staff (58%) said this support had improved.⁵³²

⁵¹⁶ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.A.6, Prison population: 2015 to 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2024.

⁵¹⁷ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Table 2, Women's comparator workbook. Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

⁵¹⁸ House of Commons written question 14892, 27 February 2024

⁵¹⁹ Light, M. et al. (2013) Gender differences in substance misuse and mental health amongst prisoners. Ministry of Justice.

⁵²⁰ Light, M. et al. (2013) Gender differences in substance misuse and mental health amongst prisoners. Ministry of Justice.

⁵²¹ Alcohol and Crime Commission (2014). The alcohol and crime commission report. Addaction.

⁵²² HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Table 2, Women's comparator workbook. Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

⁵²³ Merrill, E. et al. (2010). Meta-analysis of drug-related deaths soon after release from prison. *Addiction*, 105(9), 1545–54.

⁵²⁴ Bird, S. et al. (2016). Effectiveness of Scotland's National Naloxone Programme for reducing opioid-related deaths: A before (2006–10) versus after (2011–13) comparison. *Addiction*, 111(5), 883–91.

⁵²⁵ Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (2022). Review off the UK Naloxone implementation: Availability and use of naloxone to prevent opioid-related deaths.

⁵²⁶ Human Medicines (Amendments Relating to Naloxone and Transfers of Functions) Regulations 2024. Statutory Instrument no. 1125, 4 November 2024.

⁵²⁷ House of Commons written question 23904, 8 May 2024. <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-26/23904>

⁵²⁸ House of Commons written question 10826, 30 January 2024. <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-22/10826>

⁵²⁹ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Annual report 2023–24. HC 218. HM Stationery Office.

⁵³⁰ Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (2023). Table 2.2, Data tables. Alcohol and drug treatment in secure settings 2022 to 2023. Public Health England, and previous editions.

⁵³¹ House of Commons written question 19895, 27 March 2024 <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-21/19895>

⁵³² Greevy, H. et al. (2023). £50m Reducing Reoffending Package process evaluation. Ministry of Justice.

In 2022–23, just over half of adults (53%) identified as needing substance misuse treatment after prison were successfully engaged within 21 days — an 11 percentage point increase from the previous year.⁵³³

Community Sentence Treatment Requirements (CSTRs) mandate substance misuse interventions as part of a community sentence. While reoffending rates for people receiving Alcohol Treatment Requirements (ATRs) or Drug Rehabilitation Requirements (DRRs) were similar to those on community sentences without CSTRs or short custodial sentences, there were modest but statistically significant reductions in the frequency and severity of reoffending.⁵³⁴

ATR recipients took longer to reoffend, reoffended slightly less frequently, and were less likely to receive a custodial sentence upon reoffending compared to both groups.

DRR recipients also reoffended less frequently, took longer to reoffend, and were less likely to receive custodial sentences compared to those on short custodial sentences. However, they reoffended slightly more often and more quickly than those on community sentences without CSTRs.

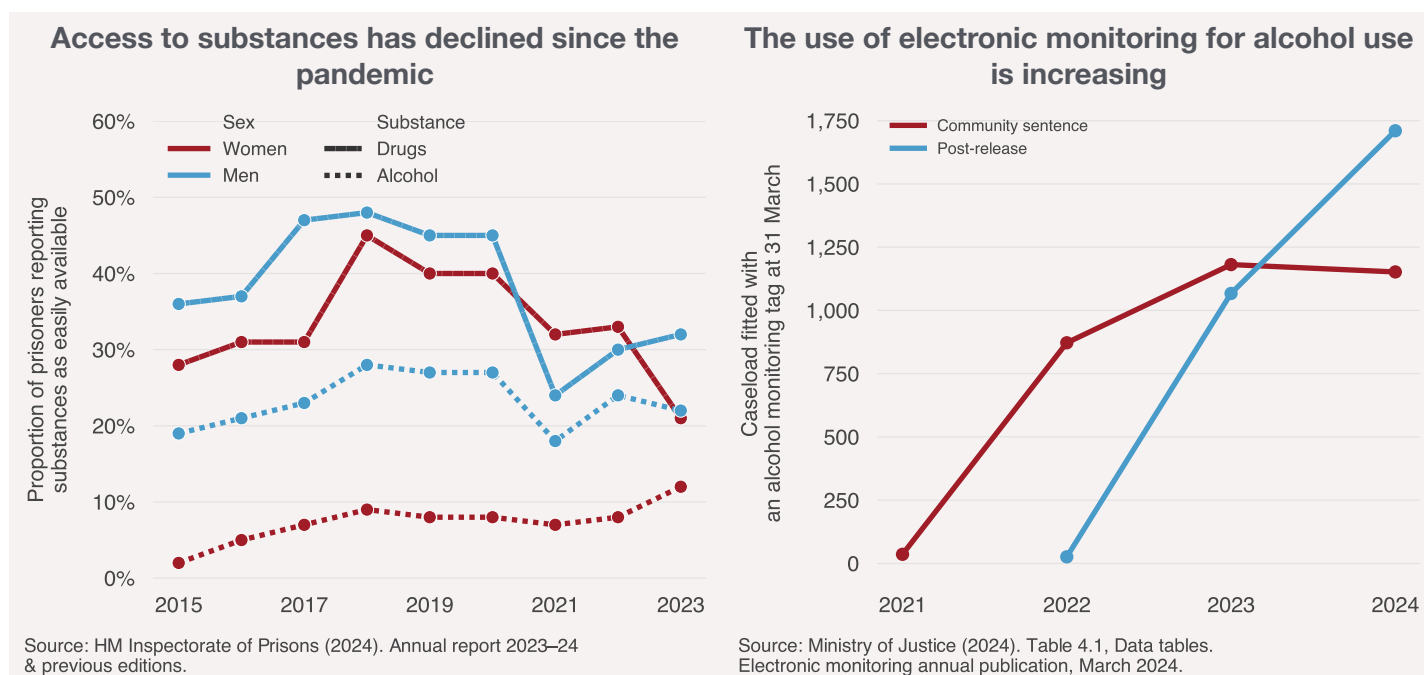
Electronic monitoring for alcohol use

When alcohol contributes to offending, courts may impose alcohol abstinence or treatment requirements. Treatment is typically used for alcohol dependence, while abstinence targets non-dependent drinkers and is monitored through electronic alcohol testing with the threat of further sanctions for non-compliance.⁵³⁵

As of 31 March 2024, 2,862 people on probation were fitted with alcohol monitoring devices — a 27% increase from the previous year.⁵³⁶

Since their introduction, alcohol monitoring requirements have achieved a 97% compliance rate.⁵³⁷

People given an abstinence requirement were about a quarter less likely to reappear before a court for another offence compared to those not given such a requirement, irrespective of age, sex, ethnicity, local area and offence type.⁵³⁸



⁵³³ Calculated by Office for Health Improvement and Disparities: Evidence Application Team using data from the National Drug Treatment Monitoring System (NDTMS), indicator C20, available at <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/public-health-outcomes-framework/data>

⁵³⁴ Chalam-Judge, R. & Martin, E. (2024). The impact of being sentenced with a community sentence treatment requirement (CSTR) on proven reoffending. Ministry of Justice.

⁵³⁵ Lightowlers, C. (2024). Enforced alcohol abstinence: Does it reduce reoffending? Administrative Data Research UK.

⁵³⁶ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 4.1, Data tables. Electronic monitoring statistics annual publication, March 2024.

⁵³⁷ House of Lords written question HL2558, 29 November 2024. <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-11-14/hl2558>

⁵³⁸ Lightowlers, C. (2024). Enforced alcohol abstinence: Does it reduce reoffending? Administrative Data Research UK

Mental health

The last few years have seen efforts to update mental health law, including for prisoners and forensic patients. In 2018, an independent review of the Mental Health Act urged ending the use of prisons as a place of safety; introducing time limits for transferring mentally ill prisoners to hospital; and that transfer decisions should be overseen by an independent role.⁵³⁹

A Draft Mental Health Bill was published in 2022,⁵⁴⁰ and scrutinised by a joint parliamentary committee.⁵⁴¹ The draft bill included a 28-day statutory time limit for relevant bodies to “seek to ensure” people are transferred from prison to hospital. It also included a provision to remove the use of prisons as a place of safety and end the use of remand solely for mental health concerns.⁵⁴²

The Mental Health Bill was introduced at the end of 2024 and is currently progressing through the necessary parliamentary stages before it can become law.⁵⁴³

Scrutiny

A 2021 Justice Committee inquiry found prison mental health provision to be inadequate, and the high unmet need “surprising and disappointing.” It called for a proper analysis of needs to inform resource planning; an end to fragmentary service provision; improved staff training and an increase in care availability. It echoed wider calls to end prison as a place of safety and increase the speed of transfers to appropriate mental health inpatient services.⁵⁴⁴

A joint inspectorate inquiry on mental health in the criminal justice system also echoed similar themes for prisons — the need for better information sharing; better staff training; more service provision; quicker transfers to hospital and an end to prison as a place of safety.⁵⁴⁵

Mental ill health among people in prison in England is estimated to cost £2.1bn annually, including £400m from avoidable prison sentences linked to mental health issues. However, much of the best-quality data on the prevalence of mental health conditions in adults in prison is outdated, making it difficult to accurately calculate the true cost.⁵⁴⁶

Extent of mental health problems in prison

Over half of surveyed men (54%) and just under two-thirds of women in prison (62%) say they have mental health problems.⁵⁴⁷

A 2023 survey of mental health caseloads in three-quarters of English prisons found anxiety and depression to be the most common primary issue (29% of patients), followed by psychosis (22%) and personality disorders (17%).⁵⁴⁸ In London, where there are more local prisons with short-term and remand populations, the prevalence of psychosis was nearly double the national rate.⁵⁴⁹

Many prisoners with mental health conditions have other factors that increase risk to their life. In surveyed prisons, more than half of patients had previously self-harmed (54%); two in five had attempted suicide (40%); and a similar proportion had a history of substance misuse alongside poor mental health (39%).⁵⁵⁰

People entering prison are screened for mental health needs. But only one in seven surveyed prisons (14%) reported that initial screenings were conducted by someone with a mental health qualification, and only one in five prisons (21%) said the same for secondary screenings.⁵⁵¹

On average, over a quarter (26%) of segregated adult male prisoners were under the care of the mental health team, according to an Independent Monitoring Board survey of 31 prisons in 2022.⁵⁵²

539 Independent Review of the Mental Health Act 1983 (2018). Modernising the Mental Health Act: Increasing choice, reducing compulsion. Department of Health and Social Care.

540 HM Government (2022). Draft Mental Health Bill. CP 699. HM Stationery Office.

541 Joint Committee on the Draft Mental Health Bill (2023). Draft Mental Health Bill 2022. Report of session 2022–23. HC 696. HL Paper 128. HM Stationery Office.

542 HM Government (2022). Draft Mental Health Bill. CP 699. HM Stationery Office.

543 Mental Health Bill, HL Bill 47 <https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/56783/documents/5312>

544 House of Commons Justice Committee (2021). Mental health in prison. Fifth report of session 2021–22. HC 72. HM Stationery Office.

545 Criminal Justice Joint Inspection (2021). A joint thematic inspection of the criminal justice journey for individuals with mental health needs and disorders. HM Stationery Office.

546 Cardoso, F. & McHayle, Z. (2024). The economic and social costs of mental ill health. Centre for Mental Health.

547 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Table 2, Women's comparator workbook, Annual report 2022–23. HM Stationery Office.

548 These figures underestimate the true prevalence of mental health conditions as people may have other conditions alongside the one classified as primary.

549 Durcan, G. (2023). Prison mental health services in England, 2023. Prison and young offender institution mental health needs analysis. Centre for Mental Health.

550 Durcan, G. (2023). Prison mental health services in England, 2023. Prison and young offender institution mental health needs analysis. Centre for Mental Health.

551 Durcan, G. (2023). Prison mental health services in England, 2023. Prison and young offender institution mental health needs analysis. Centre for Mental Health.

552 Independent Monitoring Boards (2024). Segregation of men with mental health needs: A thematic monitoring report.

Mental health support

In 2021, the Justice Committee found that around 10% of those in prison were receiving treatment for mental illness, with some prisons estimating as much as 70% of the population having some form of mental health need at any one time. It expressed surprise that none of the relevant bodies knew the extent of need for mental healthcare services in prisons.⁵⁵³

In 2023–24, inspectors raised concerns about the lack of mental health services in adult prisons; chronic recruitment and retention issues with mental healthcare staff; and excessive wait times for assessment and treatment. But they praised the better provision in open prisons.⁵⁵⁴

A 2023 independent survey suggested that the most common forms of mental health intervention offered by prisons in England are talking therapy (22%), medication (13%), and access to a psychiatrist (11%). But data on the true level of service is patchy.⁵⁵⁵

Support for some mental health needs is much worse than others, particularly neurodivergent conditions. 33% of surveyed prisons said they had skills gaps for learning disability; 58% for autism; 43% for ADHD; 87% for acquired brain injury; and 84% for speech, language and communication difficulties.⁵⁵⁶

Mental health staffing varies considerably by region, but even regions with the “best” provision had only nine nursing staff per 1,000 people in custody; two psychiatrists; seven occupational speech and language therapists; eight psychologists/therapists; five social workers and seven support workers. The youth estate has markedly better coverage than the adult estate.⁵⁵⁷

Transfers between hospital and prison

1,064 people were transferred from prison to a secure hospital in 2023 – a 47% increase since records began in 2003.⁵⁵⁸

Just over one in seven sampled patients (15%) were transferred within the recommended 28 days, according to a 2022–23 review by prison inspectors. The average waiting time was 85 days. They found that the process was not centred on patient need, and driven by a lack of available beds in secure facilities.⁵⁵⁹

A 2020 study found that only one in five people returning from hospital to prison (known as remittal) entitled to aftercare under Section 117 of the Mental Health Act were receiving such care.⁵⁶⁰ The government does not know how many prisoners are eligible for, or receiving aftercare.⁵⁶¹

There is currently no reliable data on how many people are remanded to prison as a place of safety owing to their mental health.⁵⁶²

Services after, or instead of, prison

In 2020, NHS England established the RECONNECT service which offers support for people leaving prison with an identified health need, up to three months before and six months after release.⁵⁶³ Both an inquiry⁵⁶⁴ and inspectors⁵⁶⁵ have urged speedy evaluation of the service.

In 2018, the Community Sentence Treatment Requirement (CSTR) programme was established in five areas of England, to try and increase use of treatment requirements as an alternative to short prison sentences. These requirements have been theoretically available since 2005, but are underused.⁵⁶⁶

⁵⁵³ House of Commons Justice Committee (2021). Mental health in prison. Fifth report of session 2021–22. HC 72. HM Stationery Office.

⁵⁵⁴ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

⁵⁵⁵ Durcan, G. (2023). Prison mental health services in England, 2023. Prison and young offender institution mental health needs analysis. Centre for Mental Health.

⁵⁵⁶ Durcan, G. (2023). Prison mental health services in England, 2023. Prison and young offender institution mental health needs analysis. Centre for Mental Health.

⁵⁵⁷ Durcan, G. (2023). Prison mental health services in England, 2023. Prison and young offender institution mental health needs analysis. Centre for Mental Health.

⁵⁵⁸ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 7, Restricted patients statistics: 2023. Restricted patients statistics, England and Wales, 2023.

⁵⁵⁹ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). The long wait: A thematic review of delays in the transfer of mentally unwell prisoners.

⁵⁶⁰ Leonard, S.-J., Webb, R. & Shaw, J. (2020). Service transitions, interventions and care pathways following remittal to prison from medium secure psychiatric services in England and Wales: National cohort study. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 6(5), E80.

⁵⁶¹ House of Lords written question HL238, 28 November 2023.

⁵⁶² House of Commons written question 7956, 15 January 2024.

⁵⁶³ RECONNECT. <https://www.england.nhs.uk/commissioning/health-just/reconnect>

⁵⁶⁴ House of Commons Justice Committee (2021). Mental health in prison. Fifth report of session 2021–22. HC 72. HM Stationery Office.

⁵⁶⁵ Criminal Justice Joint Inspection (2021). A joint thematic inspection of the criminal justice journey for individuals with mental health needs and disorders. HM Stationery Office.

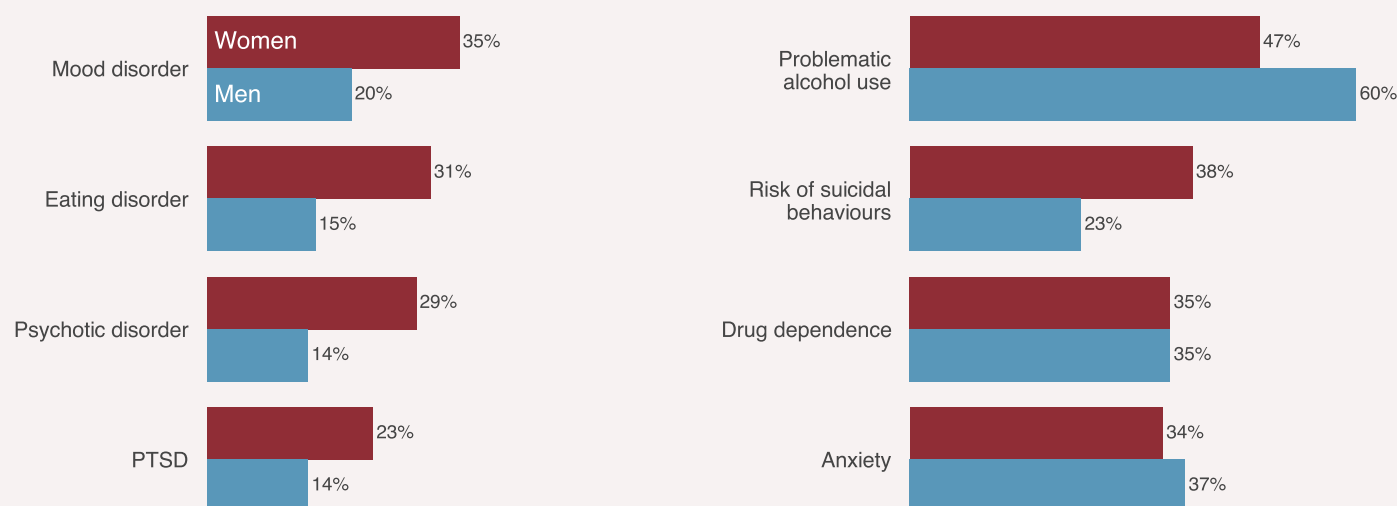
⁵⁶⁶ Chalam-Judge, R. & Martin, E. (2024). Evaluation report: The impact of being sentenced with a community sentence treatment requirement (CSTR) on proven reoffending. Ministry of Justice.

An evaluation found that four in five people assessed as suitable for a mental health treatment requirement (80%) were sentenced to one, and that between 48–73% of people showed positive reliable change across various indicators of mental distress.⁵⁶⁷

3,484 mental health treatment requirements were included in a community or suspended sentence order in 2023 — 2.2% of all orders, up from 0.3% in 2013.⁵⁶⁸

People who received mental health treatment requirements had a reoffending rate nine percentage points lower than those given short custodial sentences, reoffended less often and less seriously.⁵⁶⁹

Estimated prevalence of clinical syndromes in the prison population



Source: Tyler, N. et al. (2019) An updated picture of the mental health needs of male and female prisoners in the UK: prevalence, comorbidity, and gender differences, *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 54, 1143-1152.

⁵⁶⁷ Callender, M., Sanna, G. & Cahalin, K. (2023). Community Sentence Treatment Requirement multisite report July 2020 – January 2023. Institute for Public Safety and Criminal Justice.

⁵⁶⁸ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table A6.8, Probation: 2023. Offender management statistics quarterly: October to December 2023.

⁵⁶⁹ Chalam-Judge, R. & Martin, E. (2024). Evaluation report: The impact of being sentenced with a community sentence treatment requirement (CSTR) on proven reoffending. Ministry of Justice.

Disability, health and social care

Disability

A 2012 study estimated that over a third (36%) of people in prison had a disability. This compares with one in five (19%) of the general population.⁵⁷⁰

44% of surveyed women, 39% of men and 36% of children in prison report having a disability. All groups reported feeling less safe in prison than non-disabled prisoners.^{571,572,573}

People with disabilities report more negatively about key aspects of prison life.^{574,575}

Inspectors have raised concerns about people with disabilities not being able to access services in prisons.⁵⁷⁶

The Conservative government's National Disability Strategy includes commitments to improve support for neurodivergent prisoners, to improve accessibility and enhance digital support in the prison estate.^{577,578}

Health and social care

Inspectors highlighted a shortage of healthcare staff in prisons, with many facilities lacking sufficient clinical staff to provide effective care, particularly in mental health services and the safe administration of medicines.⁵⁷⁹

A third of men (35%) and two in five of women (42%) said it was easy to see a doctor in prison. Less than one in five (19% of men and 17% of women) said it was easy to see a dentist.⁵⁸⁰

Almost half of surveyed women (47%) and over half of men in prison (51%) said the overall quality of health services was good⁵⁸¹ — but a review of women's healthcare in prison by NHS England and HM Prison and Probation Service found it to be insufficiently gender specific.⁵⁸²

In 2023–24, over a third (39%) of recommendations by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) concerned healthcare provision — more than three times the number of the next largest category.⁵⁸³

The rate of infection for Hepatitis C in prison is around 6%, compared to 0.7% of the general population.⁵⁸⁴ Prevalence of other blood-borne viruses such as HIV is also higher in prison.⁵⁸⁵

The UK Health Security Agency classifies imprisonment as one of six social risk factors for TB, alongside drug/alcohol misuse and homelessness. In 2022, 4% of all TB notifications in England were for people currently or previously imprisoned.⁵⁸⁶

The hospital admission rate was 2.2 times higher for people in prison during the pandemic, compared to the general population.⁵⁸⁷

The Care Act 2014 places a duty on local authorities to assess and give care and support to people who meet the threshold and are in prisons and probation hostels in their area.⁵⁸⁸ However, access to social care in prison is highly varied. Whether services are equivalent to the community and the effectiveness of different models remain poorly understood.⁵⁸⁹

570 Cunliffe, C. et al. (2012). Estimating the prevalence of disability amongst prisoners: Results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) survey. Ministry of Justice.

571 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Tables 1 and 14, Men's comparator workbook. Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

572 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Tables 1 and 14, Women's comparator workbook. Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

573 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Tables 1 and 6, Children and young people's comparator workbook. Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

574 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Table 14, Women's comparator workbook. Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

575 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Table 14, Men's comparator workbook. Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

576 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

577 HM Government (2021). National Disability Strategy. CP 512. HM Stationery Office.

578 Cabinet Office (2023). Disability action plan: Consultation. CP 873. HM Stationery Office.

579 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024) Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

580 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Table 2, Women's comparator workbook. Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

581 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Table 2, Women's comparator workbook. Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

582 NHS England and HM Prison & Probation Service (2023). A review of health and social care in women's prisons.

583 Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (2024) Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office

584 UK Health Security Agency (2023, 11 May). Taking a place-based approach to tackling hepatitis in prisons.

585 Revolving Doors (2017). Rebalancing Act.

586 UK Health Security Agency (2024). Table 20, Tuberculosis in England, 2022. Tuberculosis in England, 2023 report (data up to end of 2022).

587 Davies, M. & Roy, A. (2024). Comparing the rate of inpatient admissions of prison residents with Covid-19 to the general population in England in 2020/2021 using hospital episode statistics data. BMJ Public Health, 2(1). doi:10.1136/bmjph-2023-000515

588 Care Act 2014. s76. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/23/section/76>

589 Walton, H., Tomini, S., Sherlaw-Johnson, C., Ng, P. & Fulop, N. (2023). How is social care provided in adult prisons in England and Wales? The British Journal of Social Work, 53(2), 718-736.

A 2023 review found that women's social care in prison is inconsistent, not always gender specific or sensitive to women with protected characteristics, and data on social care needs is insufficient.⁵⁹⁰

Compassionate release

The number of people granted compassionate release for health reasons is low — between 2012 and June 2023, only 108 people were released. Numbers have dropped in the recent years. In 2012, 10 people were released. In 2022 it was just one person.^{591,592}

During the pandemic, prisoners who were pregnant, had babies in custody or were considered extremely vulnerable to Covid-19 could apply for temporary release on compassionate grounds. However, only 54 prisoners were released under the scheme⁵⁹³ before it was halted.⁵⁹⁴

The PPO found that risk assessments for compassionate or temporary release were frequently determined by the risk a person would have posed when healthy — not the actual risk they pose based on their current health condition.⁵⁹⁵

Pregnancy, maternity and perinatal care

A Nuffield Trust study found that more than one in 10 pregnant women in prison (11%) went into pre-term labour, compared with around one in 15 women in the general population (6.5%).⁵⁹⁶

215 pregnant women were held in prison at some point during 2023–24 — 21 more than the previous year — with an average of 47 imprisoned at any one time.⁵⁹⁷

53 babies were born in prison in 2023–24, compared to 44 in the previous year.⁵⁹⁸ HMPPS does not record how many women experience miscarriage in prison.⁵⁹⁹

55 women and 50 babies were received into Mother and Baby Units (MBUs) in 2023–24.⁶⁰⁰

Applications for admission to an MBU were successful in around eight in 10 cases (79%) where a board made a decision.⁶⁰¹ The Royal College of Midwives has recommended a presumption of MBU eligibility for all mothers with infants aged under two years.⁶⁰²

A 2020 Ministry of Justice review found that the MBU application process was too long, sometimes resulting in preventable short-term separations.⁶⁰³ Another review found that entry into custody was particularly distressing for pregnant women, and women separated from their children.⁶⁰⁴

MBUs have an upper child age limit of 18 months, which may be extended in exceptional cases where separation is considered detrimental to the interests of the child.⁶⁰⁵

In the wake of the deaths of two babies born in prison in 2019–20,^{606,607} **HMPPS has published a new policy on pregnancy, maternity and separation.**⁶⁰⁸ Previously, there were no mandatory requirements for care of pregnant or separated women.⁶⁰⁹ MBUs also received extra funding for equipment, multidisciplinary pregnancy care planning is now compulsory, and all women are now entitled to free phone access to NHS Pregnancy Advice Services. Staff must also receive training on the care of pregnant women.⁶¹⁰

⁵⁹⁰ NHS England and HM Prison & Probation Service (2023). A review of health and social care in women's prisons.

⁵⁹¹ House of Lords written question HL10210, 25 November 2020.

⁵⁹² House of Lords written question HL1414, 25 January 2024.

⁵⁹³ HM Prison and Probation Service (2020). Table 3, COVID-19 statistics: September 2020

⁵⁹⁴ HM Prison and Probation Service (2020). COVID-19 statistics: October 2020.

⁵⁹⁵ Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (2017) Learning lessons from PPO investigations: Older prisoners.

⁵⁹⁶ Davies, M., Hutchings, R. & Keeble, E. (2022). Inequality on the inside: Using hospital data to understand the key health care issues for women in prison. Research report July 2022. Nuffield Trust.

⁵⁹⁷ HM Prison & Probation Service (2024). Tables 10.2 and 10.3, Chapter 10 tables — Mother and Baby Units, pregnant prisoners and births. HMPPS Annual Digest, April 2023 to March 2024. Ministry of Justice.

⁵⁹⁸ HM Prison & Probation Service (2024). Table 10.2, Chapter 10 tables — Mother and Baby Units, pregnant prisoners and births. HMPPS Annual Digest, April 2023 to March 2024. Ministry of Justice.

⁵⁹⁹ House of Commons written question 176814, 17 April 2023.

⁶⁰⁰ HM Prison & Probation Service (2024). Table 10.1, Chapter 10 tables — Mother and Baby Units, pregnant prisoners and births. HMPPS Annual Digest, April 2023 to March 2024. Ministry of Justice.

⁶⁰¹ HM Prison & Probation Service (2024). Table 10.1, HMPPS Annual Digest, April 2023 to March 2024. Ministry of Justice.

⁶⁰² Royal College of Midwives (2019). Position statement: Perinatal women in the criminal justice system.

⁶⁰³ Ministry of Justice (2020). Review of operational policy on pregnancy, Mother and Baby Units and maternal separation.

⁶⁰⁴ NHS England and HM Prison & Probation Service (2023). A review of health and social care in women's prisons.

⁶⁰⁵ HM Prison & Probation Service (2023). Pregnancy, Mother and Baby Units (MBUs), and maternal separation from children up to the age of two in women's prisons. Ministry of Justice.

⁶⁰⁶ Atkins, V. (2021). Letter to the Chair of the Justice Select Committee Sir Bob Neill MP, 28 October 2021. Ministry of Justice.

⁶⁰⁷ Atkins, V. & Keegan, G. (2022). Letter to the Chair of the Justice Select Committee Sir Bob Neill MP, 28 January 2022. Ministry of Justice.

⁶⁰⁸ HM Prison & Probation Service (2023). Pregnancy, Mother and Baby Units (MBUs), and maternal separation from children up to the age of two in women's prisons. Ministry of Justice.

⁶⁰⁹ Ministry of Justice (2020). Review of operational policy on pregnancy, Mother and Baby Units and maternal separation.

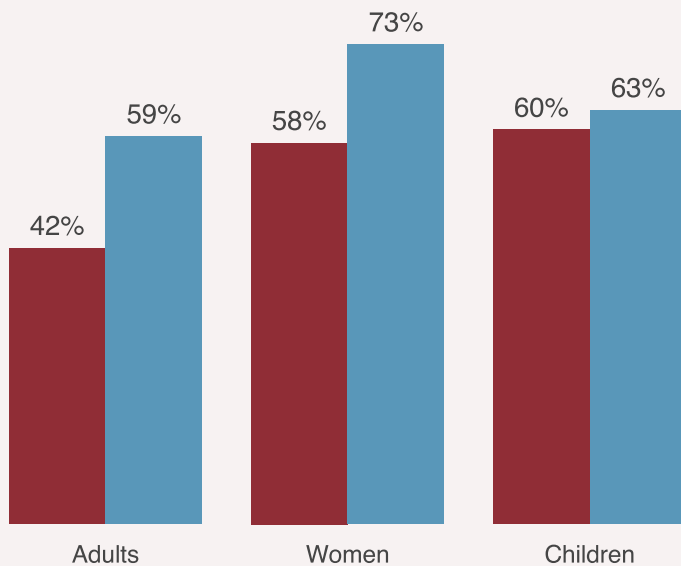
⁶¹⁰ House of Commons written question 197024, 11 September 2023.

REHABILITATION AND RESETTLEMENT

Reoffending

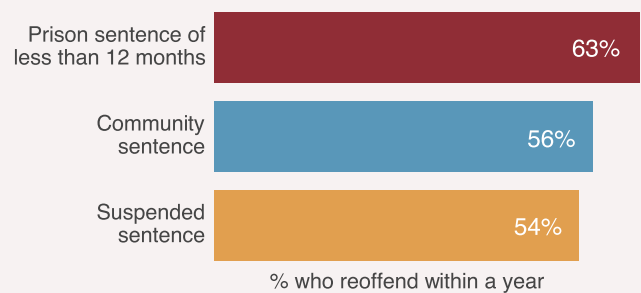
Reoffending rates are hard, if not impossible, to measure. Published figures almost invariably use reconviction as a proxy measure. But reconviction can be affected by many factors, in particular the priorities set by police and their ability to detect crime. We use published material on reconvictions as the best available indicator of probable trends in reoffending.

Reconviction rates within a year of release are high — for those serving sentences of **less than 12 months**, the rates are even higher.



Sources:
Ministry of Justice (2024). Proven reoffending statistics: January to March 2022.

Short prison sentences are less effective at reducing reoffending than community orders for people committing the same types of crime.



Source: Ministry of Justice (2013). Compendium of reoffending statistics and analysis.

For people with more than 50 previous offences, the odds of reconviction increase

↑ 36 %

when a short prison sentence is used rather than a community sentence.⁶¹¹

A 2019 study has estimated the annual total economic and social cost of reoffending as £18.1bn.⁶¹²

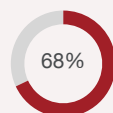
Research for the Sentencing Council found that “the current evidence does not suggest that increasing the length of immediate prison sentences is an effective way to reduce reoffending.”⁶¹³

A Ministry of Justice study found that the one-year reoffending rate was four percentage points higher for short-term custodial sentences than a community order or a suspended sentence order, and that the number of reoffences committed was also higher.⁶¹⁴

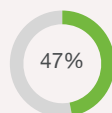
People are less likely to be reconvicted if they receive family visits whilst in prison

69%

of prisoners said they had received visits from family whilst in prison



No visits

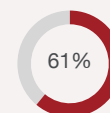


Visits

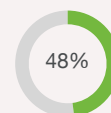
People are less likely to be reconvicted if they live with their immediate family on release

57%

said they were living with their immediate family on release



Not living with family

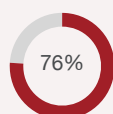


Living with family

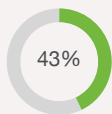
People are more likely to be reconvicted if they use class A drugs on release

1 in 3

said they had used class A drugs since leaving custody



Used class A drugs

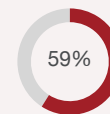


Did not use class A drugs

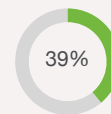
People are less likely to be reconvicted if they secure a job after their release

28%

of prisoners had been in employment the year after custody



Unemployed



Employed

Source: Brunton-Smith, I. & Hopkins, K. (2013) The factors associated with proven reoffending following release from prison: Findings from waves 1-3 of SPCR. Ministry of Justice.

⁶¹¹ Hillier, J. and Mews, A. (2018). Do offender characteristics affect the impact of short custodial sentences and court orders on reoffending? Ministry of Justice.

⁶¹² Ministry of Justice (2019). The economic and social costs of reoffending.

⁶¹³ Gormley, J., Hamilton, M. and Belton, I. (2022). The effectiveness of sentencing options on reoffending. Sentencing Council.

⁶¹⁴ Eaton, G. & Mews, A. (2019). The impact of short custodial sentences, community orders and suspended sentence orders on reoffending. Ministry of Justice.

Purposeful activity

Purposeful activity includes education, work and other activities to aid rehabilitation whilst in prison. In 2018 the Conservative government published an education and employment strategy with proposals to increase the use of release on temporary licence; give governors powers to commission education in their prisons; expand vocational training opportunities; and improve employment outcomes on release.⁶¹⁵ By April 2024 they had appointed specialist roles to oversee educational and vocational delivery; invested in vocational training and apprenticeships; introduced Employment Advisory Boards; invested in literacy initiatives; and committed to the launch of a new Prisoner Education Service in 2025.^{616,617,618} The Labour government has confirmed its commitment to continue investing in education and vocational opportunities,⁶¹⁹ and has announced the creation of Employment Councils to help more people into employment in the community.⁶²⁰

In men's prisons, nearly half (44%) of inspectors' recommendations for purposeful activity from previous inspections remained unachieved — rising to nearly seven in 10 in women's prisons (69%).⁶²¹ HM Inspectorate of Prisons condemned the “appalling” neglect of how prisoners spend their time, with far too many locked in cells without meaningful activity.⁶²²

Of the 44 inspections of prisons, young offender institutions and secure training centres conducted by Ofsted (England) and Estyn (Wales) during 2023–24, just six were judged to be providing education, work or skills at a reasonable standard.⁶²³ Inspectors have noted that there has been little improvement since a review of prison education conducted by Dame Sally Coates in 2016.⁶²⁴

On average, 70% of prisoners across establishments are engaged in purposeful activity, though this varies widely — from just a third (33%) in some prisons to nearly all (99%) in others.⁶²⁵

Only eight out of 39 adult prisons received a positive rating from inspectors for purposeful activity in 2023–24. Five were open prisons.⁶²⁶

One in ten women (10%) and just over one in five men (21%) surveyed by inspectors spent less than two hours a day out of their cells.⁶²⁷ This is a return to pre-pandemic levels.⁶²⁸ However, the true amount of time out of cell for women is difficult to assess this year, as the majority of inspected establishments were open prisons.

People are more likely to be locked up for longer in local prisons, where half of surveyed men (50%) said they spent less than two hours a day out of their cells.⁶²⁹

Even in training prisons, where people serve most of their sentence and work to reduce their risk of reoffending, almost a quarter of people (23%) said they spent less than two hours a day out of their cells⁶³⁰

Weekends are particularly difficult in prison. Over one third of men (34%) and 12% of women told inspectors they spent less than two hours a day out of their cells.⁶³¹

In a 2024 review of time out of cell, inspectors found that spending so much time locked up negatively impacted on prisoners' mental and physical health, prevented them from completing basic tasks, and led to a greater belief among those locked up longer that they were more likely to reoffend.⁶³²

Less than half (49%) of surveyed men reported being able to access the gym at least twice a week, and less than two thirds (62%) reported being able to visit the library at least once a week. 62% of women reported twice-weekly gym access and 68% reported weekly library access.⁶³³

615 Ministry of Justice (2018). Education and employment strategy. Ministry of Justice.

616 House of Commons written question 22366, 25 April 2024.

617 House of Commons written question 21770, 22 April 2024.

618 House of Commons written question 199290, 19 September 2023.

619 House of Commons written question 1840, 30 July 2024.

620 Ministry of Justice (2025, 10 January). Top bosses join forces to get thousands of offenders into work.

621 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Table 7, Judgements, scores and notable positive practice. Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

622 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

623 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Tables 8 and 9, Judgements, scores and notable positive practice. Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

624 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

625 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 2, Annual performance ratings 2023–24 supplementary tables. Prison performance ratings: 2023 to 2024.

626 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Table 1, Judgements, scores and notable positive practice. Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

627 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Table 2, Women's comparator workbook. Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

628 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2020) Annual report 2019–20. HM Stationery Office.

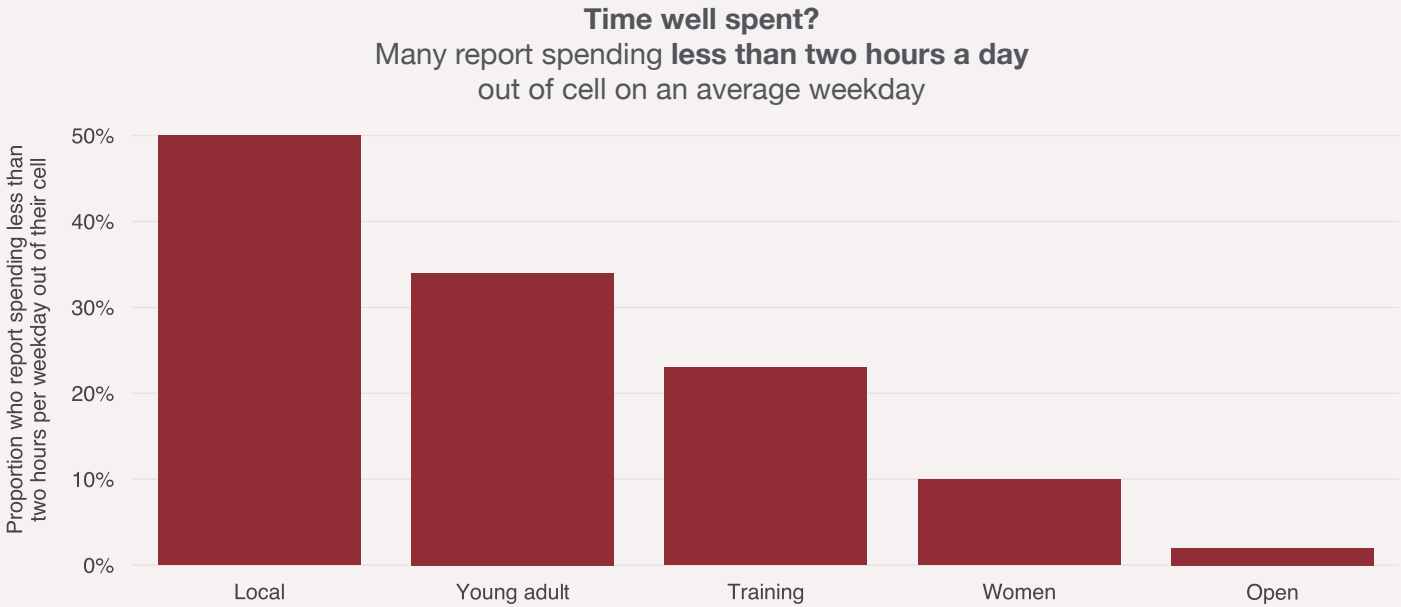
629 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Table 2, Men's comparator workbook. Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

630 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Table 2, Men's comparator workbook. Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

631 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Table 2, Women's comparator workbook. Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

632 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Purposeful prisons: Time out of cell.

633 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Table 2, Women's comparator workbook. Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.



Source: HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Annual report 2023–24.

Education

Engagement with education can significantly reduce reoffending. A 2017 review found that the proven one-year reoffending rate is 34% for prisoner learners, compared to 43% for people who don’t engage in any form of learning.⁶³⁴

In 2023–24, prisoners took a total of 47,722 initial assessments in English. 73% of assessment outcomes were at the equivalent literacy level expected of an 11-year-old or younger⁶³⁵ — almost five times higher than in the general adult population (15%).⁶³⁶

A 2022 HMIP and Ofsted study revealed that prisons often failed to prioritize improving prisoners’ reading skills, with most teachers lacking training in teaching adults to read.⁶³⁷ By 2024, the government reported that all prisons now have a reading strategy, supported by a national Reading Framework and a new Literacy Innovation Fund piloting projects in 15 prisons for prisoners with the lowest reading levels.⁶³⁸

49,965 adults in the prison system participated in education courses in the 2023–24 academic year⁶³⁹ — a 7% increase compared to last year.⁶⁴⁰

45,289 qualifications were achieved by prisoners in 2023–24 — a 14% increase on the previous year.⁶⁴¹

The improvement is even more marked for qualifications in basic functional skills⁶⁴² — which increased by 21% on the previous year.⁶⁴³

1,374 people achieved a level 3 qualification (A-level and equivalent) last year⁶⁴⁴ — up 3% on the previous year.⁶⁴⁵

More than 1,700 people in prison are studying with the Open University.⁶⁴⁶

Prisoners wishing to study in higher education must be within six years of their release date to be eligible for a student loan,⁶⁴⁷ limiting opportunities for people serving long prison sentences. Prisoner participation in higher education has been estimated to cut reoffending rates by 20–40%.⁶⁴⁸

634 Ministry of Justice and Department for Education (2017) Exploring the outcomes of prisoner learners: Analysis of linked offender records from the Police National Computer and Individualised Learner Records. Ministry of Justice.

635 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.1, Prison education tables 2023–24. Prison Education and Accredited Programme Statistics 2023–2024.

636 Department for Business Innovation and Skills (2012). Figure 1.1, the 2011 Skills for Life survey: A survey of literacy, numeracy and ICT levels in England.

637 HMIP and Ofsted (2022) Prison education: A review of reading education in prisons. HMIP.

638 House of Lords written question HL83, 31 July 2024.

639 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 2.1, Prison education tables 2023–24. Prison Education and Accredited Programme Statistics 2023–2024.

640 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 2.1, Supplementary tables – Prison education tables 2022–23 (new methodology). Prison Education and Accredited Programme Statistics 2023–2024. Note that the figures cited in last year’s edition of the Bromley Briefings were derived from an old methodology and so differ from this figure.

641 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 2.2, Prison education tables 2023–24. Prison Education and Accredited Programme Statistics 2023–2024.

642 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 2.3, Prison education tables 2023–24. Prison Education and Accredited Programme Statistics 2023–2024.

643 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 2.3, Supplementary tables – Prison education tables 2022–23 (new methodology). Prison Education and Accredited Programme Statistics 2023–2024. Note that the figures cited in last year’s edition of Bromley were derived from an old methodology and so differ from this figure.

644 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 2.2, Prison education tables 2023–24. Prison Education and Accredited Programme Statistics 2023–2024.

645 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 2.2, Supplementary tables – Prison education tables 2022–23 (new methodology). Prison Education and Accredited Programme Statistics 2023–2024. Note that the figures cited in last year’s edition of Bromley were derived from an old methodology and so differ from this figure.

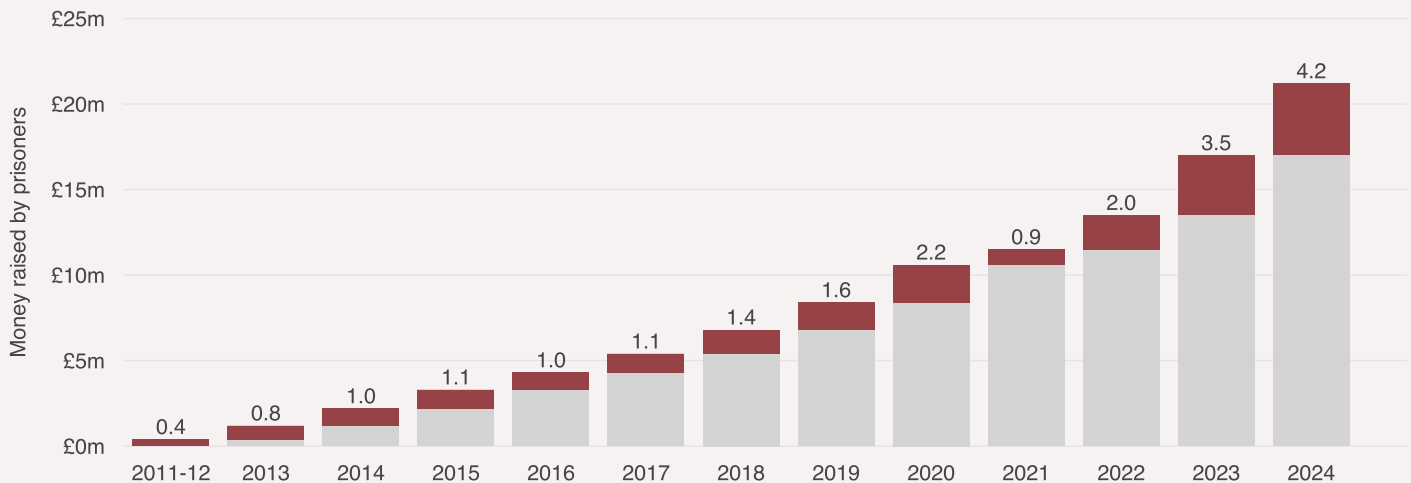
646 House of Commons written question 7955, 15 January 2024.

647 Education & Skills Funding Agency (2024, 10 April). Advanced learner loans: Funding and performance management rules 2024 to 2025.

648 Higher Education Policy Institute (2019). Student loans for those on long prison sentences. Higher Education Policy Institute.

Working for victims

People in prison have raised £17m through the Prisoners' Earnings Act levy



Source: HM Prison and Probation Service Annual Digest, April 2023 to March 2024.

Employment

The New Futures Network was established by the Ministry of Justice to develop partnerships between prisons and employers and to create employment opportunities for people in prison and on release.⁶⁴⁹ Over 400 businesses now work in partnership with prisons to provide work and employment opportunities.⁶⁵⁰

Employment advisory boards, which link business leaders with prisons to provide advice on skills gaps and the needs of the local jobs market, have been established across 93 prisons, as have employment hubs, with specialist staff offering prisoners support with job applications and CVs.⁶⁵¹

Employment Councils, which will expand this model out to the Probation Service and Department for Work and Pensions, aim to provide support to prison leavers and those serving their sentences in the community.⁶⁵²

Some prisoners in open prisons and certain women's prisons are now eligible to undertake apprenticeships following a change in the law in 2022.⁶⁵³ A trial to allow prisoners to undertake apprenticeships in some closed prisons began in 2024.⁶⁵⁴

Apprenticeships include key industries such as catering and construction⁶⁵⁵, but only four prisoners had been enrolled as of as of July 2024.⁶⁵⁶

HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) has not published figures on the number of prisoners working in custody, due to disruption to data quality. This is the fourth year in a row that they have failed to publish these figures.⁶⁵⁷

On average, 1,183 people per month were working out of prison on licence during 2023–24 — a 9% increase on the previous year and a 49% increase on 2021–22. They paid £296 per month on average to the Prisoners' Earnings Act levy — nearly a fifth of their net earnings (19%). The levy goes toward supporting victims of crime.⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁴⁹ Ministry of Justice (2018) Education and employment strategy. Ministry of Justice.

⁶⁵⁰ House of Commons written question 203060, 25 October 2023.

⁶⁵¹ Ministry of Justice (2025, 10 January). Top bosses join forces to get thousands of offenders into work.

⁶⁵² Ministry of Justice (2025, 10 January). Top bosses join forces to get thousands of offenders into work.

⁶⁵³ HM Prison and Probation Service (2022). Release on temporary licence (ROTL) policy framework. Ministry of Justice.

⁶⁵⁴ House of Commons written question 16364, 8 March 2024.

⁶⁵⁵ House of Commons written question 22366, 25 April 2024.

⁶⁵⁶ House of Commons written question 1837, 30 July 2024.

⁶⁵⁷ Ministry of Justice (2024). HM Prison and Probation Service Annual digest: April 2023 to March 2024. And previous editions.

⁶⁵⁸ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 5.2, Chapter 5 tables – Prisoner earnings. HM Prison and Probation Service Annual digest: April 2023 to March 2024.

Prepared for release

Release on temporary licence was increasing — but has sharply declined since the pandemic



Source: Ministry of Justice (2024). Offender management statistics quarterly: October to December 2023.

Home Detention Curfew

HDC use also continues to fall — following a spike during the pandemic



Source: Ministry of Justice (2024). Offender management statistics quarterly: October to December 2023.

Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL)

ROTL can play an important part in helping people to prepare for release, particularly those who are serving long sentences. Following a full risk assessment, it allows people to take responsibility, and reconnect with the world they will be released into. In 2019 the government published a new ROTL Policy Framework, allowing prison governors greater autonomy to release prisoners on licence.⁶⁵⁹

In 99.8% of incidences ROTL was completed successfully in 2023.⁶⁶⁰ In 2017 (the most recent data available) there were just 11 failures because of alleged further offending out of more than 350,000 instances of ROTL.⁶⁶¹

People who are given ROTL have lower rates of reoffending on release. The more that ROTL is used, the greater the impact on reducing reoffending and the fewer the number of offences people commit.⁶⁶²

Despite this, restrictions were introduced on ROTL in 2013 which saw a 37% drop in its use over the next three years. ROTL numbers dropped even further during the pandemic but have been increasing steadily over the last two years. However, use remains 21% lower than in 2013. At the time restrictions were introduced, the ROTL success rate was 99.9%.^{663,664}

Home Detention Curfew (HDC)

HDC allows individuals to live outside prison under strict conditions to prepare them for life on release. In 2024, eligibility was expanded to include those serving over four years.⁶⁶⁵ Previously only those serving between three months and under four years were eligible.⁶⁶⁶

The maximum amount of time a person can spend on HDC is six months of their sentence. However, this is due to be extended to 12 months from June 2025 as a means of addressing the overcrowding crisis in prisons.⁶⁶⁷

Many people are still presumed unsuitable for release on HDC, including people with a history of sex offences; people with a history of breaches; people who are liable for deportation; and people who committed certain violent offences.⁶⁶⁸

There were 7,920 releases on HDC in 2023, a 9% decrease on the year before. Use of HDC had fallen every year since 2018, and is far from its peak in 2003 when over 21,000 people were released.^{669,670} But the number of people on HDC has risen by 89% between January and December 2024 — by around 2,000 people.⁶⁷¹

⁶⁵⁹ HM Prison and Probation Service (2022). Release on temporary licence (ROTL) policy framework. Ministry of Justice.

⁶⁶⁰ Ministry of Justice (2024). Tables 3.A.20 and 3.A.23, Releases: 2023. Offender Management Statistics Quarterly: October-December 2023.

⁶⁶¹ House of Lords written question HL10936, 6 November 2018.

⁶⁶² Hillier, J. and Mews, A. (2018). The reoffending impact of increased Release of prisoners on Temporary Licence. Ministry of Justice.

⁶⁶³ Ministry of Justice (2023). Table A3.7, Releases: 2022. Offender Management Statistics Quarterly: October-December 2022.

⁶⁶⁴ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 3.A.20, Releases: 2023. Offender Management Statistics Quarterly: October-December 2023.

⁶⁶⁵ Victims and Prisoners Act 2024, s.68.

⁶⁶⁶ Ministry of Justice (2023). Home Detention Curfew (HDC) policy framework.

⁶⁶⁷ Ministry of Justice (2024). Draft explanatory memorandum to The Home Detention Curfew and Requisite and Minimum Custodial Periods (Amendment) Order 2024

⁶⁶⁸ Ministry of Justice (2024). Home Detention Curfew (HDC) policy framework.

⁶⁶⁹ Ministry of Justice (2023). Table A3.5, Releases: 2022. Offender Management Statistics Quarterly: October-December 2022.

⁶⁷⁰ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 3.A.14, Releases: 2023. Offender Management Statistics Quarterly: October-December 2023.

⁶⁷¹ Ministry of Justice (2024). Prison population bulletin December 2024. And previous editions.

Resettlement

The Ministry of Justice was allocated £550m to reduce reoffending in the 2021 government spending review. Since then, it has awarded contracts to external providers, known as Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS), in the areas of accommodation; education; employment; finance; substance misuse and wellbeing.⁶⁷² Over three-quarters of contracts (76%) have been awarded to the voluntary sector.⁶⁷³

In 2023, the National Audit Office found that HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) cannot satisfactorily demonstrate if CRS contracts are effective because of inadequate monitoring. HMPPS's own audit of 28 of the highest value contracts found that two-thirds (68%) were rated as not meeting quality standards.⁶⁷⁴ HMPPS says it is currently designing a new specification for awarding and monitoring contracts.⁶⁷⁵

The NAO also warned that the current resettlement delivery model was complex and fragmented.⁶⁷⁶ HMPPS has established ID and Banking Administrators, Employment Leads, Hubs and Advisory Boards in all 93 resettlement prisons.^{677,678} These roles and services are intended to assist prisoners with release preparation and opportunities.

Of 39 adult prisons inspected in 2023–24, only seven were rated 'good' for release preparation, including five open prisons.⁶⁷⁹ Inspectors highlighted disjointed resettlement provision with key gaps but praised open prisons for their vital role in preparing individuals for release.⁶⁸⁰

Nearly everyone in prison will be released at some point. In 2023, 48,301 people were released at the end of the custodial term of their sentence.⁶⁸¹

Inspectors found that, on average, probation regions have 30% fewer staff than they require to carry out resettlement work with people leaving prison.⁶⁸² Yet modelling suggests that the probation service may need to supervise around 5,900 extra prison leavers by 2025.⁶⁸³

Resettlement passports — a single document bringing together information and services upon release — have been promised since 2021,⁶⁸⁴ but don't yet appear to have been introduced.⁶⁸⁵

Employment

For many, having a criminal conviction is a barrier to leading a law-abiding life on release. The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 gives people with spent convictions the legal right not to disclose them when applying for most jobs. The government has recently changed the law to reduce how long some people need to disclose their conviction.⁶⁸⁶

The proportion of people in employment six weeks after leaving prison has risen to 19% — a six percentage point increase on four years ago when records began.⁶⁸⁷ Just under a third of people are in employment six months after release (31%) — a 17 percentage point rise on four years ago.⁶⁸⁸

Nearly 240 employers so far have signed up to Ban the Box, including the entire Civil Service — removing the need to disclose convictions at the initial job application stage.⁶⁸⁹

⁶⁷² National Audit Office (2023). Improving resettlement support for prison leavers to reduce reoffending.

⁶⁷³ House of Lords written question HL2855, 3 December 2024.

⁶⁷⁴ National Audit Office (2023). Improving resettlement support for prison leavers to reduce reoffending.

⁶⁷⁵ House of Lords written question HL2855, 3 December 2024.

⁶⁷⁶ National Audit Office (2023). Improving resettlement support for prison leavers to reduce reoffending.

⁶⁷⁷ House of Commons written question 12476, 12 November 2024.

⁶⁷⁸ House of Commons written question 21770, 22 April 2024.

⁶⁷⁹ HM Inspectorate of Prisons. Table 1, Judgements, scores and notable positive practice. Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

⁶⁸⁰ HM Inspectorate of Prisons. Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

⁶⁸¹ Ministry of Justice. (2024). Table 3.A.1, Releases: 2023. Offender management statistics quarterly: October to December 2023.

⁶⁸² HMI Probation (2023). Offender management in custody — post-release. A thematic inspection by HM Inspectorate of Probation.

⁶⁸³ National Audit Office (2023). Improving resettlement support for prison leavers to reduce reoffending.

⁶⁸⁴ Ministry of Justice (2021). Prisons strategy white paper. CP 581. HM Stationery Office.

⁶⁸⁵ House of Commons written question 21771, 22 April 2024.

⁶⁸⁶ Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, s.193, available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/32/section/193>

⁶⁸⁷ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 2, Employment at 6 weeks post release from custody data tables. Offender employment outcomes, update to March 2024.

⁶⁸⁸ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 2, Employment at 6 months post release from custody data tables. Offender employment outcomes, update to March 2024.

⁶⁸⁹ Business in the Community (2023). Personal communication.

Accommodation

Less than half (45%) of people released from prison in 2023–24 had settled accommodation on release, and more than one in 10 (13%) were homeless or sleeping rough.⁶⁹⁰

One in twenty (5%) people released from prison in 2023–24 were assessed as posing a high risk of harm, but released homeless or to rough sleeping.⁶⁹¹

After three months, just over two-thirds (68%) of people released from prison had settled accommodation and one in 10 (9%) were homeless or sleeping rough.⁶⁹²

Obtaining and retaining settled accommodation is a key factor in successful rehabilitation according to probation inspectors. They found that around one-third of people released to settled accommodation ended up back in custody, compared to around two-thirds of people without it.⁶⁹³

There were 6,295 placements in the HMPPS Community Accommodation Service in 2023–24 — 48% more than the previous year. HMPPS has developed the service to provide up to 12 weeks of transitional accommodation after leaving prison.⁶⁹⁴

Finance, benefits and debt

Some people are entitled to receive a subsistence payment to help them on release. In 2021 this was raised from £46 to £76 (the first increase in 26 years), and again to £89.52 in 2023, in line with inflation. But an annual rise is not guaranteed, and thousands of prisoners remain ineligible, including people released from remand; fine defaulters; people who have served less than 15 days; people awaiting deportation; and children.⁶⁹⁵

Many people in prison are released with debts which have built up during their sentence — adding to the problems they face on release. Inspectors found that in almost two-thirds (65%) of cases people didn't receive sufficient support to address their finance, benefits and debt needs before their release.⁶⁹⁶

There are now specialist staff in prisons to help prepare a Universal Credit claim, but people still cannot submit one until they have been released from prison,⁶⁹⁷ and must usually wait around five weeks for the first payment.⁶⁹⁸

In 2022, inspectors found too many people were leaving prison without the basics of having proof of identification and access to financial support in place.⁶⁹⁹

⁶⁹⁰ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 2, Housed on release from custody data tables. Offender accommodation outcomes, update to March 2024.

⁶⁹¹ House of Commons written question 15428, 2 December 2024.

⁶⁹² Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 2, Settled accommodation at 3 months post-release from custody data tables. Offender accommodation outcomes, update to March 2024.

⁶⁹³ HMI Probation (2020). Accommodation and support for adult offenders in the community and on release from prison in England: An inspection by HMI Probation.

⁶⁹⁴ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1, Community Accommodation Service Tier 3 data tables. Offender accommodation outcomes, update to March 2024.

⁶⁹⁵ HM Prison and Probation Service (2024). PSI 72/2011. Discharge.

⁶⁹⁶ HM Inspectorate of Probation (2022). Offender management in custody – pre-release. A joint thematic inspection by HM Inspectorate of Probation and HM Inspectorate of Prisons.

⁶⁹⁷ HM Government (2025, 2 January). Supporting prison leavers: A guide to Universal Credit. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-credit-and-prison-leavers/supporting-prison-leavers-a-guide-to-universal-credit>

⁶⁹⁸ HM Government (undated). Universal Credit. Accessed on 9 January 2025. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit/how-youre-paid>

⁶⁹⁹ HMI Probation (2022). Offender management in custody – pre-release. A joint thematic inspection by HM Inspectorate of Probation and HM Inspectorate of Prisons.

Family

Family and friends are a highly significant factor in enabling successful resettlement on release. But arrangements to help prisoners maintain and strengthen family ties were variable across prisons, and often not given sufficient priority or resources according to two independent government commissioned reviews by Lord Farmer^{700,701} and prisons inspectors.⁷⁰² HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) has dedicated just 3% of its 2024–25 rehabilitation budget to family services.⁷⁰³

The parental status of prisoners in the UK is not routinely monitored, nor are children of prisoners systematically identified or the services they access. In 2024, the first official statistics on these topics were published, though they remain in development.⁷⁰⁴

HMPPS estimates that over half (53%) of those imprisoned between 2021 and 2022 — around 74,275 people — were parents, with the figure potentially reaching 78%.⁷⁰⁵

HMPPS estimates that 192,912 children had a parent in prison between 2021 and 2022.⁷⁰⁶ An earlier independent study estimated that 320,000 children had a parent in prison in 2020.⁷⁰⁷

53 babies were born to women held in prison in the year to March 2024 — nine more than the previous year. All but one occurred in hospital.⁷⁰⁸

Less than half of surveyed men (42%) and women (49%) were offered a free phone call on the first night in their current prison.⁷⁰⁹

Research suggests that the odds of reoffending are 39% lower for prisoners who receive family visits compared to those who do not receive visits.⁷¹⁰ Two independent reviews of prisoners' family ties found that family relationships are an important source of support, particularly for women.^{711,712}

Less than a third of surveyed women (32%) and men (30%) reported that it was easy for family to visit them at their current prison. Two in five women (39%) and three in 10 men (29%) said they had seen family or friends more than once in the last month, and one in six (16%) had taken part in a video call.⁷¹³

Women are often held further away from their families, making visiting difficult and expensive. The average distance for women is 63 miles, but many are held significantly further away.⁷¹⁴

A 30 minute call during the working week to a landline costs 93 pence and to mobiles is £2.06. At weekends, this reduces slightly to 83 pence and £1.35, respectively.⁷¹⁵

Secure in-cell telephones are now available in all closed prisons.⁷¹⁶ People in prison reported that their relationship with family had strengthened as a result of in-cell phones.⁷¹⁷

Secure video calls, rolled out during the Covid-19 pandemic, are also available in all public and private prisons and young offender institutions in England and Wales.⁷¹⁸ Prisoners are given up to 60 minutes of video calls to approved family members and friends per month, but have no statutory right to this form of contact.⁷¹⁹

An evidence review has found that imprisonment affects families profoundly, causing confusion, fear, trauma, economic hardship, health issues, and social exclusion due to stigma.⁷²⁰

700 Farmer, M. (2017). The importance of strengthening prisoners' family ties to prevent reoffending and reduce intergenerational crime. Ministry of Justice.

701 Farmer, M. (2019). The importance of strengthening female offenders' family and other relationships to prevent reoffending and reduce intergenerational crime. Ministry of Justice.

702 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

703 House of Lords written question HL2896, 12 December 2024.

704 Ministry of Justice (2024). Official statistics in development: Estimates of children with a parent in prison.

705 Ministry of Justice (2024). Official statistics in development: Estimates of children with a parent in prison.

706 Ministry of Justice (2024). Official statistics in development: Estimates of children with a parent in prison.

707 Kincaid, S. et al. (2019). Children of prisoners: Fixing a broken system. Crest Advisory.

708 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 10.2, Chapter 10 tables: Mother and Baby Units, pregnant prisoners and births. Annual HM Prison and Probation Service digest: 2023 to 2024.

709 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Table 2, Women's comparator workbook. Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

710 May, C., et al., (2008). Factors linked to reoffending: a one-year follow-up of prisoners who took part in the Resettlement Surveys 2001, 2003 and 2004. Ministry of Justice.

711 Farmer, M. (2017). The importance of strengthening prisoners' family ties to prevent reoffending and reduce intergenerational crime. Ministry of Justice.

712 Farmer, M. (2019). The importance of strengthening female offenders' family and other relationships to prevent reoffending and reduce intergenerational crime. Ministry of Justice.

713 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Table 2, Women's comparator workbook. Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

714 Ministry of Justice. (2018). Table 5.1a and 5.1b, Supporting Data Tables for the Female Offender Strategy.

715 House of Lords written question HL1421, 24 January 2024.

716 Ministry of Justice personal communication, 21 November 2024.

717 Ellison, A., et al. (2018). The demand for and use of illicit phones in prison. Ministry of Justice.

718 House of Lords written question HL1567, 29 January 2024.

719 HM Prison & Probation Service (2024). Secure social video calling policy framework. Ministry of Justice.

720 Dominey et al. (2021). Supporting families of people in prison and on probation. Clinks.

OTHER UK PRISON SYSTEMS

Scotland

Scotland took emergency measures to reduce prison overcrowding in 2024. In June, prisoners serving under four years with 180 days left to serve became eligible for release — far longer than in England and Wales where eligibility were limited to 18 days, 35 days and then — briefly — 70 days left to serve. 477 people were released on four single days throughout June and July.⁷²¹

In November 2024, the Prisoner (Early Release) (Scotland) Bill was voted into law. From February 2025, prisoners serving less than four years will be released after serving 40% of their sentence. Previously they would have to serve 50% before release. Those eligible will be released on three single days, and the scheme will continue to operate, with a review after two years. The bill also makes provision for future changes to the release point of certain long-term prisoners to be enacted (those on non-parole sentences). Sexual abuse and domestic violence offences are excluded.⁷²²

There are 17 prisons in Scotland, including one privately managed prison and two community custody units (CCUs) for women that opened in 2022. CCUs aim to provide closer contact with community and local services in gender-specific and trauma-informed environments. HMP & YOI Stirling opened in 2023, providing a national centre for convicted young and adult women. There is one open prison (HMP Castle Huntly) and one young offender institution (HMYOI Polmont). Most prisons serve multiple functions but two specialise in provision for prisoners serving long-term and indefinite sentences.⁷²³ Certain prisons are also “community facing” and are intended to closely align prison rehabilitation and reintegration services with those in the community.⁷²⁴

The Scottish Government is taking forward an ambitious prison reform programme. This includes rebalancing justice towards community interventions instead of imprisonment; improving the reintegration of people from custody to the community; improving the health and wellbeing of people in prison; and reducing/remodelling custody for women.⁷²⁵ It has also committed to improving the quality of custody. The latest budget included a £232.8m increase in the prison service resource budget as well as £355m in capital funding intended for modernisation of the prison estate.⁷²⁶ A 2023/24 audit of the Scottish Prison Service concluded that it was under pressure owing to the rising prison population despite a budget rise, and was still forecasting an overspend of £18.3m in 2024–25.⁷²⁷

In 2010, Scotland restricted the use of custodial sentences of less than three months.⁷²⁸ In 2019, the restriction was extended to sentences of 12 months or less, with the aim of reserving prison for people who have committed serious offences, and where there are issues of public safety.⁷²⁹ However, sentences of three months or less accounted for more than a quarter (27%) of custodial sentences given in 2022–23. Sentences of 12 months or less accounted for almost three-quarters (73%) of all custodial sentences.⁷³⁰

In 2021, the Scottish prisons inspectorate published a review into responses to deaths in custody that recommended the formation of a new independent body to investigate deaths, with each investigation completed within a matter of months and involving the families or next-of-kin of the deceased.⁷³¹ A 2022 progress review found that there was still no single framework for preventing deaths in custody, outstanding work on understanding causes and trends, and family involvement remained low. A Deaths in Prison Custody Action Group was then established.⁷³² A second progress review in 2024 found that eight of the 19 recommendations made in 2021 had been completed.⁷³³

In 2019, the age of criminal responsibility in Scotland became 12 years old,⁷³⁴ unlike in England and Wales where it remains 10 years old. In 2024, the Children (Care and Justice) Act was passed, ending the placement of children in Young Offender Institutions.⁷³⁵ They are now detained in secure accommodation where directed, and the act also made improvements to quality of secure care.

⁷²¹ Scottish Government (2024, 3 December). Prison population.

⁷²² Scottish Government (2024, 3 December). Prison population.

⁷²³ Scottish Prison Service (n.d.) Prisons. Accessed 21 January 2024. <https://www.sps.gov.uk/Corporate/Prisons/Prisons.aspx>

⁷²⁴ Reid-Howe Associates Ltd. (2015). Community facing prisons. Scottish Prison Service.

⁷²⁵ Scottish Government (2022). The vision for justice in Scotland. Three year delivery plan 2023/24 to 2025/26.

⁷²⁶ Scottish Government (2024). Scottish Budget 2025–26.

⁷²⁷ Auditor General (2024). The Scottish Prison Service 2023/24 annual audit report.

⁷²⁸ Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2010. s17. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2010/13/section/17>

⁷²⁹ Scottish Government (2019, 26 June). Presumption against short sentences extended. <https://www.gov.scot/news/presumption-against-short-sentences-extended/>

⁷³⁰ Scottish Government (2024). Table 10a. Criminal proceedings in Scotland 2022–23.

⁷³¹ HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland et al. (2021). Independent review of the response to deaths in custody.

⁷³² Scottish Government (2022). Independent review of the response to deaths in prison custody: follow up on progress report.

⁷³³ Scottish Government (2024). Independent review of the response to deaths in prison custody: second progress report.

⁷³⁴ Age of Criminal Responsibility (Scotland) Act 2019. S1. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2019/7/section/1/enacted>

⁷³⁵ Scottish Government (2024, 25 April). Children (Care and Justice) bill passed.

People in prison

On 17 January 2024 the total number of people in custody in Scotland stood at 8,234.⁷³⁶

The number of women in prison has declined substantially over the past five years but has begun to rise again since pandemic. There were 327 women in prison on 17 January 2024, down from 390 five years ago (a decline of 16%), but up from the historic low of 271 in January 2022.⁷³⁷

Around one in 15 of the prison population (6%) are aged 60 or over — up from one in 50 (2%) in 2009–10.⁷³⁸

Around 7% of the prison population are from an ethnic minority background — broadly similar to 2009–10.⁷³⁹

One in 50 prisoners identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual (2%).⁷⁴⁰ Less than 1% identify as transgender, non-binary or gender-fluid.⁷⁴¹

Sentencing and the use of custody

Scotland has the highest imprisonment rate in western Europe, imprisoning 149 people per 100,000 of the population. The rate for England and Wales is 139 people, while Northern Ireland imprisons 99 people per 100,000 of the population. Scotland's rate of imprisonment has risen by five points since last year.⁷⁴²

Almost one in seven people sentenced by the courts (13%) were given a custodial sentence in 2022–23 — about the same as the previous year. But the number of people receiving a custodial sentence rose by more than 700 (9%).⁷⁴³

Half of people sentenced to custody in 2023–24 (50%) had committed a non-violent offence.⁷⁴⁴

A higher proportion of women are convicted of 'crimes of dishonesty', such as theft or shoplifting, than men. In 2022–23, 12% of proven offences by women were for acquisitive crimes compared with 8% of men's.⁷⁴⁵

Prison sentences are getting longer. The average length of a custodial sentence is now just over a year (386 days) — around three months (91 days) longer than a decade ago.⁷⁴⁶

The number of people on remand remains high — accounting for more than a quarter (26%) of the prison population compared with 20% in England and Wales. There were 2,132 people in prison on remand on 17 January 2025, of whom nearly nine in 10 (88%) were awaiting trial.⁷⁴⁷

The use of community sentences has been gradually rising over the last decade — they accounted for nearly a quarter (24%) of all sentences in 2022–23, up from 17% in 2013–14.⁷⁴⁸

On average, 15% of the sentenced prison population in 2023–24 were serving a life sentence. A further 3% were serving a lifelong indeterminate sentence, and 5% were serving determinate sentences of 10 years or more.⁷⁴⁹

A 2023 evidence review of prisoners serving very long sentences in Scotland found that this group faced specific issues that were insufficiently addressed. This included scarce resource to meet their sentence progression requirements; rising tariffs; greater use of recall and a declining rate of progressive parole decisions.⁷⁵⁰

The cost of imprisonment has risen in recent years but remained steady last year. In 2022–23 it cost an average of £47,140 per prison place, a fall of 0.5% in real terms compared to the previous year.^{751,752}

⁷³⁶ Scottish Prison Service (2024, n.d.). Prison population. Accessed 23 January 2025. <https://www.sps.gov.uk/about-us/transparency/data-research-and-evidence>

⁷³⁷ Scottish Prison Service (2024, n.d.). Prison population. Accessed 23 January 2025. <https://www.sps.gov.uk/Corporate/Information/SPSPopulation.aspx>

⁷³⁸ Scottish Prison Service (2024). Table B2, Scottish prison population statistics 2023–24.

⁷³⁹ Scottish Prison Service (2024). Table B3, Scottish prison population statistics 2023–24.

⁷⁴⁰ Scottish Prison Service (2024). Table B6, Scottish prison population statistics 2023–24.

⁷⁴¹ Scottish Prison Service (2024). Prison by numbers quarter 2 (July to September 2024).

⁷⁴² Institute for Crime and Justice Policy Research (n.d.). World prison brief. Accessed 23 January 2024.

⁷⁴³ The Scottish Government (2024). Table 7a, Criminal proceedings in Scotland 2022–23.

⁷⁴⁴ The Scottish Government (2024). Table 8b, Criminal proceedings in Scotland 2023–24.

⁷⁴⁵ The Scottish Government (2024). Table 8c, Criminal proceedings in Scotland 2022–23.

⁷⁴⁶ The Scottish Government (2024). Table 10c, Criminal proceedings in Scotland 2022–23.

⁷⁴⁷ Institute for Crime and Justice Policy Research (n.d.). World prison brief. Accessed 18 January 2024.

⁷⁴⁸ The Scottish Government (2024). Table 7b, Criminal proceedings in Scotland 2022–23.

⁷⁴⁹ Scottish Prison Service (2024). Table M3, Scottish prison population statistics 2023–24.

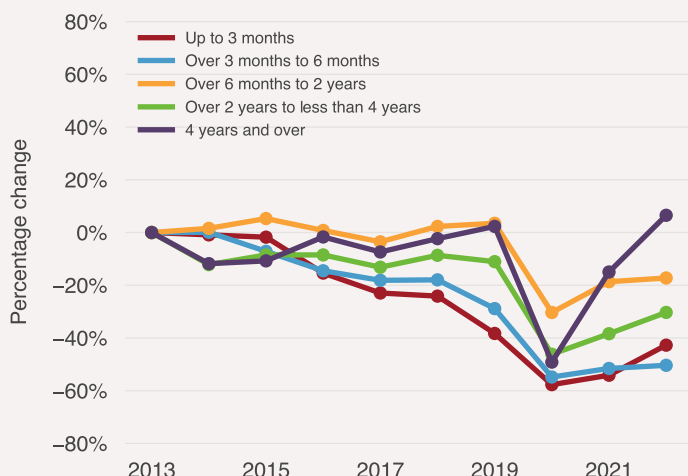
⁷⁵⁰ McGhee, J. et al. (2023). The very long-term prison population in Scotland: A scoping document. Prison Reform Trust.

⁷⁵¹ Appendix 9a, Scottish Prison Service (2023). Annual report and accounts 2022–23.

⁷⁵² HM Treasury (2024). GDP deflators at market prices, and money GDP October 2024 (Autumn Statement).

Short custodial sentences in Scotland

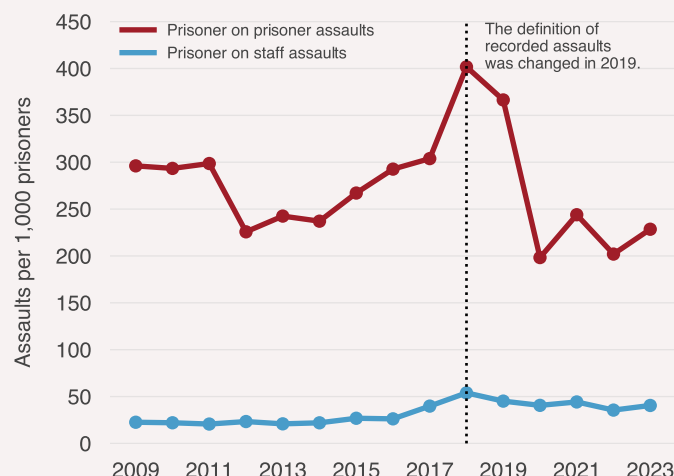
The decline of shorter sentences



Scottish Government (2024). Criminal proceedings in Scotland, 2022-23.

A volatile environment

Rates of assault by prisoners continue to fluctuate



Sources: Scottish Prison Service (2024). Annual report and accounts 2023-24. Scottish Government (2024). Scottish prison population statistics 2023-24.

Safety in prisons

In 2019, over a quarter of surveyed prisoners (27%) said they had feared for their safety in the last month.⁷⁵³

There have been 201 deaths in custody in the five years to 2024 — with 43 in 2024.⁷⁵⁴ Research published by The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research suggests that suicide and drug-related incidents were the leading causes of deaths in 2022 rather than Covid-19. While deaths from medical conditions have remained fairly steady over the past decade, suicide and drug-related deaths are rising.⁷⁵⁵

Self-harm incidents increased in the 2010s, but they are not routinely published. There were 762 incidents in 2018,⁷⁵⁶ almost triple the number in 2013 (267).⁷⁵⁷

Recorded violence in prisons rose by 20% last year, following a decrease the year before. The number of serious prisoner-on-prisoner assaults also rose by a quarter (25%) — from 91 to 114 incidents.⁷⁵⁸

There were 326 assaults on staff in 2023–24 — nine of which were serious. This compares with 259 in 2022–23 — five of which were serious.⁷⁵⁹

Treatment and conditions

Inspectors have continued to issue warnings about the “entrenched issue of overcrowding in Scotland’s prisons”.⁷⁶⁰

A 2023 review of segregation found that segregation was overused for long, detrimental periods of time, with a lack of meaningful human contact or activity; mental health support; or reintegration planning. But inspectors praised segregation staff for going above and beyond to support complex and vulnerable prisoners.⁷⁶¹

Inspectors praised the two Community Custody Units for women, and drew comparisons to the inferior opportunities for young people to prepare for release by being accommodated in less secure conditions. Young people are solely housed at the secure HMP YOI Polmont.⁷⁶²

⁷⁵³ Carnie, J. & Broderick, R. (2020). Prisoner survey 2019. 17th series. Scottish Prison Service.

⁷⁵⁴ Scottish Prison Service (2024, n.d.). Prisoner deaths. Accessed 21 January 2024. available at <https://www.sps.gov.uk/about-us/transparency/death-custody>

⁷⁵⁵ Armstrong, S. et al.(2022). Still nothing to see here? Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research.

⁷⁵⁶ Scottish Prison Service (2019) Freedom of Information request HQ18297, available at <http://www.sps.gov.uk/FreedomofInformation/FOI-6363.aspx>

⁷⁵⁷ Scottish Prison Service (2019) Freedom of Information request HQ180004, available at <http://www.sps.gov.uk/FreedomofInformation/FOI-5988.aspx>

⁷⁵⁸ Scottish Prison Service (2024). Annual report and accounts 2023–24.

⁷⁵⁹ Scottish Prison Service (2024). Annual report and accounts 2023–24.

⁷⁶⁰ HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland. (2023). Annual report 2022–23.

⁷⁶¹ Ravalde, L. and Russo, D. (2023). HM Inspectorate of Prisons in Scotland. A thematic review of segregation in Scottish prisons.

⁷⁶² HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland. (2024). Annual report 2023–24.

In a review of the progression system in prisons, prison inspectors concluded that “the system is not working for all prisoners.”⁷⁶³

In 2019, one in seven surveyed prisoners (14%) said they had experienced discrimination as a result of their religious belief; one in eight (13%) because of their disability; one in eight (13%) because of their age; and one in 12 (8%) because of their ethnicity. Only one in five people who experienced discrimination reported it (22%).⁷⁶⁴

Health and social care

In 2019, nearly two in five people in prison (38%) reported having a disability. More than two in five people said they had a long-term illness (41%). But seven in 10 said staff were aware of their disability (69%), and nearly two-thirds said staff were aware of their health conditions (63%).⁷⁶⁵

Almost three-quarters (73%) of tests carried out on people entering prison in 2022 were positive for illegal drugs. 53% of tests conducted just prior to release were positive. Unprescribed buprenorphine was the only drug more commonly detected at release than at reception, accounting for 10% of positive tests.⁷⁶⁶

In 2019, nearly two in five prisoners (39%) said they had been diagnosed with depression before coming to prison. Three in 10 (29%) had been diagnosed with anxiety/panic disorders and one in 10 (11%) with post traumatic stress disorder.⁷⁶⁷

Inspectors continue to raise concerns about the number of acutely mentally unwell people held in prison, and the delays in transfers to in-patient care.⁷⁶⁸

In 2019, more than a third of women (38%) and a quarter of men (24%) reported having been in care as a child.⁷⁶⁹

In 2019, more than three in five people in prison (61%) reported that they had children. Two in five of those reported having three or more children.⁷⁷⁰

In 2019, seven in 10 women in prison reported that they had been a victim of domestic violence.⁷⁷¹

Rehabilitation and resettlement

Two in five people released from custody (39%) are reconvicted within a year — rising to 45% of men and 46% of women with more than 10 previous convictions.⁷⁷²

Inspectors noted that there remained very limited access to purposeful activity, offending behaviour and substance misuse work, and that addressing needs “cannot happen with the large complex population the Scottish Prison Service is required to hold”.⁷⁷³

In 2019, nearly four in five people in prison (79%) said they had okay, good, or very good access to family and friends.⁷⁷⁴

In 2019, fewer than three in 10 people in prison (28%) said they had accessed services while in prison to help them prepare for release. Of those who accessed services, nearly three-quarters (72%) had sought advice in relation to housing.⁷⁷⁵

In 2019, more than half of people in prison surveyed said that they lost their accommodation when they went to prison (56%). Over a third (37%) said they didn’t know where they would be living on release.⁷⁷⁶

⁷⁶³ HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland (2024). A thematic review of prisoner progression in Scottish prisons.

⁷⁶⁴ Carnie, J. & Broderick, R. (2020). Prisoner survey 2019. 17th series. Scottish Prison Service.

⁷⁶⁵ Carnie, J. & Broderick, R. (2020). Prisoner survey 2019. 17th series. Scottish Prison Service.

⁷⁶⁶ Public Health Information for Scotland (2022). Drug trend testing for performance measurement purposes 2022. <https://www.scotpho.org.uk/risk-factors/drugs/data/availability-and-prevalence/>

⁷⁶⁷ Carnie, J. & Broderick, R. (2020). Prisoner survey 2019. 17th series. Scottish Prison Service.

⁷⁶⁸ HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland. (2023). Annual report 2022–23.

⁷⁶⁹ Broderick, R. & Carnie, J. (2020). Women in custody 2019. 17th survey bulletin. Scottish Prison Service.

⁷⁷⁰ Carnie, J. & Broderick, R. (2020). Prisoner survey 2019. 17th series. Scottish Prison Service.

⁷⁷¹ Broderick, R. & Carnie, J. (2018). Women in custody 2017. 16th survey bulletin. Scottish Prison Service.

⁷⁷² The Scottish Government (2024). Table 9 & 11. Reconviction rates in Scotland: 2020–21 offender cohort.

⁷⁷³ HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland. (2023). Annual report 2022–23.

⁷⁷⁴ Carnie, J. & Broderick, R. (2020). Prisoner survey 2019. 17th series. Scottish Prison Service.

⁷⁷⁵ Carnie, J. & Broderick, R. (2020). Prisoner survey 2019. 17th series. Scottish Prison Service.

⁷⁷⁶ Carnie, J. & Broderick, R. (2020). Prisoner survey 2019. 17th series. Scottish Prison Service.

In 2019, two in five people in prison surveyed (40%) said that if they were offered help for their drug problem they would take it — however, just a fifth (21%) said they had received it.⁷⁷⁷

Children and young adults in prison

There were an average of 166 young people (aged 16–21) in prison in 2023–24, including five children aged 16–17. The number of young people in prison has fallen by more than four-fifths (84%) since a peak of 1,040 in 2007–08.⁷⁷⁸

In 2019, two-fifths (40%) of young people reported being in care as a child.⁷⁷⁹

In 2019, two in five young people (40%) reported that they had witnessed violence between their parents/carers. A fifth reported that they were a victim of domestic violence (21%) from their partner.⁷⁸⁰

In 2019, just over half (55%) of young people were under the influence of drugs at the time of their offence (compared to 44% adults). One in eight (12%) committed their offence to get money to buy drugs.⁷⁸¹

Half of young people reported being drunk at the time of their offence, compared to 38% of adults.⁷⁸²

⁷⁷⁷ Carnie, J. & Broderick, R. (2020). Prisoner survey 2019. 17th series. Scottish Prison Service.

⁷⁷⁸ Scottish Prison Service (2024). Tables A2 & B2, Scottish prison population statistics 2023–24.

⁷⁷⁹ Broderick, R. & Carnie, J. (2020). Young people in custody 2019. 17th survey bulletin. Scottish Prison Service.

⁷⁸⁰ Broderick, R. & Carnie, J. (2020). Young people in custody 2019. 17th survey bulletin. Scottish Prison Service.

⁷⁸¹ Broderick, R. & Carnie, J. (2020). Young people in custody 2019. 17th survey bulletin. Scottish Prison Service.

⁷⁸² Broderick, R. & Carnie, J. (2020). Young people in custody 2019. 17th survey bulletin. Scottish Prison Service.

Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland has three prison establishments and one custodial facility for children.

Maghaberry is a high secure prison housing around 1,000 adult men on remand, and serving sentences from a few weeks to life. It has two wings holding Loyalist and Republican prisoners separated from the main population, and also has Category C and a small Category D provision.⁷⁸³

Magilligan is a medium secure prison housing around 500 sentenced adult men, with one semi-open unit.⁷⁸⁴

Hydebank Wood Secure College — situated within the Hydebank Wood campus — holds young adult men aged 18–24 years old.⁷⁸⁵

Hydebank Wood Women's Prison — also situated within the Hydebank Wood campus — holds all women prisoners in Northern Ireland. Known as Ash House, a single unit within Hydebank Wood for many years, the women's accommodation expanded in 2024 and now includes Beech House, which incorporates a separate segregation unit for women, a Mother and Baby Unit and a unit for women with disabilities and social care needs.⁷⁸⁶

Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre holds boys and girls aged 10–17 in custody for police questioning, remand, and serving custodial sentences.⁷⁸⁷

The Northern Ireland Prison Service has committed to a reform programme lasting 10 years or more. It met 95% of the targets it set itself under the Prison 2020 programme. In 2022 it launched a new set of reform commitments called 25 by 25.⁷⁸⁸ Prior to the restoration of the Northern Ireland Executive in February 2024, there had been no functioning devolved government for two years.⁷⁸⁹ A new programme for government was published for public consultation at the end of 2024, with an emphasis on extending Northern Ireland's joined-up and holistic approach to criminal justice, which is already a feature of the youth justice system, with offending seen as only one aspect of children's lives and needs.⁷⁹⁰

A review of vulnerable people in custody, commissioned in 2016 in response to a number of suicides in prisons, was published in October 2021. It recommended the government develop a strategy to improve the quality and accessibility of mental health services in prison, as well as raising healthcare funding to match that of the other regions of the United Kingdom.⁷⁹¹ In 2023–24, the Director General of the Prison Service said that the recommendations must be implemented “with more urgency” and drew attention to the increased number of prisoners with acute mental health issues being detained in separation units due to a lack of suitable alternatives.⁷⁹²

Hydebank Secure College and Women's Prison were inspected in 2024. HMPs Maghaberry and Magilligan had independent reviews of progress in 2023, and were inspected in 2022 and 2021 respectively. Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre were last inspected in 2022. Due to the small number of prisons, it is often both possible and more sensible to describe Northern Ireland's prison system in terms of its individual establishments rather than collectively. But presented evidence should not be interpreted as a direct comparison of the prisons due to the difference in inspection periods, and their differing proximity to the pandemic.

To reduce footnoting, sources of cited evidence are the most recent unannounced inspection reports for each of the four prisons unless otherwise stated.^{793,794,795,796}

⁷⁸³ Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (2023). Report on an unannounced inspection of Maghaberry Prison. 20 September–6 October 2022.

⁷⁸⁴ Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (2022). Report on an unannounced inspection of Magilligan Prison. 21 May–10 June 2021.

⁷⁸⁵ Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (2024). Report on an unannounced inspection of Hydebank Wood Secure College. 21 May–6 June 2024.

⁷⁸⁶ Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (2024). Report on an unannounced inspection of Hydebank Wood Women's Prison. 21 May–6 June 2024.

⁷⁸⁷ Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (2022). Report on an unannounced inspection of Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre. 22–29 January 2022.

⁷⁸⁸ Northern Ireland Prison Service (2022). Prisons 25 by 25.

⁷⁸⁹ BBC News (2024, 18 January). Stormont stalemate: Deadline to restore Northern Ireland Executive to expire.

⁷⁹⁰ Criminal Justice Inspectorate Northern Ireland (2024). Transforming the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland.

⁷⁹¹ The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (2021) Review of services for vulnerable persons detained in Northern Ireland prisons.

⁷⁹² Northern Ireland Prison Service (2024). Annual report and accounts 2023–24.

⁷⁹³ Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (2023). Report on an unannounced inspection of Maghaberry Prison. 20 September–6 October 2022.

⁷⁹⁴ Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (2022). Report on an unannounced inspection of Magilligan Prison. 21 May–10 June 2021.

⁷⁹⁵ Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (2020). Report on an unannounced inspection of Ash House Women's Prison Hydebank Wood. 23–24 October and 4–7 November 2019.

⁷⁹⁶ Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (2020). Report on an unannounced inspection of Hydebank Wood Secure College. 23–24 October and 4–7 November 2019.

Sentencing and the use of custody

The average number of people in prison in Northern Ireland has remained relatively stable in recent years, but rose by almost 200 in 2022–23, to 1,685 people, and then by around another 200 in 2023–24 to 1,877 people. This is the highest average number in the last eight years.⁷⁹⁷ By early 2025 the number had risen further to 1,914 people.⁷⁹⁸

The imprisonment rate for Northern Ireland is 99 people per 100,000 of the population. England and Wales have an imprisonment rate of 139 people per 100,000, and Scotland 149 people. Northern Ireland's rate has risen by six points compared to last year, while Scotland's has risen by five points and England/Wales has reduced by six points.⁷⁹⁹

There were 4,163 receptions into prison during 2023–24 — broadly similar to last year, but up by one fifth (20%) compared to two years ago.⁸⁰⁰

Last year, 82 people were imprisoned for failure to pay a fine or other civil offences, a decrease from 109 in the previous year, which represented an unusual spike. This continues a broader trend of decline from a peak of 484 such cases in 2016–17.⁸⁰¹

Northern Ireland continues to hold a high proportion of people in prison on remand compared with other countries. It currently holds almost two in five (37%) of its prisoners on remand compared with one in five in England and Wales (20%), and more than a quarter in Scotland (26%).⁸⁰²

Remand accounted for more than three-quarters (78%) of all receptions into prison in 2023–24, with 3,267 receptions on remand in total.⁸⁰³

On average, in 2023–24, nearly half of women (46%) and over half of young men (56%) in prison were held on remand, compared to just over a third of adult men (35%). The proportion of women on remand has decreased by eight percentage points compared to the previous year, following a rise over the previous two years.⁸⁰⁴

More than three-quarters (77%) of people entering prison to serve a sentence in 2023–24 had been sentenced to spend a year or less in custody.⁸⁰⁵

But people coming to prison are serving longer sentences — the number entering to serve more than a year has increased by over a third (34%) in the last eight years, while those serving less than a year has increased by 16%.⁸⁰⁶

There are 207 people serving an indeterminate sentence in prison. They account for nearly a fifth (18%) of the average prison population.⁸⁰⁷

The average cost of keeping a person in prison has fallen from historically high levels — costing £54,024 per year in 2023–24,⁸⁰⁸ down from £73,732 in 2010.⁸⁰⁹

Safety in custody⁸¹⁰

On average, more than two in five adult men (43%) and more than half of young adult men (51%) said they had felt unsafe at some point in the prison they were currently held.

Almost half of women in prison (49%) said they had felt unsafe — 12 percentage points lower than at the previous inspection in 2019.

⁷⁹⁷ Department for Justice (2024). Table 1e, Data tables. The Northern Ireland prison population 2023/24.

⁷⁹⁸ Department of Justice (n.d.). Weekly situation reports 2024/25. Week ending 10 January 2025. Accessed 18 January 2024. <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/articles/weekly-situation-reports-october-2015>

⁷⁹⁹ Institute for Crime and Justice Policy Research (n.d.). World prison brief. Accessed 22 January 2024.

⁸⁰⁰ Department for Justice (2023). Table 15d, Data tables. The Northern Ireland Prison Population 2023/24.

⁸⁰¹ Department for Justice (2024). Table 15c, Data tables. The Northern Ireland Prison Population 2023/24.

⁸⁰² Institute for Crime and Justice Policy Research (n.d.). World prison brief. Accessed 18 January 2024.

⁸⁰³ Department for Justice (2024). Table 15b and 15d, Data tables. The Northern Ireland Prison Population 2023/24.

⁸⁰⁴ Department for Justice (2024). Table 1b and 1d, Data tables. The Northern Ireland prison population 2023/24.

⁸⁰⁵ Department for Justice (2024). Table 19b, Data tables. The Northern Ireland prison population 2023/24.

⁸⁰⁶ Department for Justice (2024). Table 19b, The Northern Ireland prison population 2023/24.

⁸⁰⁷ Department for Justice (2024). Table 7c, Data tables. The Northern Ireland prison population 2023/24.

⁸⁰⁸ Northern Ireland Prison Service (2024). Northern Ireland Prison Service annual report and accounts 2023–24.

⁸⁰⁹ Committee for Justice (2014). Prison service reform and management of drugs misuse: Northern Ireland Prison Service. Northern Ireland Assembly.

⁸¹⁰ The Northern Ireland Prison Service does not publish data on deaths, self-harm and assaults in custody. Data in this section is derived from publications by the Prison and Probation Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and the Criminal Justice Inspection for Northern Ireland.

During 2023–24 there were four deaths in custody, and a further four deaths within a fortnight of leaving custody.⁸¹¹

There were no deaths officially recorded as being due to Covid-19 in Northern Ireland's prisons.⁸¹²

Inspectors criticised Maghaberry prison in 2022 for failing to learn lessons from seven self-inflicted deaths over three years, and for lacking a clear plan to address rising self-harm. During a return visit in 2023 inspectors acknowledged reasonable progress, but noted that the fundamental principles of a new process introduced to address deaths in custody had not yet been fully embedded.⁸¹³

Rates of self-harm were lower for women than in similar prisons in England and Wales and inspectors praised the efforts of staff to support vulnerable women and young men at Hydebank Wood. Rates were also low at Magilligan with good levels of support.

The self-harm rate at Maghaberry was comparable to similar prisons in England and Wales, but inspectors were concerned there was no clear plan to address the rising rate and about the quality of care and monitoring of prisoners who were self-harming. On their follow up visit in 2023, inspectors said that oversight and management had improved and were now reasonably good.⁸¹⁴

All three men's prisons had relatively low levels of violence, often less than similar prisons in England and Wales. Hydebank Wood Women's Prison had experienced rising violence at the time of its 2024 inspection, with levels now equivalent to similar prisons.

Use of force in men's prisons was also generally low, but its governance needed improving for young adult men. Use of force had risen for women. Inspectors noted these were generally lower level incidents (e.g. guiding away from the scene rather than restraint) but that governance meant learning opportunities were being missed.

One in 10 women in prison (12%) said they had been physically assaulted by another prisoner while in prison – 18 percentage points lower than at the previous inspection in 2019.

Inspectors found that adult men's prisons had serious problems with drug availability, higher than similar prisons and often with no clear strategy to address it. In contrast, Hydebank Wood was praised for its approach. Inspectors noted "minimal" demand for illicit drugs and were "confident" that the prison's positive culture, pleasant living conditions and purposeful activity were reducing demand.

Adult safeguarding (protecting people from abuse and neglect) in prisons is still highly variable. Inspectors praised an effective approach at Magilligan, but raised concerns about serious shortcomings at Maghaberry. A follow up inspection in 2023 revealed no meaningful progress at Maghaberry.⁸¹⁵

Treatment and conditions

Living conditions are often poor in adult male prisons but better in others. Inspectors judged that living conditions have improved at Maghaberry, but remained poor on the induction unit. The environment at Magilligan required renewal, with older units in a poor state of repair. In contrast, inspectors described living conditions at Hydebank Wood as "excellent". Every prisoner had a single cell, the environment was "pleasant", and a refurbishment programme for ageing areas was underway.

Half of prisoners at Maghaberry said they spent less than two hours out of their cell on weekdays, rising to nearly two-thirds (63%) at weekends. But inspectors reported that reasonable progress had been made during their 2023 follow up inspection.⁸¹⁶

At the other prisons, on average just 6% of people reported spending less than two hours unlocked on weekdays, rising to 10% at weekends.

⁸¹¹ The Prisoner Ombudsman for Northern Ireland (2024). Annual report 2023–24.

⁸¹² The Prisoner Ombudsman for Northern Ireland (2022). Annual report 2020–21.

⁸¹³ Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (2024). Report of an Independent Review of Progress (IRP) at Maghaberry Prison. 31 October – 2 November 2023.

⁸¹⁴ Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (2024). Report of an Independent Review of Progress (IRP) at Maghaberry Prison. 31 October – 2 November 2023.

⁸¹⁵ Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (2024). Report of an Independent Review of Progress (IRP) at Maghaberry Prison. 31 October – 2 November 2023.

⁸¹⁶ Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (2024). Report of an Independent Review of Progress (IRP) at Maghaberry Prison. 31 October – 2 November 2023.

Inspectors reported in their 2023 follow up inspection at Maghaberry that “prisoners now had more regular and consistent access to education, skills and work activities to meet their rehabilitation and resettlement needs”.⁸¹⁷

At Magilligan inspectors found that the delivery of education and skills “had resumed at a good pace” following the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions, but that not enough progress had been made in increasing the proportion of prisoners achieving qualifications at level 2 or above.⁸¹⁸

Provision of purposeful activity was judged as good for young men and for women at Hydebank Wood, with 90% of prisoners engaged in purposeful activity; something inspectors said they rarely saw at other prisons.

On average, nearly three-quarters of prisoners (73%) said staff treated them with respect, and an equal proportion reported having a staff member they could turn to for support. Women and young men at Hydebank Wood reported even higher levels of positive experiences, with 80% and 85%, respectively.

Young adult men were less likely to say that complaints were dealt with fairly. Less than two in five (38%) said they felt they had received fair treatment, compared to an average of 45% for adult men and more than half of women 54%.

Prisons had some good initiatives to support vulnerable adult men, including compassionate suspension of certain sanctions for some prisoners with learning difficulties at Maghaberry and good support for older and disabled prisoners at Magilligan. Hydebank Wood opened a unit in 2022 with specialist support for women with disabilities and social care needs.

On average, almost half of prisoners (45%) said they had children under the age of 18. Less than a third (32%) said it was easy for family and friends to visit.

Health and social care

Inspectors judged that women and young adult men had good access to primary healthcare and were treated professionally. But waiting times were judged as too long for adult men — particularly for those requiring treatment and support for addiction.⁸¹⁹

On average, nearly three in five prisoners (59%) said they had a disability. The level of support varied between establishments. Two in five people (40%) at Magilligan said they were getting the support they needed, compared to just under a quarter at Maghaberry (24%) and almost one in three young men (30%) at Hydebank Wood. Almost half of women (46%) said they had received support.

On average, just under a third of prisoners (30%) said they had an alcohol problem when they arrived in prison. A greater proportion of women (48%) said they had been helped with their problem than men. Three in 10 adult men (31%) said they had accessed treatment.

On average just over half of men in prison reported having drug problems (51%), and 53% of women. Around two in five people who had a problem (43%) reported receiving help for it in prison, except at Maghaberry where just over a quarter reported that they had (28%).

Three-quarters of prisoners (76%) said they had mental health problems. A higher proportion of women (51%) and young men (47%) reported receiving help, compared to just over a quarter of adult men (27%).

Women and young adult men were judged as receiving equivalent mental healthcare to that available in the community, but inspectors were concerned about services for adult men. There was insufficient availability of forensic psychiatric and psychological services, long waiting times for mental health assessments, and for transfers to inpatient facilities.

⁸¹⁷ Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (2024). Report of an Independent Review of Progress (IRP) at Maghaberry Prison. 31 October – 2 November 2023.

⁸¹⁸ Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (2024). Report of an Independent Review of Progress at Magilligan Prison. 31 October – 2 November 2023.

⁸¹⁹ Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (2024). Report of an Independent Review of Progress at Magilligan Prison. 31 October – 2 November 2023.

Mental health care at Maghaberry “remained significantly under-resourced and did not adequately address the complex needs of the increased prison population” but inspectors highlighted there had been reasonable progress in their 2023 follow up inspection.⁸²⁰

Prevalence of mental health problems is 25% higher in Northern Ireland than the rest of the UK,⁸²¹ but prevalence in prison is poorly understood. A 2019 inspection of safety in prisons urged the prison service to undertake a proper needs analysis of mental health.⁸²²

Individual prisons provided various forms of social care. These included good provision of speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, adaptations for older and disabled prisoners, and complex individual care packages.

At the time of inspection of Hydebank Wood in 2024 there were no pregnant women, but inspectors reported that there were good community links that facilitated antenatal care, as well as support for miscarriages, terminations and menopause. Mothers and babies were previously held on a general population wing — something inspectors considered inappropriate⁸²³ — but a refurbished Mother and Baby unit is now operational.

Rehabilitation and resettlement

More than two in five prisoners (43%) said they had a custody plan, rising to over half (51%) if Maghaberry, which holds a large proportion of remand prisons, is excluded. Over half of prisoners with custody plans (57%) said staff were helping them achieve their targets.

More than half (54%) of women said they were being helped to prepare for release, compared to only around a third of adult men (36%). Almost four in five young men (78%) said they were receiving help.

45% of adults released from custody went on to be reconvicted within a year.⁸²⁴ Almost half of adults (46%) who reoffended did so within two months of release.⁸²⁵

212 people were recalled back to prison in 2023–24, up from 198 in the previous year.⁸²⁶

People in prison

90 women were held in prison in Northern Ireland on average in the year 2023–24 — 12 more than last year, and the highest number in nine years.⁸²⁷

On average, nearly one in ten prisoners serving a sentence in 2023–24 (9%) were aged 60 or over — 101 people. The average number of prisoners aged over 60 has increased by more than half (55%) since 2015/16 — an additional 36 people.⁸²⁸

Just over half (52%) of prisoners are Catholic.⁸²⁹ At Maghaberry, inspectors identified evidence of disproportionate outcomes for Catholic prisoners in several areas. Inspectors judged that outcomes for Catholics had improved at Magilligan, with good monitoring of potential religious bias and little evidence of persistent inequality.

Just over one in 13 people in prison in 2023–24 (8%) were from an ethnic minority group, compared to more than a quarter (27%) in England and Wales. Inspectors criticised the lack of consultation with prisoners from ethnic minority groups.

On average 5% of people in prison report being from a Gypsy, Roma or Traveller (GRT) ethnic group. GRT prisoners at Magilligan felt poorly understood and not sufficiently supported. Maghaberry was making efforts to improve provision for GRT prisoners but inspectors said they were not consulted sufficiently.

820 Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (2024). Report of an Independent Review of Progress (IRP) at Maghaberry Prison. 31 October – 2 November 2023.

821 O'Neill, S. et al. Mental health in Northern Ireland: an urgent situation. The Lancet Psychiatry 2018; 5(12): 965-966. Available at: <https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366%2818%2930392-4/fulltext>

822 Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (2019). The safety of prisoners held by the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

823 Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (2020). Report on an unannounced inspection of Ash House Women's Prison, Hydebank Wood. 23–24 October and 4–7 November 2019.

824 Department of Justice (2024). Table 8, ODS tables. Adult and youth reoffending in Northern Ireland (2021/22 cohort).

825 Department of Justice (2024). Table 7b, ODS tables. Adult and youth reoffending in Northern Ireland (2021/22 cohort).

826 Parole Commissioners for Northern Ireland (2024) Annual report 2023–24.

827 Department for Justice (2024). Table 1f, ODS tables. The Northern Ireland prison population 2023/24.

828 Department for Justice (2024). Table 2c, ODS tables. The Northern Ireland prison population 2023/24.

829 Department for Justice (2024). Table 14e, ODS tables. The Northern Ireland prison population 2023/24.

Almost a fifth of women (17%) and more than one in 20 men (7%) identified as LGB+. 2% of prisoners identified as transgender.

One in 10 prisoners are foreign nationals (9%) on average. A higher proportion of adult men at Maghaberry high secure prison were foreign nationals (12%) compared to the medium security Magilligan prison (3%). In 2019 — the most recent data available — over two thirds (67%) of foreign national prisoners were on remand.⁸³⁰

Over a quarter of adult men (27%), more than two-fifths of young men (44%), and three in 10 women in prison (30%) said they had been in local authority care or had a social worker as a child.

Children in custody

104 individual children (aged 10–17) were admitted to custody in 2023–24, almost half (47%) as many as a decade ago. More than three quarters were boys (76%).⁸³¹

There were a total of 214 admissions of children to custody in 2023–24. Just five of these were because a child had been sent there to serve a sentence. All other children were either held pending police questioning; awaiting a court date; or on remand.⁸³²

The average number of children held in custody at any one time was 10 in 2023–24, a slight decrease from 11 the previous year. Most — eight children — were held on remand, while only one was serving a sentence.⁸³³

Almost half of children (49%) who entered custody in 2023–24 were in care — the highest proportion in the last fifteen years.⁸³⁴

Inspectors have raised concerns that children continue to be inappropriately placed in custody at times of crisis because there are no available alternatives, and that children remain there because they don't have a suitable bail address.⁸³⁵

Inspectors were told that “some children were breaking bail conditions or reoffending because they would rather be in [custody] than at home or in the community”.⁸³⁶

⁸³⁰ Northern Ireland Prison Service (2020). Analysis of NIPS prison population from 01/10/2018 to 31/12/2019.

⁸³¹ Youth Justice Agency (2024). Table 17, Northern Ireland Youth Justice Agency annual workload statistics 2023/24.

⁸³² Youth Justice Agency (2024). Table 15, Northern Ireland Youth Justice Agency annual workload statistics 2023/24.

⁸³³ Youth Justice Agency (2024). Table 32, Northern Ireland Youth Justice Agency annual workload statistics 2023/24.

⁸³⁴ Youth Justice Agency (2024). Table 27, Northern Ireland Youth Justice Agency annual workload statistics 2023/24.

⁸³⁵ Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (2022) An announced inspection of Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre, 22–28 January 2022.

⁸³⁶ Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (2022) An announced inspection of Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre, 22–28 January 2022.

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